Waikato Biodiversity Forum
Ngā Kaihāpai Rerenga Rauropi o Waikato

# Autumn Newsletter 2025 Number 85

## Kia ora tātou,

**Some of the work undertaken over the past three months:**

- Responded to information and support requests from WBF members and public
- Organisation and facilitation of South Waikato Biodiversity Bus Tour, 14th of May 2025
- Updated website including funding opportunities

## Biodiversity Bus Tour May 14th 2025 – On-Farm and Community Biodiversity Projects a Plenty in South Waikato

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum (WBF) held its autumn forum event in South Waikato on 14 May 2025. This event was a bus trip with a focus on visiting sites and groups with a focus on water quality and biodiversity. There were a mix of sites from the beautiful Te Waihou springs, cared for by kaimahi from Raukawa Iwi. A visit to a local dairy farm to learn about an on-farm tuna eel pond habitat project, and a visit to the Whakauru Stream planting site at David Foote Park, Tokoroa. They have been supported with advice from DairyNZ and scientists in planning their tuna pond and planting site. About 40 people from around the Waikato region attended the bus trip.

Tuna specialist Dr Jacques Boubee said there are three types of eel in Aotearoa New Zealand. Two of them are indigenous to NZ and one is Australasian. The short fin eel and long fin eels will be familiar to many people. Eels migrate up and down rivers from the sea and are thought to breed near New Caledonia. Barriers on waterways, like dams and other blockages interfere with this cycle. The tuna ponds on this Waikato farm provide a home for tuna to stay while they wait for nearby paddocks to flood. Eels feed on worms, insects and small animals on the flooded paddock. Long fin eels are larger and more dominant than short fin eels.
The land owners have planted native shrubs and trees around the ponds to shade the water and provide protection for in-stream bugs and other creatures living in the streams. Vegetation around these ponds attract birds and insects to the area and provides habitat and shade.

Raukawa people said that the past 3-5 years there has been a big focus on planting and pest control along the banks of the Te Waihou Spring and walkway. These plants are now shading the river and helping the wellbeing of the spring. Walkways and viewing platforms have been important for encouraging visitors to keep the paths and allow the plants to grow. The team have been carrying out pest control and learning a lot. Having people working in the area every day and keeping ‘eyes on the stream’ has meant the realization of a dream for elders they said.

At the Whakauru Stream, the Raukawa team have been monitoring the health of the water by checking for the presence of freshwater koura. This is done through submerged bracken bundles instream (Tau koura/Tau Kewai), that provide good hiding places for the koura, away from eels.

Waikato Biodiversity Coordinator, Sam McElwee, says that “Each of these projects has been a team effort, with local people helping with planting, weeding and pest control. This is what makes the projects special. People get to be in nature, meeting other community members and making a difference in a tangible way’. Some sites have local business involvement, like Manulife, picking up the maintenance of the stretch of stream bank near their offices at Tokoroa.

Poikaiwhenua Catchment Group Coordinator, Hadleigh Putt, said that “the best thing about the job is meeting people and making a difference. He’s learnt about many special places there is in the South Waikato and gets to connect with people in a really meaningful way”.

**Getting Involved** - Bringing back the healthy streams and rivers is a community effort and there are many ways to contribute. “You don’t need experience—just enthusiasm,” says Hadleigh. “Catchment groups love sharing knowledge with people who are new to environmental projects. It’s a chance to learn, make friends, and spend time outside in some of the most beautiful parts of our community. Whether you’re planting trees, tackling pests, or simply enjoying time in nature, your involvement helps sustain these shared treasures.” Written by Wendy Boyce and Hadleigh Putt, Wai Connection, Waikato

To get involved or find out more, visit:

- www.waikatobiodiversityforum.org.nz
- www.pokaiwhenuacatchmentgroup.org.nz
- www.piakocatchmentforum.co.nz
- www.Raukawa.org.nz
- www.goeco.org.nz
- www.waiconnection.nz (National project sharing environmental skills with local people)
- www.southwaikatodistrictcouncil.govt.nz
- www.matamatapiakodistrictcouncil.govt.nz
- https://sites.google.com/view/mokaihaha/home

## Manaaki Kaimai Mamaku - Feral Goat Hunting in the '90s

For professional hunter Steve Lurie, eradicating feral goats from the Kaimai has always been 'unfinished business'. The helicopter whirrs as four men fly into a remote area of the Kaimai to start 10-days of hunting feral goats. Steve Lurie was overseeing the Department of Conservation Kaimai goat culling programme for three years between 1995-1997, before funding cuts left him and his team without jobs. “80% of my time was in the field,” he explains. A normal day was “get up, split up and hunt”.

While he loved the work, it was gruelling. He says the best part was getting home as the low numbers of goats, unpredictable weather, and the nature of the forest made for hard physical and mental work. “We would hunt all day. And then repeat for 10 days on and four days off.” Feral goats destroy the forest, hinder restoration efforts and consume valuable pasture. Manaaki Kaimai Mamaku Trust CEO Louise Saunders says they wreak havoc wherever they go. “They eat understorey which stops forest regeneration, they have the potential to spread kauri dieback disease and they eat grass at record speeds which severely impacts farm productivity,” she says.

The management of feral goats in the Kaimai started in the 1940s. Steve, his team, and every hunter who helped before them, almost got the numbers to a zero density. “That’s one goat or less for every 10-man day hunted,” Steve explains. “We had four hunters, working with dogs, hunting ten days swings, and quite often they weren't encountering a goat! We were pretty close to it”.

Steve currently lives in Queensland and still works as a professional hunter. He says getting that last goat out of the Kaimai has always been ‘unfinished business’. “We got so damn close in the 90s. It was very disappointing when the redundancies came. 30 years of hard work was out the door”. For the past three years, Manaaki Kaimai Mamaku Trust have worked with Waikato Regional Council, Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Department of Conservation on a feral goat eradication plan.

## Nurturing the Ngahere

Otawa Waitaha a Hei is the environmental restoration project of Waitaha iwi. The field team of five have been operating a ground-based pest control network in Otawa, behind Te Puke, since 2021. Started with funding through Jobs For Nature, and with the support of Manaaki Kaimai Mamaku Trust, the team has installed, and is effectively managing, 400 hectares of pest control infrastructure.

Luke Whareaorere (Ngāti Ranginui, Ngā Potiki, Kahungunu, Waitaha, Tapuika and Ngā Puhi) has been with the project since inception, when he, his wife and four tamariki, returned from the Gold Coast where he was working on large construction sites. Now a father-of-five with another on the way, he has let the various construction tickets and licenses lapse, and is committed to a life of protecting the ngahere. Working in conservation gives Luke the purpose he was lacking and while it can be hard, it’s for the betterment of his people. “This work… it’s improving the health of our people,” the 39-year-old says. “If our maunga and our awa are dying, our people are dying. The more we look after our ngahere, the healthier our people are.”

“I like to walk along the riverbeds and when I have a break the manu come and see what I’m doing and they talk with me. I had never seen a kererū before this mahi, but now I see them all the time.”
Pre-colonisation, this whenua was utilised heavily by Māori. Mainly used as a māra kai, a source of food, Luke’s tūpuna would walk these maunga to collect the kererū and other manu for protein along with an array of

rākau that were both eaten and used for rongoā (medicine). However, decades of land confiscation, deforestation for logging and infestation from pest species, have left the ngahere and awa in a bad state. And it's only just beginning to heal. "What we're doing here [predator control] is so important. Without it, they [the pests] would take over and the ngahere would collapse," Luke says. "We don't own this awa, our maunga or our whenua," he says, gesturing to the lush ngahere. "We belong to it."

Waitaha are currently working on a 150ha project expansion, made possible through co-funding from BayTrust and TECT. Before they can set a single rat trap, the team have to hike almost two-hours to get to the border of the land-locked project area. A total 19,000 steps, 15 kilometres, 612 metre elevation gain. An instagrammable hīkoi (walk) for most… just an average day in the office for Waitaha. Their traplines target rodents, mustelids (stoats/weasels/ferrets) and possums, and have been expertly planned and cut. To the untrained eye, it looks like a maze. "I've spent enough time in this ngahere that I can navigate without a map," Luke says. "I like to walk along the riverbeds and when I have a break the manu come and see what I'm doing and they talk with me. I had never seen a kererū before this mahi, but now I see them all the time".

Ted Whareaorere, koro or uncle to every team member, has been hunting in this whenua since he was seven years old. He's now in his 70s and witnessing the land regenerating. "Back in the '70s, you could see through this bush. There was nothing here. Now, especially in the last three years since the team's been here, the bush is growing fast. There was a track that I knew like the back of my hand, but I can't find the entrance," Koro says. The team tracks success through a range of monitoring methods including environmental DNA (eDNA), rat tracking tunnels and five-minute bird counts.

Rākau regeneration isn't the only positive difference from pest control mahi. As at 8 March 2025, Otawa Waitaha a Hei, and the seven other Kaimai Mamaku Restoration Project iwi and hapū-led conservation groups, have removed almost 20,000 rats, possums and mustelids from the Kaimai Mamaku forest. Adult Norway rats, one of the two feral rat breeds in Aotearoa, can weigh more than 500 grams and eat up to 10 per cent of their weight each day. This predator would still be hungry after raiding an entire tūi nest where three to four 10-gram eggs are often left unattended.

Rather than just focusing on the kill tally, the team tracks success through a range of monitoring methods including environmental DNA (eDNA), rat tracking tunnels and 5-minute bird counts. Bird counts are a Te Papa Atawhai Department of Conservation standard, resource-efficient tool for monitoring the abundance of birds. The method sounds simple — just stand quietly at a fixed location and record all the birds you see or hear within five minutes. However for Waitaha, their project area consists of off-track, steep, un-tracked terrain, and the experience is anything but easy.

Warwick Buckman, chairman of HELP Waihi, and his wife Krishna have been leading an annual bird count in the Kaimai Mamaku since 2009. Around 28 fixed locations are strategically mapped across the conservation park with the couple, their daughters and other experts coming together to complete a count every spring. The analysis of 16 years of data shows bird populations have increased in certain areas. "Reserves, and pest control groups, can bolster [bird] numbers," Warwick says. "The data is telling us longer term things. For at least the first five years, we didn't hear any robins north of Aongetete. It's only in recent years that we've heard them. So, they're coming back." Warwick is beginning to slow down in his golden years and is passing his extensive knowledge down to others, including all of the Kaimai Mamaku Restoration Project teams. He says it's important for iwi and hapū to continue bird counts across the rohe. "They're in the bush for long periods where they can do monitoring, even informal bird counts, regularly. They'll start to notice an increase in numbers, or loss of birds too. And the more knowledgeable they become, the more aware they'll become of those changes," he says. "The data is telling us longer term things. For at least the first five years, we didn't hear any robins north of Aongetete. It's only in recent years that we've heard them. So, they're coming back."

Like most people who work in te taiao (the environment) this isn't just a job for Luke and the Waitaha team — it's their life. To better look after the whenua and their whānau, Luke and his two teammates Robbie Peake and Watana Williams, are in their second year of a Bachelor of Environment Studies at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiarangi. "I like to think this is something my kids can aspire to. I took the three youngest into the ngahere and told them all about the mahi, the studies and how we're the guardians and protectors of these lands. The

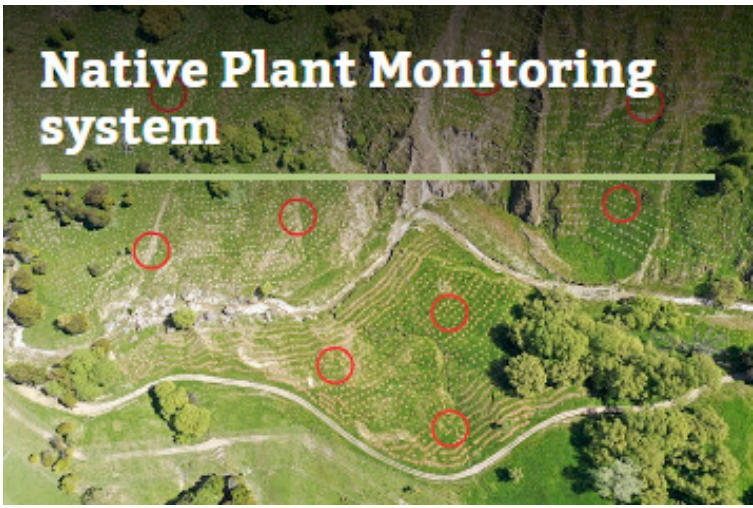
youngest said, ‘Me too, daddy? Can I come work in Otawa too?’ To hear her say that… that’s the reason I do this.”

Koro Ted feels the same. “Being in this ngahere, with my moko, it’s my whole life. When I was a young fella, when everyone was out partying, I was in here. Being out here is rongoā. I lie down here and let all my woes go away. This is my healing place. I come in here and I’m a better person. And look at Hakaraia,” he says pointing at his great grandson. “He’s at home too. My moko are the motivation to keep me going”. Words by Rebecca Lee of Manaaki Kaimai Mamaku Trust. Photography by Cam Neate


## Tanes’ Tree Trust - Native Planting Monitoring Tool

Many native planting projects focus heavily on the initial planting phase, with little or no follow-up monitoring—often just a quick look over the fence or a few casual photos. But the first 1–5 years after planting are the most critical. Without timely weed and pest animal control, young native plants are highly vulnerable, and survival rates can suffer. Given that it can cost up to (and occasionally more than) $20,000 per hectare to establish a diverse native forest, it’s essential to monitor progress in a systematic way. Robust data on early survival and growth allows for timely interventions—such as weeding or pest animal control—and helps evaluate whether the species mix or techniques used (like nurse crops) are supporting successful growth. To make this process easier, Tāne’s Tree Trust and Trees That Count, with support from partners including Tasman Environmental Trust, Auckland Council, Pamu Farms, and The Tindall Foundation, have developed an easy-to-use online monitoring toolkit. This tool lets anyone planting natives to record survival and growth each year in the early stages of establishment.

Most well-managed sites should develop a native canopy within five years, at which point monitoring is no longer needed. Some sites may only require one or two years of monitoring before it’s clear they’re on track.
Start monitoring your planting project today: Visit https://monitoring.tanestrees.org.nz for more info. For questions or help, contact Michael Bergin: michaelbergin.erl@gmail.com



## Ōwhango Alive - Successful Funding Boost for Predator Control In The Ohinetonga Scenic Reserve and Ōwhango Surrounds

Dean and Jerome

Ōwhango Alive is thrilled to announce the successful outcome of our funding application to the Alan Rosoman Trust, securing $10,000 for an innovative predator control initiative. The funds have purchased 20 live capture traps equipped with a cutting-edge node system supplied by Encounter Solutions. These smart nodes send an alert to a mobile phone when a trap is triggered, significantly improving efficiency and animal welfare by removing the need for daily physical checks to conform with AWAC (Animal Welfare Advisory Committee) requirements. To support this technology, the Department of Conservation (DOC) has a repeater system in place within Tongariro Forest Park. This infrastructure will link seamlessly with the aerial installed by the Ōwhango Alive team (Mark, Ken, Dean and Jerome from DOC) on nearby farmland, ensuring reliable data transmission across the trapping network.

This project marks a significant step forward in targeted pest management and is a great example of collaboration and innovation working hand-in-hand to protect our native wildlife. We look forward to this system being up and running in the next couple of months. Mark Fredericks.

Ken and Mark

## Mangaiti Gully Restoration Trust - Black Mud Fish

In December 2023 our Trust submitted an application to the Department of Conservation (DOC) for the translocation of black mudfish into a blind gully swamp in Mangaiti, Hamilton, New Zealand. This was after identifying the location as an ideal natural mudfish habitat and it being highly probable that mudfish would have occupied this location in the past, before European settler land modification. This is also in line with our Trust's vision: To manage the gully in such a way that native fauna (birds, fish, bats, reptiles & insects) will re-establish, either naturally or by introduction and for this to be sustainable. In March 2025 this year, a permit was granted. Translocating mudfish has historically, not been that successful so there was reluctance by DOC to translocate them from a known stable habitat. However, the Rotokauri urban subdivision is about to commence where 14 sites of mudfish have been identified. These wetland sites, which in most cases are farm drains, will be modified (drained) during the groundwork. Because our permit specifies that they are to be translocated from "at risk" habitats within Hamilton City, this has, in essence, become a rescue mission of an at-risk, declining, indigenous species through habitat loss. Managing the translocation is not that straight forward, and part of the DOC permit requires three years of monitoring and reporting. We are fortunate to have a retired NIWA marine scientist as one of our volunteers who is being the lead on this project. The following Linkhttps://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/freshwater-fish/mudfish/black-mudfish/ will take you to a DOC pdf with extra links explaining all about the unique features of this species. Photo: Waikato Regional Council

## Ballance Farm Environment Awards: Taiea te Taiao Maungatautari to Pirongia Ecological Corridor

NZ Landcare Trust's Taiea te Taiao project was showcased at the recent Waikato Ballance Farm Environment Awards, held at the Sir Don Rowlands Event Centre on Lake Karāpiro – ancestral whenua of Ngāti Korokī Kahukura and Ngāti Hauā.

The showcase award was accepted by the NZ Landcare Trust Taiea te Taiao project leads and governance group representatives from local iwi and the community.

The awards showcased Taiea te Taiao mā Mangapiko, mai i Maungatautari ki Pirongia te aroaro o Kahu ahu ake which seeks to connect Maungatautari and Pirongia with a thriving native landscape in the Waipā District. Established in 2021, the initiative builds on years of riparian restoration and pest control driven by the efforts of dedicated volunteers from various local community groups. Now using a 'stepping stones' approach, the project focuses on restoring key cultural sites and strategically important areas to create an ecological corridor.

To date, over 250,000 native plants have been planted, alongside wetland restoration and 22km of waterway fencing. These efforts are supported by extensive pest and weed control. Around 60 landowners are actively involved, with governance led by a 10-member team and strong local participation in events, education, trapping, and restoration activities.

Before the awards, a special event celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Waikato Farm Environment Award Trust, founded by the late Gordon Stephenson, a former NZ Landcare Trust board member.

**Left to right: Tiaki Ormsby, Nick Edgar, Bill Garland, Nardene Berry, Clare St Pierre, Te Ao o te Rangi Apaapa, Bexie Towle, Hazel Wander, Graham Parker, Donal (Bush) Macky.**

## Waikato Regional Council - $1.34 Million From The Natural Heritage Fund (NHF) Toward Four Landscape Scale Projects

Waikato Regional Council has granted a total of $1.34 million from its Natural Heritage Fund (NHF) towards four landscape scale environmental projects. The Integrated Catchment Management Committee has approved grants for projects at Mt Karioi (Raglan), northern Coromandel Peninsula, Mt Pirongia and the Kaimai-Mamaku Ranges. (Details provided below.)

Integrated Catchment Management Committee chair Cr Robert Cookson says the number of applications to the fund shows the value of the council's increased investment in community initiatives to enhance the Waikato region's environment. The council had increased its per property natural heritage rate from $5.80 per annum to $15 as part of the 2024-2034 Long Term Plan. This has provided a significant boost to the funding available to support more work to protect and restore our region's native plants and animals, special landscapes and ecosystems, with 10 applications received for the NHF's 2024/25 funding round.

“We want to support projects to mature and succeed over the long term,” says Cr Cookson. “We do this not only by making funding available, but also by working closely with all these community groups and giving them guidance and advice; developing true partnerships.” The next Natural Heritage Fund round opened in April, for the 2025/26 financial year, with approximately $1.4 million to distribute. The council has three contestable funds as part of its Natural Heritage Partnership Programme (NHPP):

Small Scale Community Initiatives Fund for project grants up to$5000
Environmental Initiatives Fund for project grants up to $40,000
Natural Heritage Fund (for project grants over $40,000).

Details of the four successful applicants for 2024/25 round of the Natural Heritage Fund are as follows:

A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand, $393,000 over four years towards Te Whakaoranga o Karioi – The Karioi Project. The funding will go towards:

- labour – pest animal control, seabird/coastal ranger and volunteer coordinator
- mātauranga Māori cultural health monitoring
- health and safety – materials and expert guidance

This group has been working together with the Raglan community for over 15 years. It undertakes a landscape scale pest control programme on the Karioi maunga, a backyard trapping programme in the surrounding rural and urban landscape, supports an iwi-led kākā reintroduction project, supports an iwi-led wetland restoration project at Toreparu Wetland, and runs an environmental education and awareness programme.

Moehau Environment Group Incorporated, $445,593 over three years towards its Caring for Native Biodiversity in Northern Coromandel project. The funding will go towards:

- labour – pest animal, pest plant control and community and school engagement programmes
- materials – traps and consumables.

This group has undertaken community led, landscape scale pest control and biodiversity management projects for over 20 years. The project area comprises a significant number of private properties, including QEII National Trust covenants along with areas of public conservation land. The group oversees a network of traps for a kiwi sanctuary, pest animal and pest plant control at Waikawau Wetland, a coastal forest pest animal control sub-project, and education and advocacy programmes in both schools and the wider community.

Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society, $303,023 over three years towards its Kia Mau Tonu Kaitiakitanga o Pirongia project. The funding will go towards:

- labour – pest animal control and administration support
- materials – traps and consumables
- track maintenance
- biodiversity outcome monitoring.

This group was established in 2002 as a community-led initiative to support, protect and enhance the native flora and fauna on Mt. Pirongia. It is expanding pest animal control operations on Mt. Pirongia to protect the spreading population of kōkako. This work also protects and enhances threatened native flora including Dactylanthus (wood rose). The group also has pest control operations at Okahukura in northern Pureroa, with a particular focus on protecting kōkako and long-tailed bat (pekapeka) populations.

Manaaki Kaimai Mamaku Trust, $200,000 over two years towards its Kaimai Mamaku Restoration project. The funding will go towards:

- labour – subregional hub to support capacity and capability of the iwi/hapū led subprojects
- health and safety support
- data and monitoring platform support.

This group was formed to manage Jobs for Nature funding secured from central government. It operates as a subregional hub, currently providing capacity and capability building for eight iwi/hapū pest control subprojects, including four from the Waikato region. The funding will only be applied to Waikato based activities supported by this trust.

## Bush to Burbs - Get Your Neighbour Involved

It was great to catch up and meet more land owners of the bush to burbs project over the last weeks. We caught up with Fiona Jujnovich who has been doing some great work trapping on her place as well as getting her neighbours involved.

She started her trapping journey in 2022 and with 80 traps now deployed, and 34ha protected in QE2 covenant, Fiona's trapping grid now covers 70ha total. Thanks to her great work protecting our native species she has miromiro (Tomtits) showing up regularly and kārearea (NZ Falcon) are now even breeding on her trapping grid!
Fiona has planted 7 hectares of native trees and is keen to inspire more of her neighbours to join the effort. She's now brought her new neighbours, Peter and Allison, on board. They recently gave us a tour of their property as we helped map out a trapline to get them started — which includes a beautiful little wetland area on their farm.

While this year's focus is on properties within the 3km buffer around the predator-proof fence as well as properties with priority habitat, we need you—wherever you are in the Bush to Burbs area!

Already part of B2B? Help grow the movement by getting your neighbours involved too! We'd love to welcome new landowners to the project! Simply get in touch via biodiversity@envirocentre.org.nz.

## JOIN TODAY TO HELP CREATE SAFE CORRIDORS FOR OUR NATIVE WILDLIFE!

BUSH TO BURBS

Bush to Burbs is a Waikato Environment Centre (Go Eco) project, powered by the community - to create a safe corridor for the spillover of birds and bats from Maungatautari to Leamington, Cambridge.

Controlling predators on your farm provides a variety of benefits—from supporting native biodiversity, protecting crops to reducing the risk of disease spread by pests like possums while adding to the natural beauty and ecological value of your land.

Thanks to support from the Waikato Regional Council - Natural Heritage Fund, Go Eco offers support to landowners in the Bush to Burbs area (pictured below) to undertake predator control by offering;

- Advice to start and maintain your traplines, including how to use TrapNZ
- Access to FREE Flipping Timmys and DOC200 traps.
- Discounted AT220's

To be eligible, you must live within the Bush to Burbs area (pictured below) and register your traps (and ideally trap catches) via TrapNZ.


Contact biodiversity@goeco.org.nz for more information
www.goeco.org.nz