Bream Head/Te Whara
CONSERVATION TRUST

FOUNDATION NORTH
Te Kaitiaki Pūtea ō Tāmaki ō Tai Tokerau

COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER – Mahi tahi!!

Rangers Report: August - September 2025

Tēnā koutou katoa! E mihi ana ki ngā mana whenua o te rohe nei. The Bream Head / Te Whara Conservation Trust (BHCT) acknowledges the mana whenua of the land.

We thank the community and stakeholders for their continued support of BHCT. We couldn't do it without you!

Operational summary

This report covers August and September 2025. Key points:

- We have a new ranger – a big welcome to Fern Donovan!
- Results for the September rodent tracking tunnel survey = 2% rats and 24% mice, down from the May survey results of 5% rats and 37% mice.
- Average toxin uptake by rodents dropped from 55% in July to 37% in August and then 36% in September.
- The pest plant teams have had a few good sessions on the Urquharts working block.
- In early September, the re-introduced toutouwai and pōpokotea were surveyed. This year Su also introduced toutouwai nest monitoring.
- The grey-faced petrel +/- egg check took place in August. The scheduled chick check (again burrow scoping all burrows) was completed in September.

Photos: Male toutouwai/North Island robin at Te Whara. Credit Carole Lesley.

Welcome aboard Fern Donovan

On behalf of BHCT

We are over the moon to welcome Fern Donovan on board as a ranger. Fern grew up in an off-grid earth house in Waimā Forest under the wing of legendary conservation parents. She has a MSc in Freshwater Ecology with a thesis on shortjaw kōkopu. Fern was lured into mahi with BHCT, first as a volunteer, and now as a fully-fledged ranger (sorry DOC). Fern will be sharing a job with Kees for a short time, so they can both bounce between working here and the hokianga for the summer.

Photos: Fern and co during her time at DOC.

Predator control

Written by: Tom Flynn-Plummer (BHCT Head Ranger)

Rodent tracking tunnel survey

In early September, the rangers along with two trusty volunteers (Grant Stevens and Tony Climie) undertook the spring tracking tunnel survey to gain an index of the current rodent population. We used the 150 tunnels placed across the Bream Head/Te Whara Scenic Reserve (the Reserve) and followed best practice protocols for the servicing. Results for the September survey = 2% rats and 24% mice, down from the May survey results of 5% rats and 37% mice. The September results are very similar to the same month in 2024. It is a positive sign that our toxin and trapping programme is likely paying off.

Rodent toxin

Average toxin uptake by rodents dropped from 55% in July to 37% in August and then 36% in September. This could be an indication that the rodent population has decreased to levels we come to expect at this time of year. We observed a spike in rodent numbers during autumn and winter. Hopefully the uptake we are observing now is a reflection of great control over winter. There is, however, a possibility that rodents have simply switched food sources. Regardless, it is a welcome change because we were powering through a lot of toxin through winter.

Trapping

Below are the tables for trap catches over the months of August and September 2025. Catches were not too far from the normal for this time of year. However, the increase in Norway rats in September has our interest. It will be interesting to see if those numbers decrease in the next month.

Key: **BHSR/res =** Bream Head/Te Whara Scenic Reserve. **Bound =** Northern boundary line of the Reserve. **LTR =** Load the Road (all Ocean Beach Road).

BUFFER = Private land b/t BHSR and Ocean Beach Road. **OBRR =** Ocean Beach Recreation Reserve traps.

Monthly predator trapping results: August 2025

	BHSR							Outside BHSR			
Pest	**Total # caught this month**	**# caught this month previous year**	**# of total rats caught this month Norway or Ship rats?**	**Total # caught inside res. this month (i.e. not on bound/ LTR/buffer/OBRR)**	**Total # caught inside res. this month previous yr (i.e. not on bound/LTR/buffer/ OBRR)**	**# caught 2025 YTD**	**# caught 2024 YTD**	**Total # caught this month Bound**	**Total # caught this month LTR**	**Total # caught this month BUFFER**	**Total # caught this month OBRR**
Rat	12	7	7 Ship/5 Norway	3 of 12	0 of 7	119	90	2	6	1	0
Possum	0	0	-	0	0	5	3	0	0	-	-
Stoat	2	1	-	1 of 2	0 of 1	15	12	0	0	0	1
Weasel	3	9	-	0 of 3	0 of 9	34	31	3	0	0	1
Feral cat	0	0	-	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Mouse	23	17	-	1 of 23	0 of 17	155	140	9	13	0	0
Hedgehog	0	0	-	0	0	9	8	0	0	0	0
Totals	**40**	**34**	**n/a**	**5 of 40**	**0 of 34**	**339**	**287**	**14**	**19**	**1**	**2**

Analysis:

- LTR and BHSR boundaries catch the most pests. OBRR has had 1080 applied recently which could explain low catch rates.
- Two stoats caught. First stoat catch since May.

Monthly predator control results: September 2025

	BHSR							Outside BHSR			
Pest	**Total # caught this month**	**# caught this month previous year**	**# of total rats caught this month Norway or Ship rats?**	**Total # caught inside res. this month (i.e. not on bound/ LTR/buffer/OBRR)**	**Total # caught inside res. this month previous yr (i.e. not on bound/LTR/buffer /OBRR)**	**# caught 2025 YTD**	**# caught 2024 YTD**	**Total # caught this month Bound**	**Total # caught this month LTR**	**Total # caught this month BUFFER**	**Total # caught this month OBRR**
Rat	18	5	2 Ship/16 Norway	3 of 18	2 of 5	137	95	1	9	5	0
Possum	0	0	-	0	0	5	3	0	0	-	-
Stoat	0	1	-	0	0 of 1	15	13	0	0	0	1
Weasel	2	4	-	1 of 2	0 of 4	36	35	1	0	0	0
Feral cat	0	0	-	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1
Mouse	20	23	-	2 of 20	0 of 23	175	123	6	12	0	0
Hedgehog	0	0	-	0	0	9	8	0	0	0	0
Totals	**40**	**33**	**n/a**	**6 of 40**	**2 of 33**	**379**	**320**	**17**	**19**	**5**	**2**

Analysis:

- It is common to catch significantly more ship rats than Norway rats. Interestingly, September seems to have shown a major increase in Norway rat catches.
- Catch totals for 2025 are higher than that of 2024. Last year's 1080 operation and this year's changes in food availability likely

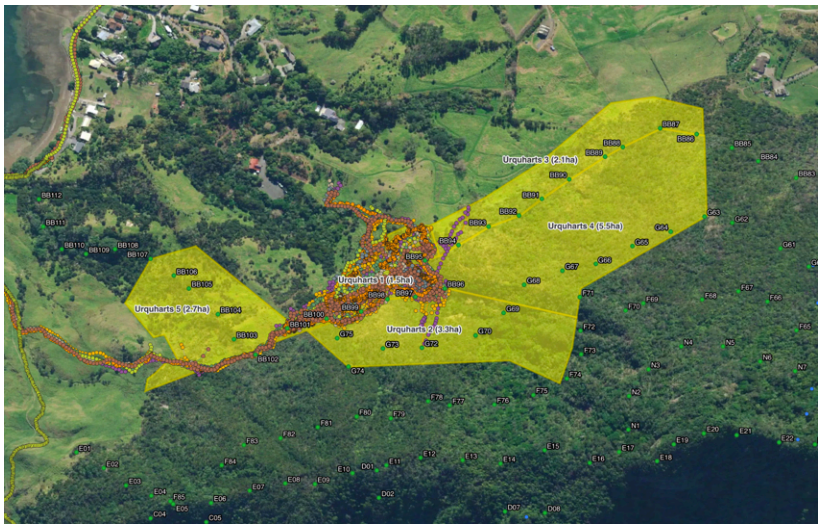
impact this.

Photos: Left: Stoat caught in the Ocean Beach Recreation Reserve. Middle: Rat caught on the northeast boundary. Right: Weasel caught on the northeast boundary.

Pest plant control

Written by: Tom Grinsted (BHCT Ranger)

The pest plant teams have had a few good sessions on the Urquharts working block. Following exploratory controls, the larger working block has been split into five smaller blocks. All the usual suspects are present, but the team has been focused on climbing asparagus, mothplant, woolly nightshade and passionfruit.



Photos: Left: Urquharts working blocks showing GPX tracks of recent controls. Right: Aki Tai Here team member above the Urquharts working blocks.

Toutouwai/North Island robin and pōpokotea/whitehead monitoring

Written by: Tom Flynn-Plummer (BHCT Head Ranger)

Annual toutouwai and pōpokotea survey

In early September, we gathered all the twitchers (experienced bird surveyors) we could to cover every line in the Reserve to survey toutouwai and pōpokotea, which were re-introduced in 2016 and 2017, respectively. The

survey method consists of playing a call for each species on a speaker every 100 m and waiting to see what comes in and/or calls back. This year we noted a slight reduction in toutouwai counts compared to the previous three years. We have recorded a noticeable decline in pōpokotea counts.

Local Senior Ecologist Su Sinclair co-ordinates these surveys for us and produces a great report at the end. We will include a more in-depth discussion on the results in the next ranger report. We can't thank Su, Jenny and the rest of the volunteers enough for their help with these surveys. A big thanks to all the rangers who also put in a mammoth effort each year!

Toutouwai nest monitoring

This year Su has also introduced toutouwai nest monitoring to help us better understand reproductive success. A small crew of volunteers was formed (the robin wranglers!) to try and track down nests. The crew has found that it is no easy task in a steep reserve and it has taken a lot of effort. The wranglers have managed to track down a nest, which feels like a huge win considering how much perseverance was required. Now we will aim to monitor and protect the nest. A big thanks to the robin wranglers for their passion and effort!

Photos: Male toutouwai within the Reserve. Credit Carole Lesley

Grey-faced petrel/Ōi

Written by: Tom Grinsted (BHCT Ranger)

The grey-faced petrel +/- egg check took place in August.

- Beven from Matakohe Limestone Island joined us (Pete, Cathy and myself).
- We found 16 adults (compared with 14 last year).
- 11 of these were confirmed with an egg.
- A male stoat was caught at Burrow site B in August – incredibly the only lure was... ratabate! Perhaps the scent trails that rodents create attracted the stoat.

The scheduled chick check (again burrow scoping all burrows) was completed in September.

- Tom F.P., volunteer Grant Stevens and myself present.
- We found 14 chicks and two eggs (the eggs were presumably abandoned).

- Note that in the September chick check last year, the burrow sites had already begun to be decimated by stoats and we only found two adults and five chicks.

Stoats have been present at the sites but not with the frequency we saw last year. The 'A' line site (located between Smugglers and Peach Cove) has also been monitored. The 'A' line site consists of two 'study' burrows. There are other known burrows in the immediate vicinity. The 'A' line site is considered a 'control' site to compare to the intensively trapped three primary Old Woman sites.

The cameras there have revealed active adult petrels but regular stoat visits. Burrow scoping recently has revealed no chicks present. Fingers crossed the two stoats trapped this year have given the birds at the primary study site a chance. It's fair to say I'm cautiously optimistic (having witnessed the grim reality of the last four seasons).

Photos: Selection of shots from August / September visits.

Volunteer spotlight

Written by: Hadden Morrison (Project Coordinator)

Meet Su Sinclair – Senior Ecologist, national twitcher treasure, humble caretaker of taonga species and volunteer at BHCT. Su is also leading our toutouwai/North Island robin and pōpokotea/whitehead surveys on the Reserve. In 2016, 40 toutouwai were released in the Reserve, and we're monitoring their movements for survival. The ngahere is Su's happy place – which is just as well, because that's where she spends 90% of her time. In the Hunua Ranges (home to many endangered species), she managed the Kōkako Recovery Project with impressive

results: populations doubled every four years + they had a record recruitment of chicks per season. Su then became Project Support Manager at Predator Free 2050, before moving north to Tai Tokerau as Operations Lead at Predator Free Whangārei. Now semi-retired, Su spends more time "translocating" herself up and down the motu, tackling more of Aotearoa's great walks than not-so-great walks. We're very lucky to have her in the team.

Photos: Left: Su working with the kōkako. Right: Su looking extremely pleased to have secured dinner.

Seasonal delights

Written by: Tom Flynn-Plummer (BHCT Head Ranger)

It's blooming time spring arrived! As people who spend so much time in the ngahere all year round, it is such a treat to witness the change in seasons. Especially, when many of our taonga begin flowering.

Puawhānanga seems to hide itself from your passing gaze throughout much of the year – it almost makes you forget it's there. During spring the stunning flowers appear, signaling a welcome change in season.

Photo: Puawhānanga (*Clematis paniculata*)

Kiekie has edible flowers that bloom from August to November. These flowers stand out on the forest floor (this species can also climb) and are quite large. Kiekie also produces a large edible fruit considered to be a delicacy. Kiekie tends to be more common further up the maunga at Te Whara in areas with a denser canopy. These areas are often dark during the winter, so seeing these flowers pop out is a welcome change in scenery.

Photo: Kiekie (*Freycinetia banksii*)

Education update

Written by: Tom Grinsted (BHCT Ranger)

In September BHCT Rangers Tom Grinsted and Hadden Morrison along with NorthTec student Emily took part in Whangārei Heads School Enviro Project.

Whangārei Heads School has a focus around kaitiakitanga, sustainability and their local environment and has implemented a number of initiatives. One of these is named “Enviro Project” and is an opportunity for students, staff, parents and the wider community to be involved in a focused activity.

BHCT attended last year and helped facilitate a tracking tunnel survey in the bush below the school. This was a hit with the kids, and the results indicated a need for predator control. This year BHCT volunteered to attend again and assist in setting up a rat trap network in the same area.

We had a great session setting up 10 rat trap stations on a loop track. The kids did the mahi: naming and hammering triangles, carrying the trap boxes and helping to choose trap locations.

Shortly afterwards Matua Dane reported 6 rats were caught on the first trap check. A volunteer kids 'trapping group' has since been formed to service the network fortnightly. All data is recorded on the school’s Trap.nz project.

Photos: Left: Whangārei Heads School Trap.nz project. Right: Kids trapping rats!

Coming up in October/November 2025:

Continued weeds work alongside Aki Tai Here: As usual, we will keep the ball rolling with weeds. The team has been getting a lot done this year thanks to extra funding.

Continued servicing of our trap and baitstation networks: Spring is a crucial time of year for our toxin operation and trapping. We aim to do everything we can to protect species during the breeding season that we are currently in.

Toutouwai nest monitoring: We will continue to monitor the toutouwai nest that was found and be on the look out for other nests as well.

Placostylus hongii survey: The *Placotylus hongii* survey alongside DOC and NorthTec is due to be completed in October. Last year's results were very positive.

A huge thank you to all of our supporters!
Mauri ora — keep well!

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