

Section 4: Priority Waikato ecosystems



Cuvier Island
Image courtesy of Terry Greene

Coastal islands

Islands are essentially hilltops that are above current sea level. They have not always been as they are, as sea levels have varied drastically through the past 100,000 years. This means that many near-shore islands (those on the continental shelf) have, at various times, been connected with the mainland or submerged beneath the sea. Human alteration of islands has often been as devastating as on the mainland, through a combination of:

- cultivation, occupation, and harvesting of sites
- lighthouse stations
- introduction, both accidental and deliberate, of plant and animal pests
- repeated fires, both accidental and deliberate.

Many native species have survived because they found refuge on islands that were inaccessible, isolated or happened through good fortune to be uninhabited by mammal

pests bought by humans. For example, the Aldermen Islands (off the coast of Tairua) have probably been visited by humans since the arrival of Maori in New Zealand. Yet only one of the six islands in the group has ever had an established population of rats.

There are a large number of islands, islets, and rock stacks close to the Coromandel Peninsula, including Cuvier Island, the Mercury Islands, and the Aldermen Islands. Some of these islands have limited access to the public. They provide refuges for animals and plants that have become extinct on the mainland because of rats, cats, mustelids and other mammal predators. The west coast of the region has only one island, Gannet Rock, which is a wildlife sanctuary. It is located off the coast of Aotea Harbour, and is a haul out and breeding site for the New Zealand fur seal and a breeding site for the Australasian gannet.

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Many of these islands provide important wildlife refuges, helping to protect threatened native species, such as storm petrels, shearwaters, tuatara, giant centipedes, lizards, tree weta, Mercury Island tusked weta, various lizards, saddleback and little spotted kiwi. There are very few areas on the mainland used for seabird breeding. The Coromandel islands house tens of thousands of seabirds, and Red Mercury Island is the national stronghold of Pycroft's petrel.

Plant species found on offshore islands are typical of what was once present around the mainland coastline. On the Coromandel islands, the vegetation is dominated by species like pohutukawa, milk tree, karo, whau, wharangi, and wharareke. These islands also tend to house a range of threatened plants that have become extinct or very rare on the mainland, such as Cook's scurvy grass, shore spurge and milk tree.

Threats to islands

The major threats to coastal islands are:

- introduction of pests that could destroy internationally important populations of rare species such as Mercury Island tusked weta, little spotted kiwi and saddleback
- fire.

Pests or fire could wipe out decades of work by DOC and tangata whenua.

Which types of coastal island ecosystems are most at risk in our region?

Islands that are close to shore are most at risk of invasion by weeds or pests.

How do I know what to do, and when?

For information on what you can do, see the table overleaf. If you'd like to visit a predator free island, see the hot tips box below.

Coastal islands hot tips

- Visit the Department of Conservation's website and search for "islands": www.doc.govt.nz
- Visit a pest-free island to learn about species recovery programmes:
 - o Tiritiri Matangi Island (via Fullers Ferry from Gulf Harbour, Whangaparaoa Peninsula)
 - o Cuvier Island via Moehau Environment Group's Summer Holiday Programme: www.meg.org.nz
 - o Visit Motutapere Island Scenic Reserve (off Coromandel Harbour), or Mahurangi Island Recreation Reserve (in Te Whanganui-a-Hei/ Cathedral Cove Marine Reserve at Hahei).

Shore Skink on Alderman Island
Image courtesy of Paul Schilov





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Choosing Actions: Coastal islands

Most of the coastal islands are administered by the Department of Conservation. All the islands in the Cuvier-Mercury and Aldermen Island groups are “no-landing islands” to keep them free from animal pests and fires. Contact your closest Department of Conservation office to find out how you can become involved and help with coastal island restoration work.

If you own a coastal island with native forest and/or a wetland, use the native forest and scrub table or the swamps and bogs ecosystems template to assist you in deciding on which restoration actions need to be undertaken and to determine their priority. You can also learn about restoring a coastal island by joining an island restoration group through the Department of Conservation.

Action and Priority	Comments
<p>Contain animal pests</p> <p>1st Prevent transfer of pests</p> <p>2nd Keep pets off islands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure no animal pests such as rats are transferred to islands. Be particularly careful with food and keep it in sealed plastic containers. Use rat bait on board your boat. • Don't use islands to exercise pets.
<p>Prevent weed spread</p> <p>Remove weeds from your boat</p>	<p>Remove exotic plants and weeds from the motor and hull of boats and wash down away from a waterway to prevent transfer of invading weeds to the marine area.</p>
<p>Visit islands responsibly</p> <p>1st Respect no-landing bans</p> <p>2nd Visit islands with permission or 'open sanctuaries'</p> <p>3rd Help restore islands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't land on islands that have no-landing rules to protect them from fire and pests. Don't let your pets land either. Keep dogs under control within swimming distance of islands. • The Moehau Environment Group (supported by the Department of Conservation) runs several one-day trips each year to Repanga/Cuvier Island. Cuvier has one of the longest histories of restoration in New Zealand, with goats, cats, and rats all having been removed. • Tiritiri Matangi is an open sanctuary run by the Department of Conservation and the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi. The island is being re-vegetated with community help, and threatened species once present are being re-introduced. Contact Fullers Ferry service for information.
<p>Volunteer</p> <p>Join an island restoration group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Conservation runs several two-week trips to Repanga/Cuvier Island each year. These trips focus on weed control and restoration of the historic lighthouse settlement. The Department of Conservation is often looking for volunteers for the weed and historic teams. Contact the Coromandel Field Centre if you are interested. • The Department of Conservation maintains four staff on Raoul Island (in the Kermadec Group), approximately 900 kilometres north-northeast of Cape Reinga. This team is supplemented by up to eight volunteers once a year, who stay for four months. The main management aim for Raoul is weed control.