



AUTUMN NEWS

Welcome to our Autumn issue. What a busy summer it was for our volunteers and partners; trapping, weeding, planting and maintaining local tracks and waterways. Our heartfelt thanks to everyone working to protect and restore our unique natural environment. We celebrate the difference you are all making.

Highlights in this issue include an update on the kiwi release in Te Waorahi, a first for our rohe for over a decade, and a wonderful example of just what can be achieved when communities, mana whenua, and organisations work together. You can also read about our Conservation Week activities, a proposal to set up an open sanctuary within the Piroa-Brynderwyns High Value Area (HVA), completion of our first long-tailed bat survey, and a new catchment initiative focused on the Doctor's Hill area, among the many other activities we have under way.

NATIVE SPECIES



Kiwi at home in Te Waorahi

The three young kiwi released into regenerating native forest at Te Waorahi in March, are settling in well into their new home, ranger Steve McKee reports.

The three Northland brown kiwi, gifted by Ngāti Hine, were brought from Matakoho–Limestone Island and released in a moving ceremony attended by hapu, local conservation groups and volunteers. The young birds - two females and one male—were named Rangiora, Hinekiuta and Matahāpo by mana whenua. Transmitters fixed to the legs of the birds have allowed Steve and the team from Kiwi Coast to keep on eye on their movements and while all three are doing well, Hinekiuta (Ngāti Hine) did cause a few anxious moments.

At this time of year, kiwi are active from around dusk, feeding for 12–13 hours each night. For the first few nights, the transmitter attached to Hinekiuta showed she wasn't leaving her shelter until after midnight and was only active for a short time. Todd Hamilton, Dave Cullen, and Steve headed out to check on her, eventually finding her tucked away in a pampas bush. After a thorough wellness check she was released. Since then, Hinekiuta has shown great improvement. "Over several nights, she began getting active earlier and staying out longer, and she is now up around dusk and feeding for 10–12 hours — right where we'd expect her to be," Steve says.



Rangiora (Patuharakeke) has been covering a bit more ground. He's been detected across the southern Brynderwyns, and even as far as Marunui. However, he continues to return towards the Te Waorahi release area. Matahiapo (Te Uri o Hau) stayed close to the release site initially, but had moved down Te Waorahi Road and appears to have settled in that area.

"Overall, all three birds seem to be adjusting well and have remained within the wider area. It's encouraging to see them establishing themselves, and we're hopeful that, in time, they'll pair up with local kiwi and begin breeding," Steve says.

The kiwi release is part of an ongoing effort by PCT to restore both the local kiwi population and the wider ecosystem, and wouldn't have been possible without the vision and foresight of landowners Bruce and Janine Copeland, the generosity and support of mana whenua - Patuharakeke, Te Uri o Hau, Te Parawhau and Ngāti Hine - and our community conservation partners Kiwi Coast, Northland Regional Council, the Department of Conservation, QEII National Trust. A big thank you to everyone involved— we'll keep you updated as their journey continues.

Photo credits: Malcolm Pullman, Steve McKee

Heeding the call

The Kiwi Listening Programme – or Kiwi Coast Call Count Survey - is on again, with PCT volunteers contributing data from nine listening sites. The results will help us gain a better picture of kiwi presence and any change in the population.

This year, the official listening 'window' is from May 5th – 23rd, with the Second (Backup) Window: June 3rd – 22nd. Our kiwi expert, Debs Searchfield, says listening posts will be positioned throughout the Piroa-Brynderwyn Ranges in a range of habitats. "To build a reliable long-term picture of kiwi activity, it's important that we return to the same sites ideally for at least five consecutive years. This allows us to track how the population is changing over time," Debs explains.

Volunteers carry out listening sessions between 6–8 pm on four fine, calm nights within the listening window. At this time of year, kiwi are calling frequently as the breeding season begins. Using the Kiwi Coast app, volunteers can use their phones to enter information while listening at the site, and can capture kiwi calls in real time. The results are collated and sent to the Department of Conservation, which produces a combined report for Northland. With effective predator control and responsible dog management in place, call-count results should begin to reflect conservation gains, Debs says. "Knowing where kiwi are located, and whether their call numbers are increasing or decreasing, we can better protect our precious kiwi and give them the strongest possible chance of successfully breeding."



Photo credit: Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust/PFNZ

Going bats!

PCT has just completed its first-ever survey of the New Zealand long-tailed bat, to find out more about their distribution and where to target future predator control. The survey, led by NRC Bat Specialist Stephanie Tong and supported by PCT, Shorebirds Trust, Patuharakeke and local ecologists, was carried out in the ranges of the High-Value Conservation Area. Sixty-two listening devices were employed for a month on ridge-lines and in areas the bats are known to inhabit. PCT Conservation Co-ordinator Katie Gibb says the devices yielded an enormous amount of data that will take some time to analyse, but the survey results will be invaluable in helping to direct predator control efforts where they are needed.



Long-tailed bats are widely distributed throughout the mainland, Stewart Island, Little Barrier and Great Barrier islands and Kapiti Island. They are on the Department of Conservation's Threatened - Nationally Critical list and may only produce one offspring a year. They can fly at 60 km per hour and a bat colony can have a range of more than 100 km². An aerial insectivore, they feed on small moths, midges, mosquitoes and beetles. *Photo credit: DOC/Sabine Berner*

Making a place for the bellbirds

From planting the right food sources, to effective predator control, creating a safe and healthy environment will help bring the bellbirds back to Waipu. During his Conservation Week presentation in April, ecologist Dr John Craig spoke about the important role bellbirds play in our environment, drawing on his years of studying them on Tiritiri Matangi Island. He shared insights into past bellbird reintroductions, why most attempts failed and what made one successful, along with practical ways we can help attract bellbirds back to Waipu.



Key takeaways:

- Predator control matters! Reducing rats, possums, and mustelids gives native birds a much better chance.
- Plant native trees and plants in your garden that can provide food and shelter year-round. P uriri is fast-growing and one of the best native plants for absorbing carbon.
- Bird feeders can help, but we need to ensure visiting birds are safe. This Forest and Bird article has best practice guidelines <https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/resources/backyard-bird-feeding>

Photo credit: PFNZ



Conservation Week fun

Take Action for Nature was the theme of our Conservation Week programme held from April 20-26. Piroa Conservation Trust teamed up with Shorebirds Trust and Sustainable Kaipara to host a range of free community events in Mangawhai and Waipu during the week, including workshops on predator control, biodiversity and plant propagation, a plant and seed swap, a field trip to the Marunui conservation area, a talk by bellbird expert Dr John Craig, and community planting and weeding days.

All up, around 100 people participated, with the bellbird talk in Waipu, and the backyard biodiversity workshop and plant and seed swap in Mangawhai, proving especially popular. Mick and Andrea from Kaiwaka Food Forest shared their knowledge of seed saving and native planting and the share table was a big success, with people sharing with a variety of plants, produce and seeds from their gardens. Fifteen volunteers turned out to help with planting at the Mangawhai Community Garden. Around 200 native trees and plants were planted at the entrance to the park. The winners of our Conservation Week photo competition will be announced in May. Thanks to Aotearoa Surf, Four Square, the Waipu Community Plant Nursery, and the Mangawhai Golf Club for donating such great prizes and to everyone who took action for nature this Conservation Week!

Stepping into stewardship

By PCT Conservation Co-ordinator Katie Gibb

The trapping field trip at Marunui, during Conservation Week, was one of those days that reminds you why this work matters. The bush was absolutely alive, sunlight filtering through the canopy and birdsong carrying across the valley; a powerful reflection of decades of care. There was a real sense that people weren't just arriving for a workshop, but stepping into a form of stewardship, into a story that has been unfolding here since the 1980s.



Marunui is an incredible example of long-term, community-driven conservation. The work here has been shaped by years of dedication and deep local knowledge. This was brought to life through an outstanding introduction from John Hawley, who shared the history of the site and the journey of the project over time. That accumulated experience speaks not just to effort, but to learning, adapting, and continually improving outcomes for the forest. The day was about showcasing that knowledge, giving people a window into what sustained predator control looks like over time, and why it remains so important.

What stood out most was the willingness of people to step into that legacy. There was real curiosity, thoughtful questions, and a strong sense that people wanted to be part of something meaningful. This event wasn't just about skills, it was about connecting people to a place, to its history, and to the ongoing work needed to protect it. With new volunteers showing interest in supporting trap lines, it felt like a strong step forward in continuing the care of this remarkable forest.

PREDATOR CONTROL

Open sanctuary - a landscape approach to conservation

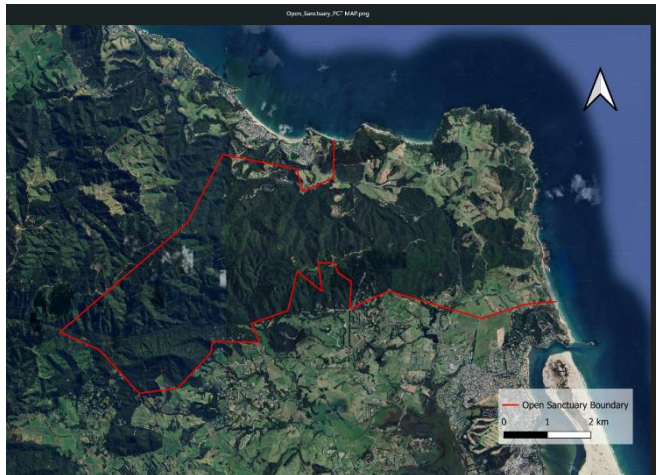
Landowners, iwi and the community are coming together to design an “open sanctuary” from Bream Tail to Marunui, which would see current predator control efforts in the area taken to scale.

The concept of the open sanctuary is the result of community-led conservation work and has evolved over many years, supported by PCT. Trustee Peter Hunt says the idea is to expand the current focus area of 1,200 ha to a 3,000+ ha contiguous area within the 23,500ha Piroa-Brynderwyns High Value Conservation Area (HVA).

“The wider Piroa Brynderwyns HVA exists because individual landowners and groups have dedicated time and effort to predator control for many years and at Marunui (a privately-owned QEII covenanted property) for over three decades,” Peter explains. “But ecosystems and predators do not follow fencelines. Predator movement, habitat connectivity, and native species dispersal require coordination beyond individual properties.

“We are already seeing strong conservation potential in this area, including native bird populations such as kiwi and forest birds like kākā and kererū. PCT wants to continue to work with the local community to help protect and grow these gains through a landscape approach.”

For more information: katie.gibb@piroaconservation.org.nz



Project Bellbird summer highlights

Our backyard trappers are making great progress toward in reducing rats and possums around Waipu village, so bellbird and other wildlife can survive and thrive. Some summer highlights:

- We had our 100th household join our trapping network.
- In April, Waipu Primary School also joined Team Bellbird, with pupils setting up nine traps around the school.
- A workshop in March drew a good crowd of locals keen to brush up on their predator tracking and trapping, with many people keen to volunteer for other PCT activities.
- Sam Cowpland has joined the team to support our backyard trappers and to help increase project support and participation.



If trapping's not your thing, but you'd still like to support the project, we are offering backyard planting kits to Waipu villagers. The plants are designed to provide habitat, shelter, and food all year round for our native species. Packs contain 30 plants and are a great deal at \$30 per pack. Contact coralie.roberts@piroaconservation.org.nz for details. For more information about Project Bellbird, contact: projectbellbird@piroaconservation.org.nz

HABITAT RESTORATION

Waionehu catchment news

Willow removal has now been completed at the Lynch's Farm wetland site, in efforts to improve wetland health and habitat quality. The farm wetland is one of six demonstration sites where we are undertaking restoration and or wetland creation. Removing invasive willow opens space for native vegetation to regenerate, improves water flow, and helps restore the natural function of the wetland.

We're excited to be supporting a new community catchment group in the Doctor's Hill area near Uretiti, focussed on protecting the nationally critical matuku-hūrepo (Australasian bittern).

Healthy wetlands, clean waterways, strong riparian planting, and predator control all play an important role in creating safe habitat for these iconic birds. By improving catchment health, we're not only supporting water quality and biodiversity, but helping ensure bittern can continue to thrive in our local landscape. This work reflects our wider catchment approach, where what's good for the environment is also good for the species that depend on it. *Photo credit: Andy Cable*



Summer siege on invasive weeds

It's been a busy and productive summer for our weed warriors.

In December, PCT held hands-on weed action sessions at Black Swamp Road, focusing on removing moth plant, privet and tobacco plant. January saw us working at the King/Cove DOC Reserve, where we freed up native plants by clearing invasive grasses like paspalum and kikuyu, followed by targeted spraying and control of wattle. From February through March, we organised and maintained the weed bins



at Wyatt Landscape Supplies. Due to strong community uptake, we increased the number of bins to three. In March, further work was carried out on public land around Mangawhai Heads, including spraying moth plant above the car park and behind the holiday park.

Work has continued on eliminating climbing asparagus in the Mangawhai Community Park, and on vines through the Mangawhai Gorge and old Cove Rd areas.

A few hardy volunteers put in a great effort at the community weeding bee at the Mike Keating Reserve in Mangawhai during Conservation Week in April (pictured). Over four days they were able to clear invasive weeds from a wide area, to make room in the park for native trees and plants to flourish.

A big thank you to everyone who has contributed their time and effort. Your support is making a real difference in protecting our local environment. We're always looking for help with working bees, monitoring weed bins, and tackling weeds on properties around the district. Every bit helps! Contact habitat@piroaconservation.org.nz for more information, or keep an eye out for our volunteer days.

IF IT'S FLOWERING NOW...

...Then it's not toetoe! The difference? Toetoe, the native NZ grass, typically flowers in spring, starting around October, with droopy flowerheads. Pampas grass usually flowers February to June (autumn) and has upright fluffy flowerheads. This difference in flowering seasons is one way to distinguish between the two grasses. So channel your inner pampas warrior and get out there clipping those seed heads!



Community nursery update

A workshop on how to propagate plants from cuttings proved a hit during Conservation Week, attracting around half a dozen participants. Meanwhile, nursery manager Coralie Roberts is working with a number of Waipu residents, advising and assisting with the removal of Moth Plant. A reminder to anyone with this invasive plant in their gardens: it's essential that Moth Plant pods are removed BEFORE they burst open. Coralie advises the Nursery will have some native plants available for sale to the public from mid-May.



Contact coralie.roberts@piroaconservation.org.nz for details. *Photo credit: Weed Action*

Go, the trappers!

A special thanks to the dedicated landowners and volunteers who consistently monitor and maintain the traps along King Road, Tara Road, Pebblebrook, and Jude Roads. Your commitment to this vital task helps protect our precious native wildlife. We appreciate the time, energy, and resources you invest in this important work, and we recognise the positive impact it has on our environment.

Wanted: minute taker

We are looking for a volunteer who can take meeting minutes for our PCT Board of Trustee meetings. We're looking for someone with an eye for detail, and an interest in conservation and community governance.

What's involved:

- Attending six meetings per year (approximately every 8 weeks) on Monday afternoons, 2:00–4:00 pm
- Taking clear, accurate minutes and providing them after each meeting reflecting the decisions made by the six Trustees

For more information, please email info@piroaconservation.org.nz or call our Chair, Gill Webb on 021 623 811



Piroa Conservation is a charitable trust working to protect and restore the biodiversity of the Piroa-Brynderwyns and Bream Bay area through community-led conservation. Our activities include habitat restoration, predator control, water catchment improvement, native species monitoring and environmental education. If you'd like to help us help nature, contact info@piroaconservation.org.nz