

LIVING BY THE MARAMATAKA

by Haukura Jones

Heeni Hoterene grew up in Horowhenua. (On her mother's side, one of her iwi is Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga.) The area is famous for its good climate and good soil, and Heeni's whānau had a big vegie garden. Heeni learnt a lot about gardening from her koro. He traced what he knew back to their tūpuna, who lived on the same land. Heeni's koro called this "taonga tuku iho" – knowledge passed down from the days of old. He said it had to be used and shared or else it would perish. The knowledge needed protecting so it wouldn't disappear. It needed kaitiaki.

Heeni's koro and her tūpuna lived by the maramataka – the Māori calendar. They watched for changes in the natural world, and they used these changes to make everyday decisions, such as when to weed the garden, when to catch īnanga, and when to take time off to rest. The ancestors brought this knowledge from Hawaiki, and it was added to by later generations who lived in Aotearoa.



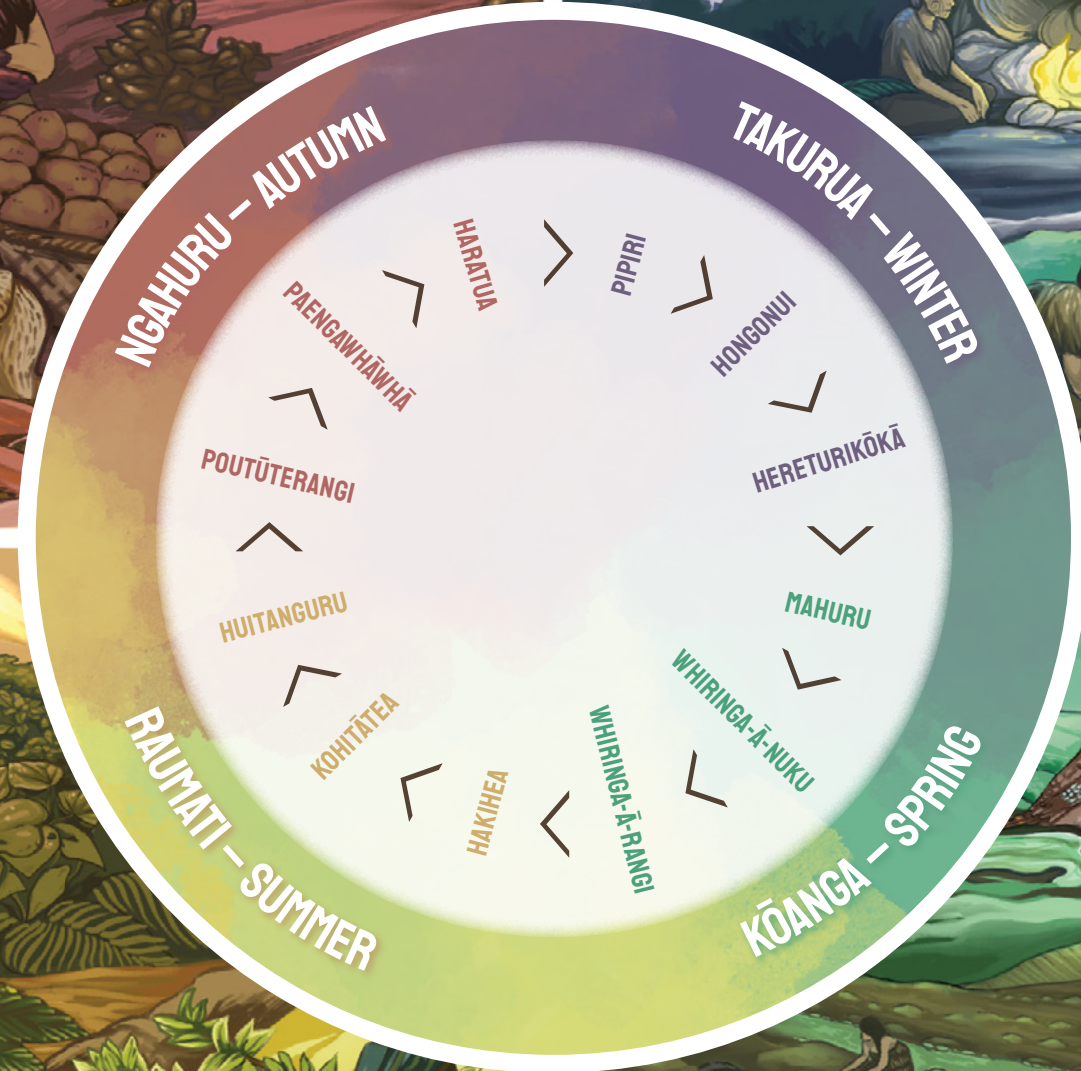
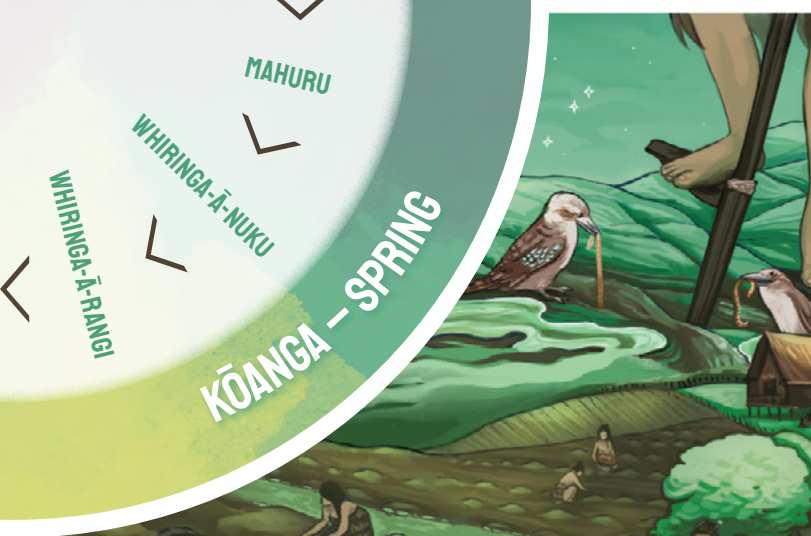
Know your maramataka

Maramataka are different from one iwi to the next. They have been developed over thousands of years and are based on a deep understanding of the local environment.

Māori followed changes in the plant and animal world, and they linked these changes to the movement of te rā (the sun), ngā whetū (the stars), ngā aorangi (the planets), and te marama (the moon). They used these observations to track the passing of time and to create the first maramataka.

Changes in the natural world, such as when the pōhutukawa start to flower or when a star rises, are called tohu (signs). There are different versions of the maramataka because different iwi and hapū have their own tohu, depending on where they live: north or south, east or west, inland or on the coast.

The maramataka on the right is from Ngāi Tūhoe. The knowledge comes from Tūtakangahau, a Ngāi Tūhoe rangatira. It uses Ngāi Tūhoe names for the seasons (which change as Earth moves around the sun) and for the months (which change as the moon moves around Earth).



Heeni's koro ... kept Māori knowledge alive through his work in the garden. Heeni had to find her own way ...



KEEPING KNOWLEDGE ALIVE

When Heeni was growing up, her whānau didn't use their maramataka every day. It was mostly used by her grandparents. Heeni's koro was from a generation who never left the land; he kept Māori knowledge alive through his work in the garden. Heeni had to find her own way to be a kaitiaki.

Heeni went to university and got a degree in Māori studies. Then she moved to Northland. There she met Reuben Taipari Porter, whose whānau lived on the land and *did* follow their maramataka every day. They helped Heeni learn more about the Māori calendar. She saw how it could help with all parts of daily life.

FINDING AND GROWING FOOD

When the tūpuna arrived in Aotearoa, they worked hard to survive. They had to do the right things at the right time so there would be enough to eat. Maramataka were especially important as a guide for when to plant, harvest, fish, and hunt. A lot of the work around growing and finding food depended on the season. In fact, the first maramataka only used ngā kaupeka o te tau (the seasons).

“Māori always harvest kūmara during ngahuru, when there's less water in the soil,” Heeni explains. “This means the kūmara will be dry.” Kūmara were an important crop. They were stored in pits to supply food over winter. If they were too wet, they rotted and people would go hungry.

Alongside the four seasons, the days of the month are also important. It's best to catch tuna, for example, on days when the moon is only partly lit and the nights are darker. Tuna don't come out when the moon is full. They don't like bright light.

Harvesting kūmara near Awanui in the Manawatū



Nights of the month

It takes the moon around thirty days to travel around Earth. Each night, the moon looks different from the night before. The changing moon helps people know what day it is and good things to do on that day. Each night has its own name. The names below come from Ngāti Kahungunu.

The knowledge was recorded by Paraire Tomoana.



Whiro



Tirea



Hoata



Ōuenuku



Okoro



Tamateangana



Tamatea-kai-ariki



Huna



Ariroa



Maure



Māwharu



Ohua



Hotu



Atua



Turu



Rākaunui



Rākaumatohi



Takirau



Oike



Korekore-te-whiwhia



Korekore-te-rawea



Korekore-hahani



Tangaroa-ā-mua



Tangaroa-ā-roto



Tangaroa-kiokio



Ōtāne



Ōrongonui



Mauri



Ōmutu



Mutuwhenua

LEARNING FROM THE TŪPUNA

People still use maramataka to find and grow food. Heeni says a lot depends on where they live, the time of the month or year, and what food is around. “People who live near the moana like to eat seafood,” she says. “They use their maramataka to see what days are good to fish or go for a dive. And people who grow their own food use a maramataka to see the best time for weeding and digging.” Heeni says Māori don’t dig their gardens when the ground is wet. “We’re taught that when we look after the land, the land looks after us.”

Heeni says we have much to learn from the ancestors. “Our tūpuna didn’t change the environment. They used it in a respectful way.” On her father’s side, Heeni is Ngāti Hine. Many of the nights in the Ngāti Hine maramataka are about eeling. “We catch the big tuna to eat, but we also have a tradition of helping the young tuna return from their breeding ground,” Heeni says. “We carry them in baskets past a waterfall so they can continue swimming upstream. If we miss the right time to do this, we might not have enough tuna to eat during winter.”

Gathering kaimoana around 1900



Matariki

The most important time in all maramataka is Te Mātahi o te Tau (the Māori new year). This starts in winter, during the coldest months. For some iwi, the new year begins when people see Matariki reappear in the sky just before dawn in Pipiri (June–July). At first, the stars are low on the horizon. This can make them hard to see, especially from places in the west. Some iwi in Northland and Taranaki mark Te Mātahi o te Tau with the rising of the star Puanga (Rigel in English). So do Ngāi Tahu, who call this star Puaka.

The meaning of Matariki isn't the same for all iwi and hapū. It was often celebrated when the crops had been harvested and food was ready for the winter. The hard work was over, and people could spend time with their whānau and enjoy some rest.

Matariki is still a time to celebrate life. People look ahead and make plans. They also look back, remembering the year that is over and loved ones who have died. Some Māori believe these people become stars that shine down from the heavens.



The Matariki stars can be seen from most places in the world, where they have different names. In English, they're known as the Pleiades or Seven Sisters.

TAONGA TUKU IHO

Heeni says it's important to look after the environment – and maramataka help us do this. “Maramataka connect us to the natural world. They encourage us to notice change, and they teach us the right time to do things. This means we can act as kaitiaki and be good to the planet, something that's more important than ever because of climate change.”

Now Heeni is working to teach other people about maramataka. She enjoys sharing what she's learnt, but best of all, she likes knowing that she's helping to keep the knowledge of her tūpuna alive. “Using taonga tuku iho means it will never perish, just like my koro said.”



“ Using taonga tuku iho means it will never perish, just like my koro said. ”

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