

Media Release  
For immediate use

## **Pōhutukawa and rātā — New Zealand's iron-hearted trees**

Pōhutukawa and rātā trees are among New Zealand's most beloved and recognisable national icons, symbolising summer, nationhood and our unique natural environment.

A new book, *Pōhutukawa & Rātā: New Zealand's Iron-hearted Trees*, celebrates these unique trees — their place in the natural world, their importance to Māori, their role in symbolism, art, and design, their many remarkable uses — and reveals the threat they face today from possums, progress and people.

"Pōhutukawa and rātā are two of New Zealand's most famous and loved trees," explains author Philip Simpson, "but their splendour and their importance to people are not matched by the protection they have received. This book, then, is a celebration of these beautiful icons, but it is also a plea to protect them."

Containing a wealth of new research, the book is generously illustrated with over 400 archival and contemporary photographs, diagrams, maps and full-colour reproductions of New Zealand artworks.

Simpson's new book follows on the heels of his award-winning (and bestselling) cabbage tree book *Dancing Leaves: The Story of New Zealand's Cabbage Tree: Tī Kouka*.

"If pōhutukawa were native to Rome or Greece, the whole world would know about them," he says, "New Zealand's Christmas tree and the 'monarch of the forest', rātā, were obvious candidates for a similar detailed treatment to *Dancing Leaves*."

Simpson was raised on a farm and plant nursery in Takaka, and says this was where his love of New Zealand's native plants first took root. He studied plant anatomy at Canterbury and in 1968 was awarded a Regent's Fellowship at the University of California, Santa Barbara where he wrote a PhD on the Joshua Tree.

And his next project? Simpson says it could well be pōhutukawa and rātā focused.

"The massive amount of research that has been undertaken for this book includes the hidden memories of people, obscure references in family papers, land proceedings and recollections. These trees are particularly special because they have a majestic presence, and I have no doubt that I could be writing about pōhutukawa and rātā for many years to come."

**For more information, please contact Te Papa Press publicist: Kathryn Carmody  
\* Tel. 04 387 2833 \* Mob. 027 287 7963 \* Email. [kathryn.carmody@gmail.com](mailto:kathryn.carmody@gmail.com)**