

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

January 2025

Editorial: Benefits of Predator Free and Cat control

I spent two days at the resort on Kāpiti Island this month. The resort is part of a family-owned block that includes homes that are occasionally or permanently lived in. Because there are no introduced predators on the Island, and no family cats or other pets, wildlife is not under threat except from predators that have always existed such as weka, kāhu, pūkeko and kārearea (falcon). Consequently, wildlife was not concerned about us. Takahē grazed the lawns. Kākāriki and tūi searched for seed on flax and exotic grasses. Korimako, tieke (saddleback), tūi, toutouwai (robin) and riroriro (grey warbler) searched the shrublands finding food, and kākā and kārearea made their presence felt by their distinctive cries as they flew overhead. At night, the species changed. Ruru, weka and kiwi pukupuku (little spotted) took the stage, pāteke and lizards rustled in the undergrowth. Yet around all this threatened and endangered wildlife were the facilities of the resort and other locals living normal lives with houses, lawnmowers, not cars, but all the other trappings of modern society. It was a bit surreal to have takahe grazing the lawn in front of me while I relaxed on the deck with a hypothetical glass of wine. Tieke were particularly numerous and loud. They also seemed to be able to thrive in an ecosystem that had recently grown from farmland. A thriving population it seemed had more to do with lack of predation than a quality habitat.



Predator free started on NZ offshore islands but is now practiced on the mainland. It has seen some amazing results. Predator observation techniques have improved our knowledge of what each predator does to avoid being caught, what its weaknesses are, and which species are more difficult to catch. Traps are improving with some identifying the predator and stopping the trap from releasing if the potential predator could be a stray domestic or an unwanted target. Automatic release of lures over a long time and battery-operated traps have also been developed. This will continue so, over time, we should see improved predator control for less effort.

Predator free has taken a step forward in Kāpiti recently. Kevin Sheppard* with the Waikanae Lions (not predatory lions) has initiated Predator Free Waikanae (**he's speaking at our upcoming AGM*). Greater Wellington has recognized that the land around the expressway is also a predator highway populated with rabbits to provide mustelids with breakfast. They have decided to trap the whole of the expressway from Ōtaki to Pauātahanui. There are also moves afoot to set up Predator Free Kāpiti though this may take a few years. Such an organization can then look at the gaps that need to be filled and then organize the human and equipment resources to fill them.

To get the benefits of predator free, cat control measures are also needed. This means microchipping and desexing of all cats, then the live capture of stray cats with follow up actions being 1) return to owners of microchipped cats, 2) homing of friendly and well cats, and 3) euthanasia only for those cats which remain too wild or are too unwell to save. (Many stray cats get into fights and have injuries and disease which can be hard to treat.) Many councils have adopted these measures recognizing that overall cat health follows. This is partly because stray cats can fight with and infect domestic cats so with

less strays, the health of the domestic population increases. These processes take a few years to implement and the first step is to pass a bylaw that requires domestic cats to be microchipped, then allow time for that to happen. Hutt City and Wellington have such laws and Porirua is consulting on it now. Kāpiti is behind NZ in this respect.

As predator and cat control become fully implemented around NZ and that includes cat remaining inside or in a contained area outside, especially at night, our parks and reserves, our stream and river riparian strips, even residential sections especially those that back onto natural areas could begin to be like my experience on Kāpiti island. Along with tūī, pīwakawaka and kererū, we could also see kākārīki and tīeke gracing our gardens, takahē wandering through our reserves, kākā calling as they fly over

treetops. These seem to be the most capable of our native bird apart from those already in our gardens. Falcons and kākā are occasionally seen flying between Kāpiti island and the mainland but usually at height. They would be seen in our parks and gardens rather than passing overhead. The species that I think will be difficult to make a significant comeback in our lives will be the hihi and the kōkako. It seems that their needs are more demanding.

This will happen. It is just a matter of time. Cat control will be similar to dog control and many more people will elect to have traps on their property. A small business opportunity will be clearing traps for those (like me) who don't have an interest in doing this.

Russell

Salvaged Skinks released at Whareroa Cairn

On 21/01/2025, a group of passionate people from Ngā Manu Nature Reserve, DOC, and Whareroa Guardians [relocation of 11 Northern Grass Skinks at Whareroa Farm](#).



Photo © Andrea Wilson

The skinks, salvaged during building the Transmission Gully Road in 2018, were moved to Ngā Manu and they have been living in captivity there ever since. This is far too long, so Ngā Manu's vet, Andrea Wilson and their Reptile Ranger Mel Carr, DOC representatives, and Whareroa Guardian Sue Blaikie, hatched a plan to rehome the skinks (or their offspring).

While these skinks are not rare (they used to be called Common Skinks), there were not known to be any in Whareroa. This release is the first since the Farm became part of the DOC estate in 2003. It was made possible by the fantastic efforts of the 10 trappers at Whareroa Farm, who plan to keep up their efforts (they've despatched over 8000 pests since 2013), and makes good use of the [Cairn](#) which was built in 2013/14 as a commemoration and reminder of the vision, hard work and persistence of those who fought to preserve Whareroa Farm in public ownership.

The Cairn is an ideal home for the [Northern Grass Skinks](#) (*Oligosoma polychroma*), who love to bask in the sun on rock piles, especially in coastal areas, and enjoy rough pasture as habitat. It sounds like an ideal match.

New tarāpunga breeding colony in Whitireia Park - Robyn Smith

While silver or red-billed gulls may be annoying when eating fish 'n chips, it is worth remembering that they also have a right to be here, and they are facing significant breeding challenges. Robyn Smith reports some exciting news...

We have discovered a large breeding colony of tarāpunga, red-billed gulls, on the northern coast of Whitireia Park.

On 29 November 2024 I noticed some tarāpunga roosting on a spur down the Whitireia escarpment with some black-backed gulls swooping down on them. The tarāpunga held their ground which made me think they were nesting. Because I had my dog with me, I didn't immediately go down the escarpment track to confirm.

In early December though, Mike Jacobson, one of our intrepid trappers, was checking mouse traps (in what we call Bay C), adjacent to the spur with the tarāpunga, and found a very large colony of nesting tarāpunga and some tara, white-fronted tern, also nesting there.

Yesterday, Mike, his wife Christine, and I walked along the bottom of the escarpment from Kaitawa Point to Rocky Bay during low tide and reconfirmed the nesting colony and took photos. There is a substantial number of tarāpunga chicks, several hundred, which are not far off fledging which illustrates that it is a pretty safe nesting site. The Whitireia Restoration Group predator team do a lot of predator control mainly because of the lizard monitoring project on the escarpment, which must also benefit kororā.

Tarāpunga have a conservation threat status of Declining, and there have been dramatic declines in numbers over the past few years. Reasons for the decline include disturbance of nests by humans and dogs and predation of eggs and chicks by cats, mustelids and rats. Warmer seas mean their food (they prefer krill) is further out to sea and deeper so parent birds can be exhausted trying to feed their chicks, so chicks starve. This may worsen over time as less chicks reach breeding age due to the impacts of climate change on their food supply.



Pics © Robyn Smith

Have Your Say

A Vision for the Wharemauku Stream:

Raumati 02/02/25 – 2-4:30pm

The [Whaitua report](#) released last year on the Raumati catchment areas shows our streams could be in a lot better condition. On Sunday 2 February from 2-4:30pm at the KCU Clubrooms, [Weka Park, Raumati Beach](#), there is an open meeting to seek public views on a vision for the Wharemauku Stream. As Councillor Bede Laracy, of the Raumati Community Board, notes 'With a collective vision in place, we can then decide on a range of short, medium, and long-term goals and objectives'.

Kāpiti Draft Plan Change 1E – Rural Indigenous Biodiversity Incentives

This responds to a review of the current District Plan's "development incentives" provisions, and aims to refocus those provisions to provide incentives for the restoration, enhancement, and creation of areas of positive indigenous vegetation and in exchange for a limited number of bonus allotments in all rural zones (including General Rural, Rural Production and Rural Lifestyle zones).

Council wants your feedback on this here: <https://haveyoursay.kapiticoast.govt.nz/draft-plan-change-1e-rural-biodiversity-incentives> by **Friday 14 February 2025**.

Keeping Animals Bylaw – Porirua:

Consultation ends 10/02/2025

You can make a submission here: <https://haveyoursay.porirucity.govt.nz/keeping-of-animals-bylaw-2025>. Porirua City Council has notified its Keeping of Animals Bylaw and has included cat provisions that we would encourage members to support. This is our chance to get more effective management of cats. We support their proposal for compulsory microchipping, registering and desexing of cats. Helpfully, the online submission form/survey* also asks whether there is anything else council could include to regulate cats, we encourage members to suggest a three cat limit. This would give council officers a very helpful cap on cats when they are called to houses with

too many cats. These new regulations should provide the impetus to encourage responsible cat ownership across the city. A positive step forward to protect the biodiversity of Porirua and to provide the best outcome for cats.

Personal submissions add weight to submissions from organisations like Forest & Bird. See our longer article on this from our June '24 newsletter for more info: <https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/sites/default/files/2024-06/202406%20F%26B%20K-M%20Newsletter.pdf>

Please note re the survey* that there is a broken link on the word **Survey, but you can successfully complete it using the [make a submission](#) link directly below it.

Consultations on Modernising the Conservation system

DOC has released two discussion documents
1. Charging for Access to Some Conservation Land. This document considers whether this is a good idea, and if so, where, who, and how much to charge for access.
2. Streamline the processes for concessionaries and businesses using conservation land to make it more efficient, less constraining and better economically. It also mentions clarifying conservation objectives and Treaty commitments. (comments close on 28 February 2025)

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/have-your-say/all-consultations/2024-consultations/proposals-to-modernise-the-conservation-system/>

Next Public meeting/AGM is Wednesday 19 February 2025

We hope you will come to our next public meeting - also be our **AGM** - which will be held at the **Waikanae Community Centre: 28-32 Utauta Street, at 7.15pm on 19 February 2025**. We will keep business brief. Our speaker will be Kevin Sheppard who has been key to setting up Predator Free Waikanae. Nominations for our committee are welcomed, please get in touch to discuss. Papers will follow soon.

Greendale Walk: 23/2/25: 2pm

Doug Miller will lead an 'easy Sunday Walk' around the [Greendale Reserve in Otaihanga](#) on Sunday 23 February at 2pm. Our branch

has had a long involvement with the reserve. This is an opportunity to meet other members and learn more about nature and the reserve. Contact Doug for details and registration on 0204645537.

Lizard talks around Wellington

Author of [Geckos & Skinks: The Remarkable Lizards of Aotearoa](#), Anna Yeoman, will share stories and photographs from her recent book - a collection of gripping tales about lizard discoveries, research and conservation in New Zealand - at the following venues in February.

Tuesday 11th February 7.30pm Tararua Tramping Club, 4 Moncrieff Street, Mt Victoria.

Wednesday 12th February 12.30 - 1.15pm, Unity Bookshop, 57 Willis Street, Wellington Central.

Wednesday 12th February 7.30pm, Hutt Valley Tramping Club. Philip Evans Reserve, 15 Birch Street, Waterloo.

Thursday 13th February 6pm, Conservation Kōrero at Zealandia Sanctuary, Karori, seminar room upstairs. (Tickets for the Zealandia talk are \$10 for public, \$5 for members). The other talks are FREE.

We tried to get Anna to one of our meetings, but her schedule was too full...so we hope you might be able to attend one of these options instead.

Russell and Pene

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Your feedback on this newsletter would be most welcome as would contributions to future newsletter.