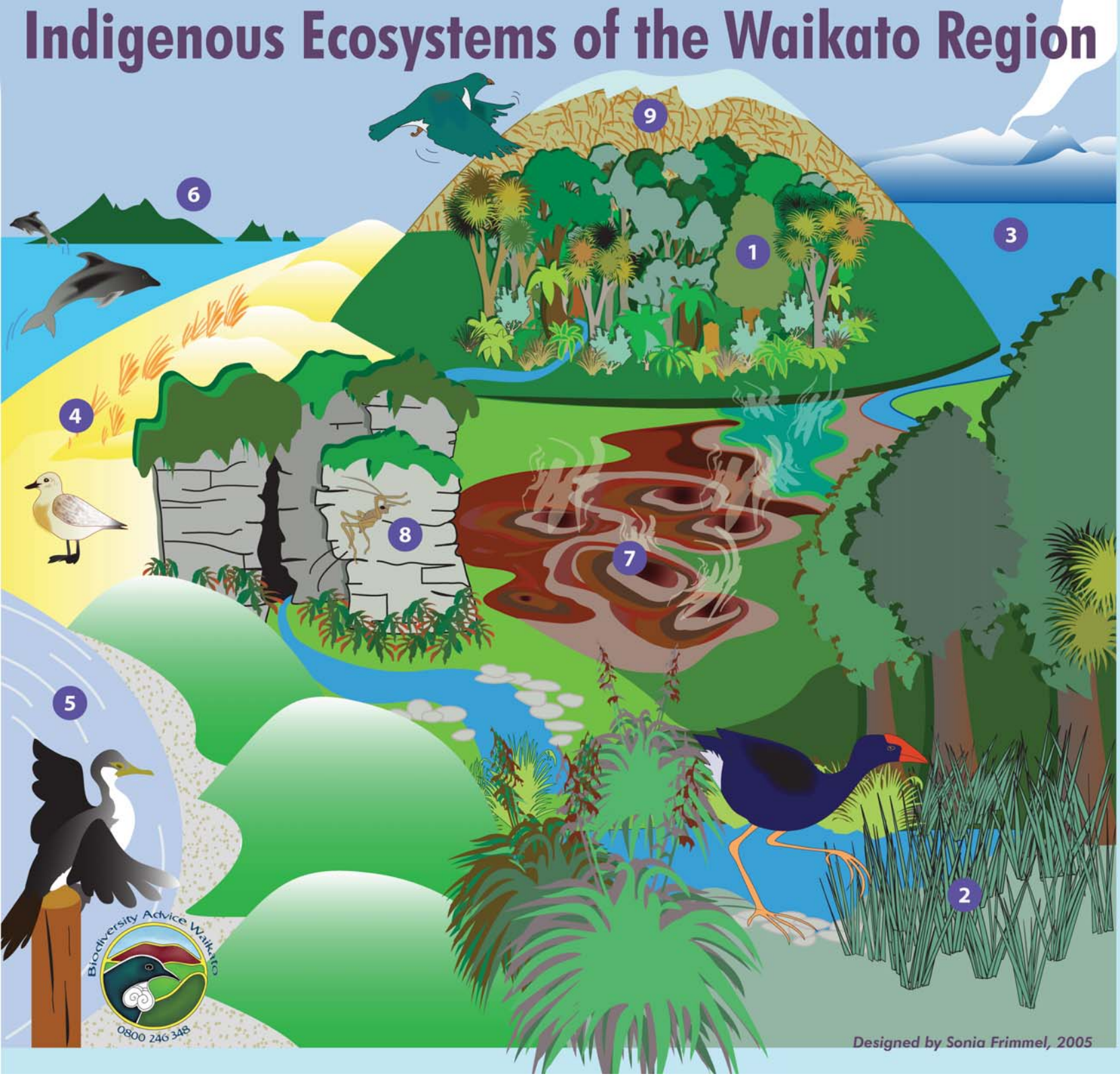
Indigenous Ecosystems of the Waikato Region



1 Native Forest and Scrub
Once heavily forested, today only 26% of the Waikato Region (around 620,833 ha) remains in native vegetation (mostly forest and scrub), fragmented into thousands of patches. Most of these remnants are in hill country; only 18% of pre-European vegetation is left in the vast lowland area, and only 5% in the coastal zone. Most areas of scrub on hillsides are regenerating back into native forest. Forests are home to many species of native birds, reptiles, frogs and bats.

2 Swamps and Bogs
Wetlands once covered 5% of the Waikato Region (108,000 hectares) but agricultural drainage reduced this to 1%. Waikato freshwater wetlands include peat domes, moderately fertile wetlands (with kahikatea, manuka, or sedges) and raupo / harakeke (flax) swamps. They are home to many unique and threatened plants and animals including the giant cane rush, Australasian bitterns, and giant kokopu.

3 Streams, Rivers and Lakes
The Waikato hosts several freshwater icons, including our longest river and largest lake. Lake Taupo provides valuable habitat for indigenous fish and invertebrates. Nearby streams and rivers support endangered species such as the blue duck. The Waikato River (425 km long) and its associated wetlands, streams and lakes, supports a diverse range of indigenous fish.

4 Beaches and Dunes
Only a few beaches in the Waikato Region are undeveloped and coastal subdivision puts pressure on the coastline's natural character. The removal of dune plants such as, pingao and spinifex has lead to the loss of the protective buffer dunes provide against erosion and flooding, and valuable habitat for dune birds, lizards and invertebrates.

5 Marine and Estuarine Ecosystems
The 1150 km Waikato coastline includes the exposed west coast, the Firth of Thames and the sandy beaches and inlets of the Coromandel Peninsula. It is home to a diverse range of species including the endangered Maui dolphin. Some 35 estuaries, comprising seagrass beds; mangroves; saltmarshes; sand and mud flats; rocky reefs and shallow open water, provide feeding, spawning and nursery habitats for many fish, shellfish and birds.

6 Coastal Islands
Many small islands and rocky stacks stand offshore from the Coromandel Peninsula, including Cuvier, and the Mercury and the Aldermen Islands. Some of these are refuges for animals and plants that are now extinct on the mainland, including tuatara and North Island saddleback. Gannet Island off the coast of Aotea Harbour is an important breeding ground for NZ fur seals and Australasian gannets.

7 Geothermal Ecosystems
The Waikato Region contains almost 80 percent of New Zealand's geothermal systems, comprising springs, seeps and streams, geysers, sinter terraces, colourful lakes, superheated fumaroles and hydrothermal eruption craters. Geothermal areas are home to unique plants, animals and bacteria with many primitive and ancient species.

8 Karst (limestone) Ecosystems
Karst habitats and landscapes are found in the western hill country from Port Waikato to Mokau. Rainwater dissolves limestone creating karst features such as caves, fluted rock outcrops, natural bridges, disappearing streams, and blind valleys and springs. This geodiversity creates habitat for some unique species, including cave weta, limestone ferns and a hebe shrub found only in the Waikato.

9 Mountain Ecosystemss
A significant area of alpine habitat clothes the upper slopes of our highest mountains in Tongariro National Park and the Kaimanawa Ranges. Here the vegetation is dominated by red, snow and bristle tussocks, alpine shrubland, prostrate herbfields and alpine wetlands. There is a high diversity of insects, along with pipits, harriers, falcons and the occasional banded dotterel.