



Natasha potting up in the nursery – she hopes to introduce some rare native species to the park. Photos Liza Hamilton

Born to the

Natasha Beletzky might be an introduced species - coming as she does from Argentina - but as Whakanewha's new park ranger, she tells Liza Hamilton she's born to help protect Waiheke's native flora and fauna.

Whakanewha's new park ranger believes education is key to achieving success at the island's regional park.

Natasha Beletzky is well qualified to make this happen – back in her native Argentina she was a high school biology teacher and a forest firefighter.

"It was my dream to be a ranger, especially on Waiheke. The island has a very special community which is very interested in conservation."

"I have a thinking that I grew up with, to protect something you need to love it and to love it you need to know it," Natasha told *Gulf News*.

You could say she was born into the job – not only was Natasha's father a park ranger, she was even born in Latin America's first national park, Nahuel-Huapi, and spent her childhood rotating around the country's national park system on her father's different postings.

Since arriving in New Zealand seven years ago, Natasha has been struck by the guardianship of the environment here, especially on Waiheke.

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job: Waiheke's new park ranger

special community which is very interested in conservation," she said. "One big factor in taking this role was being able to have more contact with the community."

Natasha stepped into this role following the departure of Jonah Kitto-Verhoef and she looks forward to outreach work with local schools and organisations to help connect people with nature.

"How can people protect dotterels if they don't know about them, or the tree? They will like it and they will have a sense of belonging and that way they will protect it. It's simple," she said.

"When I see people who don't care about conservation it is because they are not in touch with nature and to be in touch with nature is the key."

Natasha speaks with admiration of the hard work volunteers do at Whakanewha – and says she is keen to encourage more people to come along and help out.

"We have an amazing group of volunteers: working on planting, the bait stations, stoat control, in the nursery. They are a really big part of Whakanewha, this is functioning because they are working with us."

No experience is required and Natasha says there is an opportunity for volunteers to learn new skills while they are at it.

"It is important to involve communities," she said. "The reason I became a biology teacher is because I thought, what can I do? It's not just about conservation, it's about the wellbeing of people, that can come from things like walking through the bush, it's simple, it's connecting people to their environment."

Natasha started out volunteering at

Whakanewha when she first arrived on Waiheke and continued work at the Forest & Bird reserves at Onetangi and Atawhai-Whenua by Matiatia.

It is encouraging, she says, that more resources have been allocated to conservation and as park ranger she can help manage those resources to get results in projects tackling kauri dieback and Pest Free 2050.

Day-to-day the workload is focused on weed control and animal control – there are 800 bait stations which need to be filled with poison blocks targeting rats and pests to help protect the native bird population.

Protecting nesting dotterels is one challenge facing rangers at the park. "It is a public area and there are a lot of people around the beach, so it's not easy to protect them," said Natasha.

"I would like to be successful in protecting this area and increasing the numbers and that will mean we are doing a good job."

Education is key. "I like to talk with people when I am walking around Whakanewha," she said. "It's not something that just the rangers can do, the conservation. I would feel overwhelmed if I realised I was alone. I really appreciate all the people who are working and being involved, it's such a big help. That is one of the reasons I think it is important to involve the community."

In coming months Natasha wants to encourage planting sessions with different schools and organisations – with plans for an open day at the end of September to coincide with Conservation Week 2019, celebrating 50 years of conservation in New Zealand.

"I would like to have an event, different events where the community is welcome to



There are more than 800 bait stations around Whakanewha.

participate. My idea is to do a conservation open day where we can have activities and stalls with the different organisations showing what they are doing, maybe a speaker and invite schools," she said.

"I think Whakanewha has a lot of beauty that can be explored. The big picture is something I would like to – step-by-step – share with the community."

If you want to find out more about volunteering contact natasha.beletsky@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

NZ Fashion Weekend and Plant Potions giveaway



Louise Mills. Sonja Read Photography

To help celebrate being part of New Zealand Fashion Weekend, Waiheke's Plant Potions is giving away two General Admission tickets to the event, a Premium Massage Candle and an Aura and Hand Massage.

Founder Louise Mills says NZFW is a huge platform where Plant Potions can shine and provide the opportunity to reach a diverse group of amazing people.

"It'll give us the opportunity to showcase our handcrafted range and give you an authentic experience in our Aura and Hand Massage Rituals - a brief adventure into true bliss!"

Plant Potions launched in December 2018 and has grown via local events,

Ostend Market and donating to local fundraisers as well as stocking via Waiheke Unichem Pharmacy and WE-AR.

To be in to win the Plant Potions prize pack of 2 x GA passes to fashion weekend, 1 x Premium Massage Candle in the Plant Potions fragrance of your choice, and an Aura and Hand Massage at the event, text your name, choice of either Saturday or Sunday to attend NZFW and contact details to 02041874688 by 2pm Friday. The winner will be chosen at random and contacted by return of text.

For more information and to find out about Plant Potions' free delivery throughout the island, visit plantpotions.co.nz