Bream Head/Te Whara CONSERVATION TRUST

FOUNDATION NORTH
Te Kaitiaki Pūtea ō Tāmaki ō Tai Tokerau

COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER – Mahi tahi!!

Rangers Report: October-November 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 October and November 2025. Key points:

- A reserve-wide survey was conducted for both re-introduced bird species – pōpokotea/whitehead and toutouwai/North Island robin.
- In early October, the Robin Wranglers (led by Senior Ecologist Su Sinclair) located a toutouwai/North Island nest. The Wranglers monitored feeding activity for a few weeks before Tom FP set up a thermal camera.
- Last week, the Wranglers identified another nest. We are hoping to repeat the same monitoring using the thermal camera.
- In mid-October, BHCT rangers, NorthTec students/tutors and DOC surveyed the range-restricted population of pūpūharakeke/flax snails within the Bream Head/Te Whara Scenic Reserve (the Reserve).
- The ōi/grey-faced petrel breeding season is looking hopeful this spring with multiple chicks alive and well in the study site burrows.

Photos: Amazing moment captured of toutouwai/North Island robin parents collecting food together. Credit: Carole Lesley.

Predator control

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

Bi-annual 1080 operation date set for May–June 2026

The 1080 operation in July 2024 provided some awesome results for predator control, and we are seeing the positive impact in the Reserve! We plan to perform another 1080 operation two years after in 2026. We learnt from the last operation that we could shift the start date forward a month or two to take advantage of the well-documented rodent carrying capacity spike around May. This is when rodents reach a density that cannot sustain the population due to food becoming more scarce at this time, combined with more mouths to feed.

Rodent toxin

Ratabate (diphacinone) uptake by rodents has remained quite low since September 2025. Average uptake across the Reserve was around 36% in October and 35% in November. It definitely feels as though rodent interest has shifted onto other food sources or there aren't many rodents (especially rats) around currently – a frequent observation is that garden snails are eating a lot of bait. The fact that uptake remains low across the Reserve (grassy areas on the north side are the exception due to high mouse numbers) means it's a good time to pull all Ratabate out of bait stations ahead of the summer break. It's also a good time as our next 1080 operation is scheduled for May–June 2026!

We will monitor the rodent population carefully and are prepared to strategically re-introduce bait into areas that may require it (eg, Kakerakau skink grid).

Trapping

Below are the tables for trap catches over the months of October and November 2025.

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: October 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	5	12	3 Ship/2 Norway	1 of 5	4 of 12	142	107	0	0	2	2
Possum	0	0	-	0	0	5	3	0	0	-	-
Stoat	0	1	-	0	1 of 1	15	14	0	0	0	0
Weasel	2	1	-	0 of 2	0 of 1	38	36	1	0	0	1
Feral cat	0	0	-	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Mouse	17	14	-	0 of 17	0 of 14	192	164	4	13	0	0
Hedgehog	0	0	-	0	0	9	8	0	0	0	0
Totals	**24**	**28**	**n/a**	**1 of 24**	**5 of 28**	**403**	**333**	**5**	**13**	**2**	**3**

Analysis:

- Overall catches dropped off significantly since September 2025. Spring time food in the forest is plentiful (seeds, fruit, eggs, etc) for pests, so we would expect predators to be less interested in traps.
- Rat catches reduced compared to previous months.

Monthly predator control results: November 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	7	5	4 Ship/3 Norway	1 of 7	1 of 5	149	112	2	1	0	3
Possum	0	0	-	0	0	5	3	0	0	-	-
Stoat	0	0	-	0	0	15	14	0	0	0	0
Weasel	2	0	-	0 of 2	0	40	36	1	0	0	1
Feral cat	0	0	-	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1
Mouse	14	19	-	0 of 14	2 of 19	206	183	6	8	0	0
Hedgehog	0	0	-	0	0	9	8	0	0	0	0
Totals	**23**	**24**	**n/a**	**1 of 23**	**3 of 24**	**426**	**357**	**9**	**9**	**0**	**5**

Analysis:

- Overall catches remain low through spring.
- No stoats caught in either month – the 1080 operation in the Reserve last year could have had an impact as well as the 1080 operation done this year in the wider area (Manaia and Ocean Beach Recreation Reserve) by other groups.

Pōpokotea/whitehead and toutouwai/North Island robin monitoring

Written by: Tom Flynn-Plummer (BHCT Head Ranger) with reference to Su Sinclair's 2025 survey report

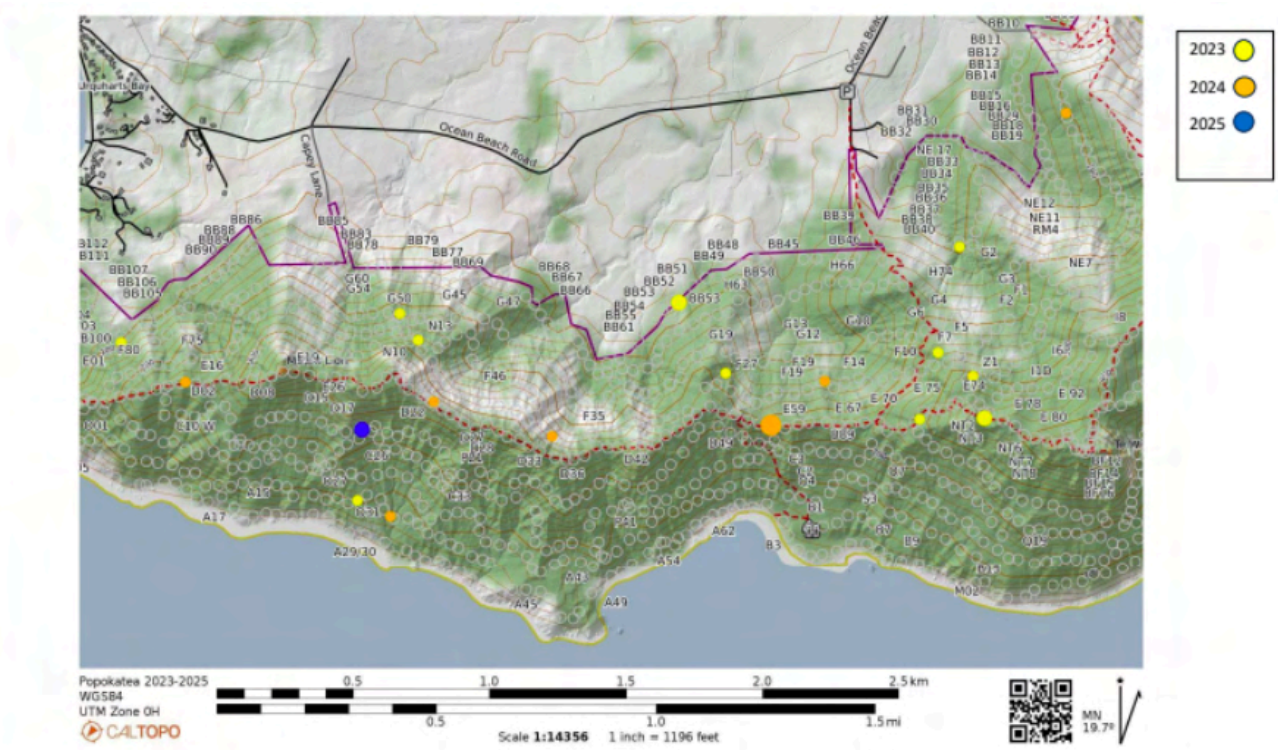
Summary of spring survey results 2025

As mentioned in the previous ranger report, a reserve-wide survey was conducted for both re-introduced bird species – pōpokotea/whitehead and toutouwai/North Island robin. Unfortunately, it is not looking like pōpokotea/whiteheads have successfully established (see table below). Early surveys have questionable results. However, from 2022/23 onwards the effort and experience used has been relatively consistent. There are multiple possibilities as to why these birds have not been established, but the most likely being that the majority dispersed outside the Reserve as seen in the majority of mainland translocations.

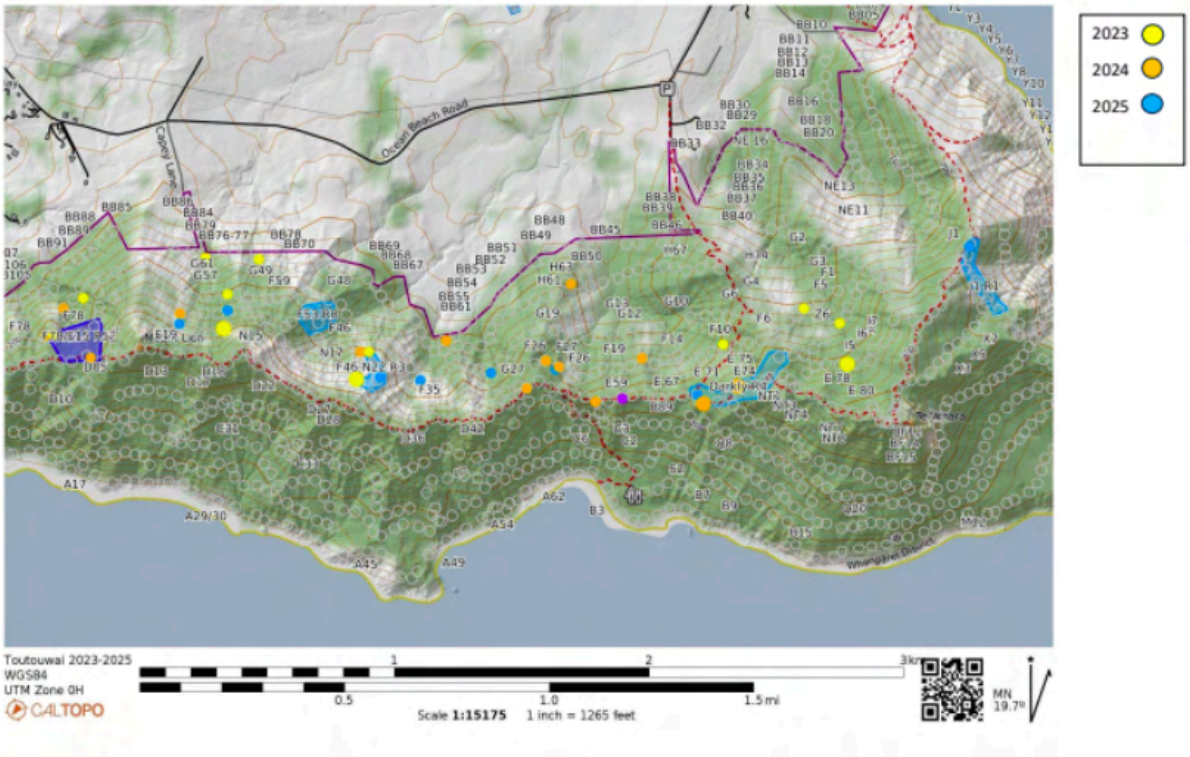
Survey results of toutouwai/North Island robin have shown similar stable yet relatively low numbers for the last three surveys (see table below). Toutouwai/North Island robins are less likely to flee the area after release, although early reports in 2016 suggested some did in fact disperse. They are territorial birds that can occupy an area for multiple years. It's hard to determine what the trajectory of this population is, but for the time being numbers appear to be stable, with breeding being observed still. With nest monitoring of this species, we may be able to determine if a top-up translocation is worth pursuing.

Table: Number of individuals detected in surveys by year. Source: Su Sinclair 2025 survey report. Until 2023, results are thought to be more variable due to surveyors used.

Released		**2018**	**2019**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**
Pōpokotea	100 birds (2017)	57	41	6	13	9	2
Toutouwai	40 birds (2016)	**-**	**-**	**-**	15	16	12



Map 1: Pōpokotea/whitehead detections within the Bream Head/Te Whara Scenic Reserve over the past three surveys. Source: Su Sinclair 2025 survey report.



Map 2: Toutouwai/North Island robin detections within the Bream Head/Te Whara Scenic Reserve over the past three surveys. Source: Su Sinclair 2025 survey report.

Judging from both maps above, the distribution of detections for both species is almost exclusively on the north side of the Reserve. Warmer temperatures on the north-facing side may impact species distribution. If there is a clear preference, that would mean half of the Reserve is optimal habitat for these species. There is a lot to think about with these results.

If you are keen to see the full survey report, please get in touch with myself (Tom Flynn-Plummer).

Toutouwai/North Island robin nest monitoring

The infamous Robin Wranglers (led by Senior Ecologist Su Sinclair) have been very busy over October and November, tracking down toutouwai/North Island robin nests and monitoring nesting activity. They are up the hill multiple times per week to track movements of toutouwai/North Island robin in the hopes of finding nests. The observations they have made are very exciting. A huge thank you to this dedicated crew!

In early October, we received word that a nest was found. The Wranglers monitored feeding activity for a few weeks before I could get a thermal camera set up (see photos below). The hope for this was to figure out if the breeding toutouwai/North Island robins are having any issues nesting. What we all wanted to see was evidence of birds safely fledging. The thermal camera was able to give us awesome footage of constant heat spots from the nest (indicating chicks inside and therefore active) and also the parents travelling back and forth feeding the chicks.

In late October, a strong wind/rain event occurred and the camera footage was compromised (very irritating coincidence!) for a short time. This meant the fledging event was not recorded. During this time the nest became inactive, as indicated by the lack of heat spots. I searched through the footage to understand what may have happened to the nest following the weather event. We can be fairly certain that predation didn't occur, as the camera would have detected large heat spots and been able to identify the species using the embedded AI classifying system.

Eventually, I was able to identify the exact same heat spot as the nest, but in slightly different locations within the camera's frame. Of course the nest can't move, so I reached out to Su Sinclair who mentioned that the parents will keep their fledglings very close to the original nest whilst they continue to feed them. This certainly fits with what I was seeing on the recordings. Fast forward to now, the wranglers have observed the same breeding pair feeding their young chicks. I'm told the parents keep their young very well hidden, so there is still more to be observed. Regardless it is very positive to witness nesting, let alone fledging!

Just last week the crew identified another nest. We are hoping to repeat the same monitoring using the thermal cameras – it would be awesome to capture the moment of fledging. This information helps us build a case for a potential top-up translocation of the toutouwai/North Island robin. We will continue to do our best to monitor and assist all struggling taonga on their journey to re-establishment in the Reserve.

Photo: Female toutouwai/North Island robin that is now paired with a male, named Darkly, who the Robin Wranglers have been watching for months now. They were beginning to lose hope that he would find a mate. Better late than never! Credit: Carole Lesley.

Photo: Setting up a DOC AI thermal camera (from the Cacophony Project) to focus on a previously identified toutouwai/North Island robin nest.

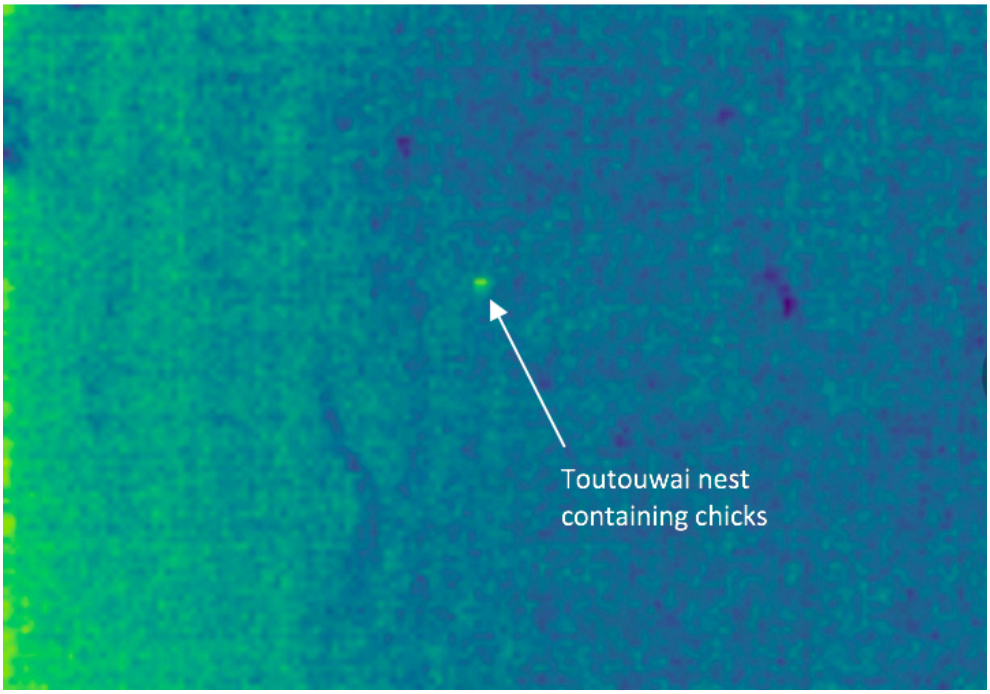


Photo: Small heat spot shows a toutouwai/North Island robin nest containing two chicks. Recording captured using the DOC AI thermal camera from the Cacophony Project.

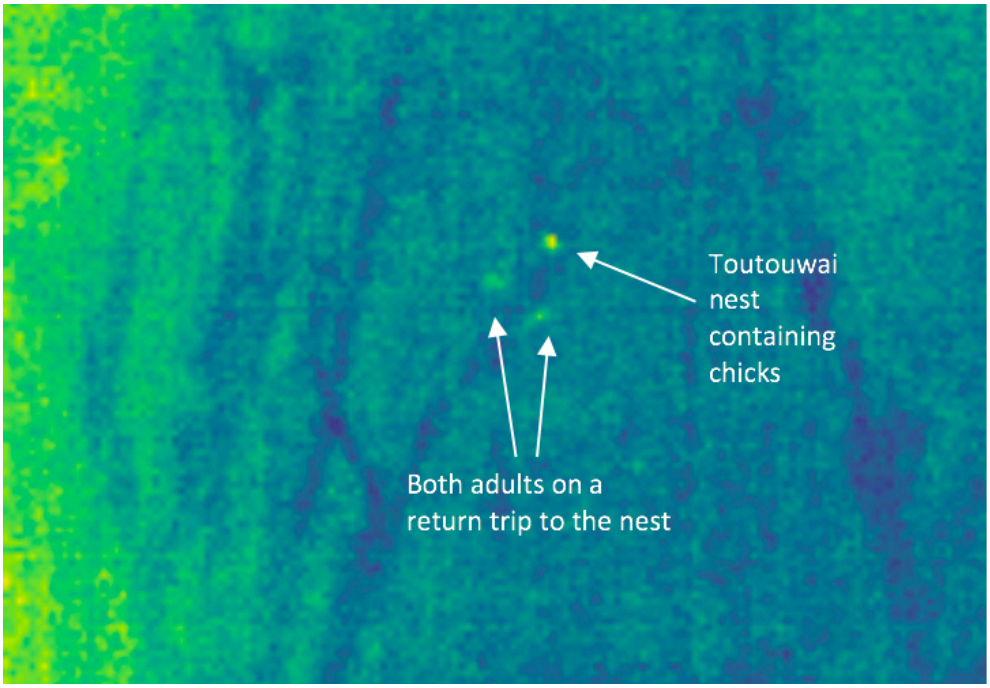


Photo: Brightest heat spots show a toutouwai/North Island robin nest containing two chicks; the two more faint heat spots show both parents returning to the nest. Recording captured using the DOC AI thermal camera from the Cacophony Project.

Pūpūharakeke/flax snail (*Placostylus hongii*) survey results

Written by: Tom Flynn-Plummer — BHCT Head Ranger

For those who aren't aware, there is a small population of range-restricted pūpūharakeke/flax snails (*Placostylus hongii*) within the Reserve. Populations are only found on the northeastern coast of the North Island between Whangaroa and Whangārei, and offshore on the Poor Knights, Chicken, Mokohinau, and Great Barrier Islands[1]. Additionally, a translocated population of Poor Knights snails was established on Motuhoropapa Island in the inner Hauraki Gulf in 1934.

Management of pūpūharakeke/flax snail colonies has been carried out since the early 1980s. The first Department of Conservation Giant Land Snail Recovery Plan was approved in 1995 and is currently being updated. If interested, you can read the document in full here. Some key information about the species is summarised below.

Pūpūharakeke inhabit coastal broadleaf forest and scrub and have never been located more than 1 km inland. They are estimated to live to 20 years or more, reaching maturity at 3–5 years. Key food plant species include mahoe, *Coprosma* species and karaka. Mating appears to be triggered by climatic conditions (eg, rainfall) and likely occurs every year except in periods of drought. Between 20–30 eggs are laid in shallow nests inside loose earth. The eggs hatch in 6–15 weeks, and the 5–7 mm hatchlings are thought to spend a period of time living in trees and shrubs up to 6 m above the ground.

On the 13th of October, BHCT rangers, NorthTec students/tutors and DOC surveyed the populations (see table below). It's very encouraging to see a huge increase in numbers for Site 2 and to observe signs of a comeback for Site 1 after a rough few years.

[1] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03014223.1999.9517605

Photo: Survey crew prepping for a big day of counting pūpūharakeke/flax snails in the Bream Head/Te Whara Scenic Reserve.

Table: Number of live pūpūharakeke/flax snails at two sites in the Bream Head/Te Whara Scenic Reserve.

Year	Site 1 (original survey site)			Site 2 (newer site up the hill on the ridge)		
	Juvenile	Adult	Total	Juvenile	Adult	Total
2017	3	5	8	-	-	-
2018	0	3	3	33	20	53
2019	0	3	3	-	-	-
2020	-	-	-	10	40	50
2024	10	4	14	81	57	138
2025	8	4	12	183	91	274

Numbers of live pūpūharakeke/flax snails at Site 1 dwindled in previous years. This is thought to be due to habitat degradation (ie, slips causing sedimentation and canopy thinning). Early reports of this population also suggested rodent predation had played a role in its decline. However, this site has shown hope of a comeback after providing encouraging results in 2024 and similar results in 2025.

Numbers of live pūpūharakeke/flax snails at Site 2 were significantly higher compared to the original Site 1 when first surveyed. This has remained consistent over time. The 2024 survey showed a large increase in live snails, especially juveniles. Results from this year's survey have shown an even larger increase in both adult and juvenile live snails. Overall, live snail count was more than double compared to last year. This is very encouraging.

Due to there being so many pūpūharakeke/flax snails found, it put a lot of pressure on the crew to finish the job on the day. So, I want to acknowledge the huge effort put in by everyone to get it done. Awesome to see!

It's important to note that signs of rodent predation at both sites were very minimal again this year. The pūpūharakeke/flax snail population is protected by an intensive grid of bait stations, which was set up in 2017 to control rodents. Prior to that, DOC and BHCT had been protecting the wider area using regular bait stations since the early 2000s. It seems that this rodent protection has done its job in assisting pūpūharakeke/flax snail numbers to increase! We are appreciative of everyone involved. Please see the Appendix, which was put together by Alicia from NorthTec, for more detailed survey results.

Ōi/grey-faced petrel

Written by: Tom Grinsted (BHCT Ranger)

Ōi/grey-faced petrel breeding season – cautious optimism. The breeding season is looking hopeful this spring with multiple chicks alive and well in the study site burrows (see table below) with the last check being the 24th of November. This time last year there were no chicks due to stoat predation.

In November, Jess from Kiwi Coast joined BHCT Ranger Tom Grinsted on his fortnightly visit to the study sites. It was great to introduce Jess to the manu ōi and spend some time sharing stories regarding each other's work. The mahi of all local conservation groups overlaps, and fledging seabirds (fingers crossed for this year) are definitely an indicator that our collective mahi makes a difference.

Table: Number of ōi/grey-faced petrel adults and fledged chicks confirmed across all three nesting sites since 2016/17.
The chicks will be weighed and banded in early December, ready to fledge from December–January. And — classic ōi behaviour — they'll return to the exact same burrow to breed… in about 8–10 years. No rush aye!

Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Adults	7	11	10	16	15	15	15	14	14	14
Chicks fledged	0	10	5	0	9	0	0	0	0	TBC



Photos: Clockwise from top left: 1. Easter Island style rock out near the Old Woman. 2. Petrel chick chillin'. 3. Tom Grinsted and Kiwi Coast's Jess Ogle out at the ōi/grey-faced petrel burrow sites. 4. Unwelcome visitor (stoat) sniffing around.

Pest plant control

Written by: Tom Grinsted (BHCT Ranger)

BHCT rangers and contractors Aki Tai Here have continued pest plant control operations targeting our priority species moth plant and climbing asparagus. Recent focus areas include the Urquharts working blocks and Y Line South.


Photos: Left: Kees in a thick patch of moth plant on Y line. Right: Tom FP with the biggest vine of the day.

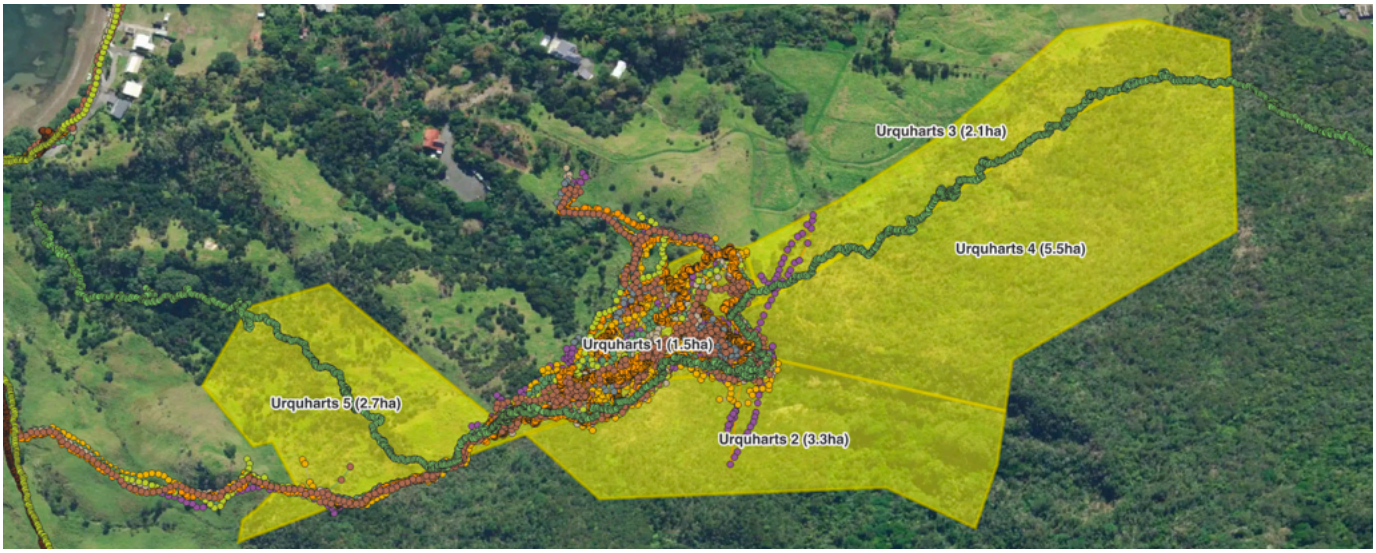


Photo: GPX tracks of pest plant control by BHCT rangers and contractors Aki Tai Here in the Urquharts working blocks.

BHCT is in line to receive additional funding from DOC to continue the momentum of our pest plant control programme. This funding will be used to target weed-led and site-led priorities within the Bream Head/Te Whara Scenic Reserve as outlined by the BHCT Pest Plant Management Plan.

The work will be undertaken by BHCT field rangers and external contractors.

Specifically this work will include:

- ~5/6 combined BHCT/external contractor pest plant 'controls', with coverage of ~10-20 ha
- up to 3 working days of search and destroy drone spraying targeting moth plant and pampas
- up to 150 ha of drone surveillance targeting moth plant infestations.

The purpose of the drone survey is to:

- aid in directing ground teams (via geospatial polygons derived from the orthomosaic aerial image) to locations of adult moth plant
- monitor the effect of control operations over time.

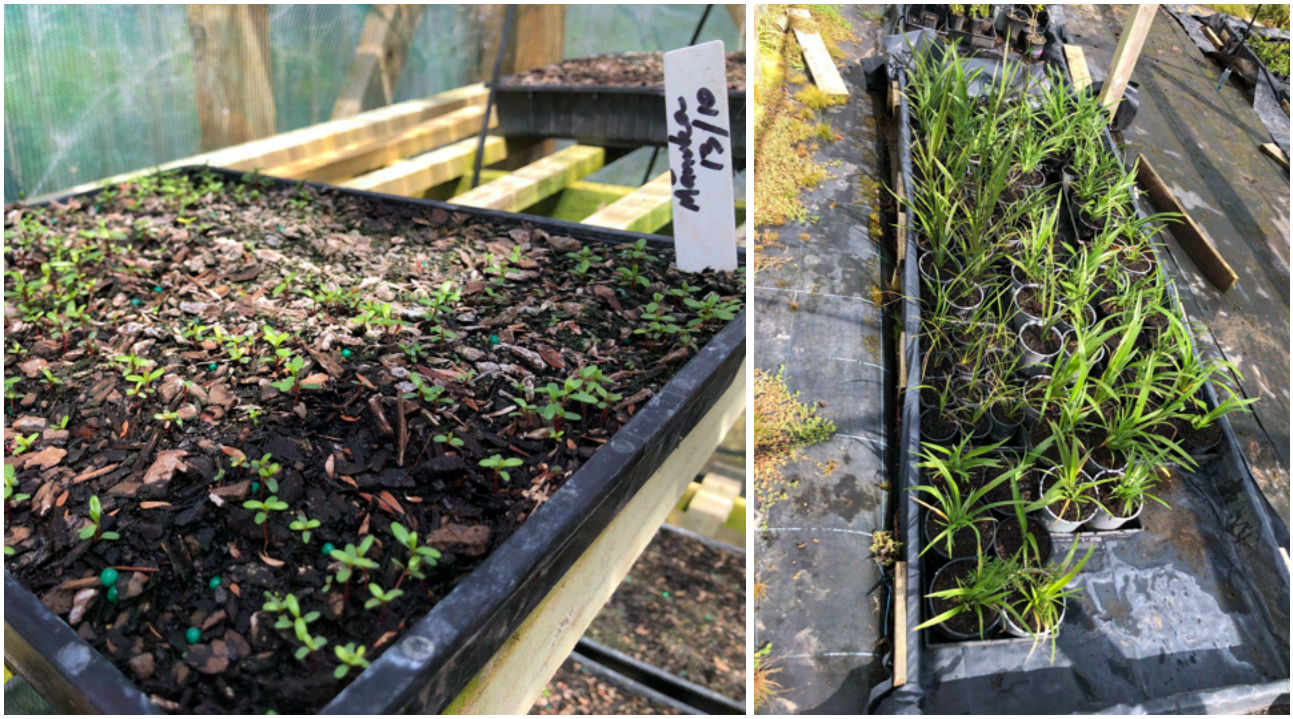
The drone surveillance will target areas adjacent to sites of ecological, cultural and community value.

Photo: Planned aerial drone survey areas. Work is due to commence when the moth plant flowers in December/January.

Revegetation/Nursery

Written by Tom Grinsted (BHCT Ranger)

The nursery team kicked off the 2025/26 growing season with a bang. Three new volunteers joined the core nursery crew for a working bee and pricked out 19 trays (44 root trainers each) of mānuka in the 25/26 growing season.



Photos: Left: Young mānuka seedlings. Right: Young harakeke/flax.

Photo: Planned 2026 planting site planting site near Smugglers Bay showing Smugglers Bay Loop Track zig-zagging through the area.

Volunteer spotlight

Written by: Hadden Morrison (Project Coordinator)

The spotlight has been on one of our most dedicated volunteers — Onerahi local, Grant Stevens. When he's not running his engineering business, sitting on boards, or helping out at Matakohe Island, Grant's out on the Reserve proving he's still fitter than most twenty-year-olds, tackling tracking-tunnel checks and long bush missions with a grin.

He first joined BHCT through a friend's suggestion, and what began with trap lines has grown into servicing some of the tougher areas of the Reserve and retrieving footage from cameras capturing the incredible life returning to Bream Head/Te Whara.

Across his six years of volunteering, Grant has seen a huge increase in birdlife — from kōtare and tūī to the soft calls of ruru echoing through the trees — a rewarding reminder that hard mahi pays off. One spot close to his heart is the ōi/grey-faced petrel nesting area at the Old Woman, a rare mainland breeding site that still needs protection from stoats and other predators. For Grant, volunteering offers a balance of keeping active, connecting with good people, and making a meaningful difference for nature. We're hugely grateful for everything he brings to our team — tēnā koe, Grant, you're a legend!

Photo: Grant, Bill, Tom G, Kees, Nic and Beven. A volunteer dream team track clearing on Lady Alice Island.

Education update

Written by: Lil Craig — Education committee chair and Trustee

In late November we had a group of keen 'Eco Warriors' from Whangārei Intermediate School visit the nursery to take part in our education programme. Our awesome rangers were joined by Rupert Newbold to work through three activities on rotation - seed collection, sowing and pricking out seedlings into root trainers; walking our mini trapline learning about the various traps and devices we use on the reserve to control predator (a highlight being a nice big female tree wētā that had made a home in our wētā hotel); and Rupert showed the students around the areas he has been regenerating over the years. They also got to plant some flaxes in a wet area. We are

forever grateful to Rupert for his support and involvement in our programme!

We're so fortunate to have the opportunity to pass on to our rangatahi the importance of conservation and to show the impact we can all have. These Eco Warriors are making a difference in their own local environment around their school and they're keen to visit us again in the future.

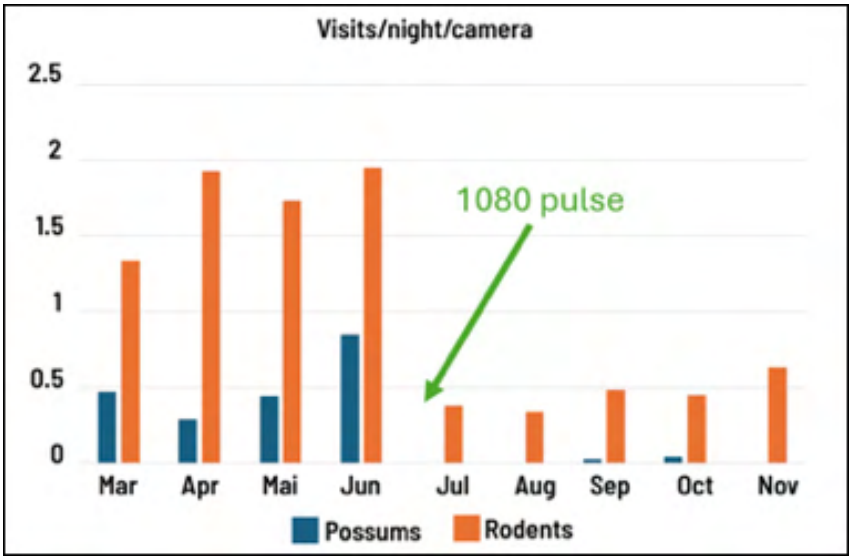
Photo: Left: Wētā hotel made by Tom G. Right: Tom FP with a group on the mini trap line.

Update from Predator Free Whangārei

Written by: Vicky Vajda McNab – Communications and Engagement Coordinator

It’s been a busy year for the Predator Free Whangārei team. We are now on Defend Phase (zero possums!) in 4,200 ha, and on Mop-up Phase – very close to becoming possum-free – on 1,800 ha. All on track to achieve a possum-free Whangārei Heads by mid-2027!

In winter, we started our operations at Kauri Mountain and had a successful 1080 pulse, with zero possum presence detected by our AI thermal cameras right after the operation. Some reincursions have been spotted but these have been dealt with follow up legholds and cyanide operations.



Graph: Average monthly possum and rat sightings per night across all cameras in Kauri Mountain.

We also have a new special tool to help us achieve our possum elimination goal: our first Conservation Dog! Our Biosecurity Officer Gaelyn Dewhurst and her dog Shaka got certified through the rigorous DOC Conservation Dog programme. Now Shaka is officially one of the very few Certified Possum Scat Detection Dogs in the country.

Scat detection dogs are particularly good for areas with lots of kiwi, like Whangārei Heads, as they are not looking for live possums, they don't need to go into burrows which can disturb our kiwi.

Shaka's sharp nose is already bringing great outcomes to our project, helping to find and trap some hard-to-get possums. He is also an efficient incursion response tool and will ultimately help our team find the last possums. Keep an eye out for this fur-midable team!

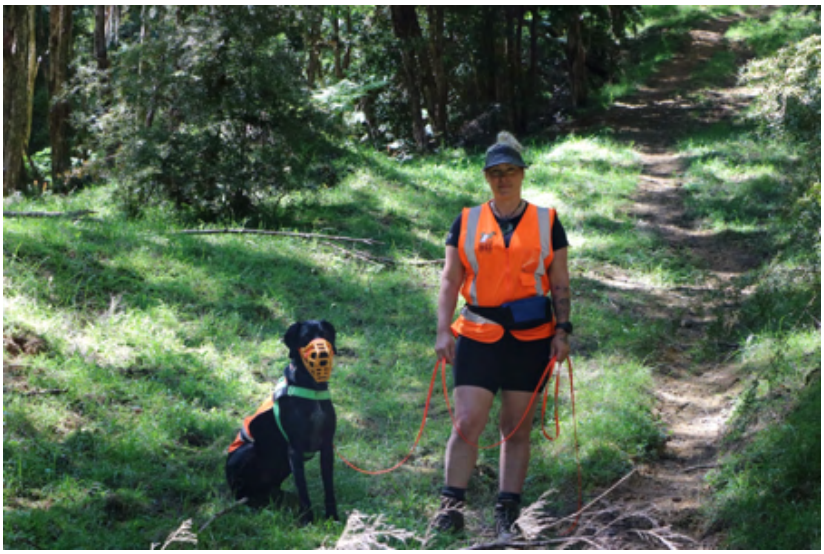


Photo: Gaelyn and Shaka on the job!

Switching to a different reporting time-frame

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

This ranger report will be the last under the bi-monthly format. While we greatly enjoy producing these reports every two months, we think there are benefits to extending it to every three months. This will give the rangers a little more time to focus on the field mahi and allows us to sync reports up with the seasons. So, the next ranger report will be a quarterly report covering the summer months (December 2025–February 2026).

Coming up in Summer (Dec 2025-Feb 2026)

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

Pulling out all rodent toxin: Over December, volunteers and rangers will be removing all Ratabate from stations. A big undertaking!

Track maintenance: With no bait scheduled until autumn 2026, we can give the lines and gear a much needed spruce up.

Summer rodent survey: It's time to see what our rodent tracking indices are doing to see how effective our control has been for the tail end of this year.

Continued servicing of our trap network: While the plan is to pull out toxin from the Reserve, we definitely won't be changing our kill trap network. We still aim to catch every non trap-shy mustelid we can.

Toutouwai/North Island robin nest monitoring: We will continue to monitor the second toutouwai/North Island robin nest as well as check in with the first pair regularly.

Introducing a new ranger or potentially two: We are currently in the process of recruiting either one full-time ranger or two part-timers. Either way, Kees and Fern's role needs to be filled as they plan to depart early 2026. Big boots to fill!

We hope everyone has an amazing summer break! A huge thank you to all of our supporters!
Mauri ora — keep well!

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