

SUMMER 2026

A time of discovery, connection and conservation action

Our first-ever BioBlitz has given us an exciting snapshot of the incredible biodiversity on our doorstep, while the latest kiwi monitoring results suggest our kiwi are ranging far across the landscape. Both are reminders of just how much there is to protect, and why our ongoing conservation efforts matter. It's also been wonderful to see community conservation gathering momentum. Project Bellbird is attracting more backyard trappers, landowners are making space for wetlands and wildlife, and local weed-busting groups are rolling up their sleeves to tackle some of our worst invasive plants. Meanwhile, our Junior Landcare Legacy programme has inspired another group of young conservation champions to get their hands dirty and discover the natural world around them.

None of this happens without people willing to pitch in, share their knowledge and work together. In this issue we also remember one such person, John Tapper, whose energy and vision have left a lasting legacy.

As we head into summer, thank you to everyone who is part of this growing conservation community. There's lots more to do, and we're delighted to have you alongside us!

NATIVE SPECIES

BioBlitz spotlights local wildlife

Our first landscape-scale survey, from the Piroa-Brynderwyn hills to Bream Tail, has given us a wonderful snapshot of the area's biodiversity that will help guide future conservation efforts.







From left: the freshwater team at work and a Puriri moth – one of 74 species found during the moth survey.

The BioBlitz – held in early November - was a massive undertaking bringing together students, ecologists, species specialists, volunteers, hapū, community conservation groups and landowners over four days. Piroa Conservation Trust co-ordinated the event in partnership with Patuharakeke, Te Uri o Hau, Northland Regional Council and the Department of Conservation.

Although bad weather forced the postponement of the final day's activities, it did little to dampen the enthusiasm generated by the four days of fieldwork. Working across forests, streams, wetlands and connected habitats, survey teams set out to find, identify and record as many living species as possible. Native birds, seabirds, plants, trees, skinks, geckos, freshwater creatures and fungi were all on the radar.

The Trust's Conservation Co-ordinator, Katie Gibb, says the information gathered will be invaluable for future conservation efforts “Pest control, habitat restoration and kiwi recovery have been happening across this landscape for years. The species lists and maps from the BioBlitz will give us a much better understanding of what is living here and a baseline for measuring future change,” says Katie.

Some highlights:

- **Freshwater health:** More than 500 fish and freshwater invertebrates were collected from the stream alongside the Tanekaha Track, including tuna (eels), banded kōkopu, redfin bullies, giant bullies and kōura (freshwater crayfish). The number of specimens and range of species indicates the stream is in good health.
- **Welcome birdlife – and a special kākāriki sighting:** Five-minute Bird Counts found bellbirds and miromiro (North Island tomtits) were widespread. Miromiro are particularly vulnerable to introduced mammalian predators, especially rats, so their presence is an encouraging sign. A male red-crowned kākāriki spotted at Bream Tail was another exciting find, raising the possibility that the species may be establishing a territory in the area.
- **Spotlight on moths:** Moth spotlighting using a wide-spectrum UV light revealed 74 species, including green lichen tuft moths, forest semiloopers and grey owlets, as well as plenty of impressive pūriri moths.

Several activities postponed because of the weather will be rescheduled, including the Lizard Spotlighting event at Te Waorahi. A further Fungi Ramble with expert David Whyte will also take place later in the year, with details to be announced closer to the time.

Our thanks to the Lottery Environment and Heritage Fund for its support and to everyone who helped make our first BioBlitz such a big success!



From left, a male red-crowned kākāriki spotted at Bream Tail; a pale form of the native orchid Corybas oblongus; look what’s in the moth trap.

Kiwi calls ring out across the ranges

Kiwi are continuing to thrive in the Piroa-Brynderwyn Ranges, with the latest monitoring results showing the birds are ranging far and wide across the landscape.

Between August 2025 and June 2026, the Trust completed an extensive monitoring programme, using acoustic recorders across 29 locations from Marunui and Te Waorahi to Cove Road, Hokonui and Langs Beach. Kiwi calls were detected just over half the locations, including at four sites surveyed for the first time. Particularly exciting were new detections around Cove Road and the western ranges, and at Jude Road/Pebblebrook and Ruru Way.

In total, 563 kiwi calls were recorded, including 95 female calls and 71 duets. While the number of calls dipped slightly (474 to 443) across the 11 annual comparison sites, female calls and duets were heard at more sites than the previous year, suggesting kiwi are active across a broader area. There were some surprises, too. Calls dropped sharply at the Marunui site, although follow-up investigations found no evidence of dogs or ferrets, and the reason for the decline remains unknown.

Another highlight was tracking three newly released kiwi – Rangiora, Hinekiuta and Matahīapo – at Te Waorahi. Rangiora travelled nearly 18 kilometres, demonstrating just how far kiwi can roam.

Our KiwiCare Coordinator Debs Searchfield says the results of the survey are encouraging. “Kiwi are using more areas of the Piroa-Brynderwyn landscape than we’ve seen in previous surveys. It highlights the need for continued monitoring and protection for kiwi, wherever they travel.” To view the report visit: www.piroaconservation.org.nz/kiwisurvey

A new ‘love zone’ for threatened īnanga



Īnanga (whitebait) will have a new place to spawn in the Waionehu Stream thanks to the hard work of local rangatahi over the September school holidays.

As part of the Junior Landcare Legacy Project, the group of young people and their caregivers planted hundreds of native grasses and sedges along the banks on Vince Mrsich’s farm, under the tutelage of our Catchment Coordinator Graham Matthews. (Read more about the programme on page 7.)

Īnanga, our most common whitebait species, are under threat mainly due to spawning habitat loss, but the Mrsich farm site provides just the right conditions for the native fish to spawn.

“The brackish area where the fresh and tidal water meet is known as the ‘love zone’ and places like this are vital for īnanga to survive.” In two to three years, he says, these plants will provide thick enough vegetation for īnanga to lay their eggs in autumn on a king tide. A month later, on the next high-water tide, the eggs hatch and the outgoing tide sweeps the larvae out to sea. They spend the winter at sea before making their way upriver (the whitebait stage) with the survivors staying in fresh water for spring and summer before making their way downstream to spawn in the estuaries. This is the third īnanga spawning site Piroa Conservation Trust has developed on the Waionehu.

College students test the waters

Bream Bay College students found plenty going on in the Waionehu River this year, with eDNA testing revealing traces of various fish species, freshwater mussels and crayfish, and shrimp.

eDNA testing assesses river health through genetic traces from native fish, birds, insects, plants and invasive species. Test kits were supplied by the Environmental Protection Agency via its community science programme. Catchments Co-ordinator Graham Matthews worked with 15 Bream Bay students to test three Waionehu catchment sites.

Upper-catchment testing detected banded kōkopu, bullies and long- and short-fin eels. Mid and lower catchments had the most fish species, including īnanga, common smelt, torrentfish and several bullies, possibly because the Waipū estuary connection allows migration between sea and fresh water. All catchments had kākahi (freshwater mussels), kōura (freshwater crayfish) and freshwater shrimp. Brushtail possum and rat DNA also appeared.



Graham welcomed the findings: “It’s interesting just how diverse our waterways are - it’s surprising what’s there.” He said eDNA and regular water quality results establish a baseline for future monitoring and catchment habitat restoration.

Current projects include Project Bellbird’s planned Waionehu River wildlife corridor linking to village predator control, plus riparian and wetland restoration, habitat enhancement and predator control. The results will help explain the importance of protecting the whole catchment and encourage community and landowner involvement.

“The eDNA testing is a great way to start the conversation,” says Graham. He says it reveals good waterway biodiversity that needs a helping hand to improve.

A place where nature thrives

Mountfield Quarry and Mountfield Landscape Supplies owners Chris Brown and Alicia Everitt are committed to restoring the natural habitat around their property - including establishing a now-thriving wetland.



Alicia Everitt – bringing out the big guns for predator control at her Mountfield Quarry property.

Their journey began four years ago, inspired by the work of the Ruakaka Reforestation Society in the bush adjacent to their property. With predator control their primary focus, they have since eliminated 238 possums, 11 stoats, 33 weasels, 12 feral cats and 217 rats on the property. (This year, Alicia also caught a ferret, earning a $100 bounty from PCT).

Beyond predator control, Chris and Alicia are enhancing the quarry environment and developing and planting the wetland that drains into the Pohuenui River. “This is our home,” she says. “We really enjoy seeing the native wildlife. We are a quarry, that’s our profession, but it doesn’t mean we have to be ugly.”

Quarry pit water drains through holding ponds into the wetland pond. Willows stand alongside native plants from PCT’s nursery. A rock ford replaced the culvert washed out by Cyclone Gabrielle, allowing floodwater to flow across when needed.

The thriving wetland supports īnanga and eels. Alicia has spotted a nesting scaup/pāpango and visiting brown teal/pāteke. She initially pitied another regular visitor, mistaking it for a deformed hawk. Graham Matthews identified it as a matuku-hūrepo, or Australasian bittern—an endangered wetland bird. New Zealand has an estimated fewer than 1000 bitterns, with wetland habitats under increasing development pressure. Nearby Doctors Hill wetland, an important breeding ground, was on the route of a now-shelved four-lane highway. The bittern visits more often as the wetland develops. “It means we are doing something right,” says Alicia.

With help from Ruakaka Reforestation Society, the Everitts are starting to see a drop in predator numbers, with trees and native birds flourishing. Kererū are common, alongside clusters of quails/tikaokao, tomtits/miromiro and moreporks/ruru. “It’s alive here with moreporks at night,” says Alicia.

Alicia and Chris are showing that quarrying and conservation can go hand in hand and that, with time, community support and a shared commitment to native wildlife, their property will be more than a source of aggregate—but a place where nature thrives.

Sign of the times

Wondering about the big billboard on the SH1 Mata straights? With our partners Patuharakeke, we are encouraging landowners to create wetlands on their properties to support wildlife and improve water quality.

As development reduces wetland habitats, species such as the Australasian bittern/matuku hūrepo increasingly depend on small rural wetlands and farm ditches to survive.

Have a boggy, unproductive patch that could become a thriving wetland? Call Graham Matthews (pictured, left, with Patuharakeke’s Steve Johnson) on 0274321016 to find out more. Thanks to Jared and Phillipa Halse for providing the advertising space!



PREDATOR CONTROL

Meet Doug, Bellbird Champion



Doug from Waipu already knows the value of good communication and community connection, having been an active member of his local Neighbourhood Watch for several years. Now he's putting those skills to good use as Project Bellbird's first Street Champion, helping bring his Glen Wallace neighbours on board with backyard trapping.

Doug's role is to encourage more residents to join our community trapping network. He's already recruited around a dozen households and has been busy building tunnel boxes to house the rat traps.

Project Bellbird supplies the traps, trapping advice and regular bait top-ups, while also helping participants record their catches. It's a great example of community-led conservation in action and an exciting step towards building a more connected trapping network across Waipu. As at the end of October, 141 households were participating in backyard trapping – putting us more than halfway towards our target of one rat trap in every three backyards.

Project co-ordinator Ellen Webb says spring brought a slowdown in reported rat catches, while chew cards placed around town showed lower-than-usual activity. This could reflect seasonal changes in rat behaviour and food availability, with more natural food sources reducing their interest in trap baits.

"While lower catch numbers are encouraging, they don't necessarily mean rat populations have declined. We're encouraging everyone to keep checking their traps, recording results and trying different baits. With native birds now entering their breeding season, predator control remains especially important."

Live in Waipu town? If you'd like a free backyard trapping kit, or are interested in becoming a Street Champion in your neighbourhood, we'd love to hear from you. Email projectbellbird@piroaconservation.org.nz.

Supported by Northland Regional Council, Predator Free New Zealand Trust with Simplicity, Pic's Peanut Butter and MenzShed Waipu.

Celebrating Project Bellbird's first year



Project Bellbird recently celebrated its first anniversary with a gathering at the community plant nursery, bringing together local backyard legends who have been helping make the project a success.

It was an opportunity to thank everyone for their efforts over the past year, share experiences and celebrate the growing community involvement and project milestones in protecting Waipu's native wildlife.

As well as the BBQ and plenty of conversation, there was a session on plant propagation, and the importance of native plants in creating food and habitat for birds such as the bellbird (korimako). It was a great reminder that restoring the local environment involves more than just predator control. There was also plenty of interest in the new off-ground rat traps. A big thank you all our backyard legends for doing their bit to help bring the bellbirds back to Waipu.

Weed warriors deal to Taiwan cherry, blue passion vine



The passion vine killers.

There has been another big push to eradicate Taiwan cherry trees around Mangawhai, with some small pockets of the pest still thriving. Several landowners have given permission to have their trees drilled and the holes filled with herbicide.

Next on the list is blue passion vine, especially in the Seascape Crescent area near Waipu, where a new group meets once a month to tackle the plant. Our weed experts Coralie and Martina have been supporting the group and helping educate residents in the area by distributing flyers. If you would like to know more about eradicating either of these invasive weeds, contact: habitat@piroaconservation.org.nz

New group vows to 'Save the Trees'

When dog Charlie disappeared into a thick patch of climbing asparagus at the Mangawhai Community Park one day, Jes Magill knew something had to be done to get rid of the invasive weed. So, she and friend Kelly Creaghan have started a new group: Save the Trees. (Kelly's efforts to root out invasive weeds are already legendary, winning her our 2026 Weed Warrior Award).

With support from PCT, the group gets together for a morning a month to carry out a "full-on assault" on the invasive menace. Two meetings have been held so far and interest is growing.



Charlie, the disappearing dog.



Climbing asparagus is notorious for smothering even grown trees, climbing up to four metres. Frequent visitors to the park will have seen this aggressive plant taking over. The aim is to free native trees and plants by cutting the weed at the base and pulling back the fronds. PCT will then spray the prepared areas, without harming the surrounding native plants. Healthy Habitat Co-ordinator Martina Tschirky says once the climbing asparagus is kept at bay, more native plants can grow undeterred. A planting day is planned for May 2027, with plants donated from the PCT community nursery.

Save the Trees meets the third Sunday of every month, 9am to 11am. Assemble at the park's Club entrance. Bring gardening gloves, shears or garden scissors. Some gear available on-site. Parking is behind the club near the pétanque court. For more information contact Kelly 0212085475 or Jes 0275374017 and check out their Facebook page: Mangawhai Community Park Weeders.



LET'S FIGHT MOTHPLANT, WAIPU!

Moth Plant is proving to be a real problem in and around Waipu so we're assembling a SWAT team to stop it spreading any further. We're meeting Saturday 28 November, 9am – 11 am at the end of Ferry Road. Please wear old clothes covering your skin, gloves, and bring goggles or fitting sunglasses. The plant sap is sticky and can cause irritation to the skin. We will cut and paste the plants, using small spray bottles close to the ground. Refreshments afterwards!

Rangatahi ‘buzzing’ about Legacy Programme

Curious minds, muddy hands and plenty of enthusiasm for the natural world made for a memorable three days at our second Junior Landcare Legacy programme, held during the September school holidays.







Supported by Bupa Foundation and NZ Landcare Trust, the programme brought together 22 tamariki, aged six to 13, for hands-on conservation activities, nature discovery and new friendships. Piroa Conservation Trust teamed up with Shorebirds Trust and Pātuharakeke, with support from parents, caregivers and a fantastic team of volunteers.

The group visited Waipu Community Native Plant Nursery, learning about the role of nurseries in conservation and getting hands-on with seeds and cuttings. At the new South Road wetland, they helped create a spawning site for īnanga (whitebait), contributing to freshwater restoration.

At Tanekaha Bush Track in Mangawhai, the tamariki explored freshwater fish and invertebrates before conducting their own mini BioBlitz. Spotting an eel was a highlight, but discovering a Piroa black beetle – found only in the Piroa-Brynderwyns – was a special moment.

At Waipu Wildlife Reserve, they learned about predator control and habitat management, including setting traplines and building rat traps.

Programme leader Alex Flavell-Johnson praised the group's enthusiasm and willingness to get involved, describing the programme as a positive and empowering experience that brought young people, iwi and community volunteers together through a shared passion for the environment.

Parents echoed that enthusiasm, reporting that their children came home buzzing, inspired and eager to learn more about nature and conservation. Wrote one parent: “hey loved the delivery. Everything was positive and encouraging. Instead of feeling like they were being told not to do this and not to do that they left being motivated to do and to try. Amazing!”

St. Dominic’s lend a hand

PCT was delighted to host a group of year 9 students from St Dominic's College at our community plant nursery in November. The students were at Waipu Cove for their school camp and were keen to volunteer with us while learning some conservation skills along the way - including how to propagate and grow native plants. In the space of a few hours they managed to pot up an impressive number of red matipo seedings that will eventually find their way into local habitat restoration projects around the rohe.



We're wild about Piroa!

…Come and find out why, at the last NatureTalks for the year on Tuesday 1 December, at the Mangawhai Golf Club. We'll update you on some of the amazing conservation work we're supporting across the Piroa-Brynderwyns.

- We'll share the results of our first bioblitz and how we'll use it to guide future efforts to protect wildlife.
- Find out what our latest survey is telling us about kiwi in our area, and what the Te Waorahi kiwis, Rangi, Hine and Matahiapo, have been up to.
- Across the rohe, we're taking back the bush from invasive weeds like moth plant and Taiwan cherry. Find out what you can do to help.
- Learn about the efforts of farmers, landowner and communities in restoring wetlands and our plans to bring back wildlife like bittern and bellbirds.

Why not bring a friend along to our last get together for the year? The more the merrier! You're also welcome to join us for our **AGM from 5.00 pm – 6.00 pm**. RSVP to info@piroaconservation.org.nz

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Remembering John Tapper, force for nature

We are deeply saddened by the passing of John Tapper, a much-loved community leader and champion for nature.

John had a rare gift for bringing people together and turning a shared vision into action. He was instrumental in establishing and leading the Wairahi Trackies, which began as a weed action group. Weed control and habitat restoration are still integral to the group's work. To help realise the group's vision for Wairahi/Langs beach district, John established the Wairahi Tracks Charitable Trust. He rallied the community, secured funding and brought local councils in behind the project.

John was a driving force behind the major upgrade of the coastal walkway and the shared trail from Langs Beach to Te Waorahi—the first stage of the Langs to Mangawhai trail—as well as the Bridge-to-Bridge walking track.

John's enthusiasm, energy and commitment helped create lasting places for people to enjoy and connect with nature. His contribution to the community and the landscape will be remembered with enormous gratitude.



John Tapper in action.

Piroa Conservation works to protect and restore the biodiversity of the Piroa-Brynderwyns and Bream Bay areas through community-led conservation. If you'd like to get involved, contact info@piroaconservation.org.nz