



Autumn Newsletter 2026 Number 89

Kia ora tātou,

Some of the work undertaken over the past three months:

- Responded to a range of information and support requests from WBF members and public
- Facilitation and organisation of the Nature in the City/Waiwhakareke, Forum day, Te kaararo Nature Precinct Hamilton, 20th of May 2026

Nature in the City and Beyond Wānanga May 20th, Kirikiriroa, Hamilton

The Nature in the City and Beyond wānanga took place on 20 May at Te Kaaroro Nature Precinct in Hamilton. Te Kaaroro encompasses both Hamilton Zoo and Waiwhakareke Natural Heritage Park. With the predator-proof fence at Waiwhakareke already well advanced in its construction, the day provided a fantastic opportunity to reflect on and celebrate what has been achieved for biodiversity in Kirikiriroa over the past 20-plus years, while also updating the community on plans for the next 20 years and beyond.

Following a beautiful whakataua from Chris and Rangiuia Riki of Ngāti Māhanga, who blessed the day and welcomed us onto the whenua, Sam McElwee (WBF Coordinator) gave a brief introduction before the first speaker, Baird Fleming, took the stage. Baird is the Director of Te Kaaroro Nature Precinct. Having worked primarily in North America before taking up the role, he remarked on how impressed he was by the local community and the value they place on indigenous biodiversity.



Looking to the future, Baird did not go into specifics about which species might eventually be introduced into the predator-proof sanctuary, noting that these decisions will be made with guidance from the Department of Conservation (DOC). He also reminded attendees that progress must happen one step at a time. The immediate priority will be the successful completion of the eradication programme, which is expected to begin later this year once the fence is completed.

The next speakers were members of the Nature in the City team: Toni Cornes (Biodiversity Planning Advisor), Fraser Smith (Predator Control Advisor), and Clare Beet (Gully Restoration Advisor). The development and adoption of the Nature in the City Plan represent the hard work of many groups and individuals across Hamilton who have championed biodiversity and worked tirelessly to bring more nature into the city.

Since the plan's inception in 2020, significant gains have already been made, with indigenous vegetation cover increasing from less than 2% to around 3%. The ultimate goal for 2050 is to reach 10% indigenous vegetation cover—the minimum level considered necessary to support a sustainably functioning ecosystem. The Nature in the City



team spoke about both the opportunities and challenges within their respective roles. Achieving the 10% target will be a significant challenge given the competing demands on urban land use, but with continued public support, it is an achievable vision.

The next speaker, Wayne Bennett from Forest Flora Nursery, was only asked to present the day before the event due to Greg Townsend being struck down by a virus. A big thank you to Wayne for stepping in at such short notice.

Wayne began his ecological restoration journey by collecting seed and propagating plants to regenerate native bush around his new home near Ngāruawāhia. Since then, he has accumulated more than 30 years of experience establishing native forests and observing the natural succession of indigenous plant communities. One of the key points Wayne emphasised was the importance of long-term observation of natural forest processes, including pollination, seed production and dispersal, competition, and succession. Understanding these processes provides valuable guidance for ecosystem restoration and helps build resilient ecosystems. One example Wayne shared was that canopy tree species such as kahikatea and rimu require adequate light and space to thrive. Attempting to establish these species beneath an existing canopy can severely stunt their growth and delay ecosystem recovery by decades.

The final speaker was Jesse Golden, a member of the Te Kaaroro team, who spoke about e-Bird and later demonstrated how to use the app during the field trip component of the day at Waiwhakareke. Jesse is a regional expert in the use of eBird, which has become the global standard platform for monitoring bird populations.

The more people who use the app, the more meaningful data can be generated to help track species populations and identify trends across our region. While developing the observation and listening skills needed to confidently identify birds takes time and practice, the app itself is free and easy to use. It also includes an audio identification feature powered by AI-assisted learning, which continues to improve in accuracy and usefulness.



Coromandel Peninsula Residents Launch Ambitious Conservation Corridor - Restoring Mauri and Reconnecting Communities Through a Landowner-Led Initiative

With birdsong fading and rātā trees increasingly threatened by possum damage, concerned tangata whenua decided it was time for decisive action. Led by Quentin Potae – Ngāti Porou ki Hauraki – Te Ranga Wairua Trust was formed in 2022.

The project area spans an impressive 8,000 hectares from Harataunga to Tuataewa on the east coast and Amodeo Bay to Colville in the west, this will create a coast-to coast conservation corridor aimed at revitalising the region's unique ecosystems. The project bridges a geographical gap in existing pest control efforts, linking with other projects to create a contiguous zone of ecological protection.

Driven by a commitment to restore the mauri of the forest, streams, wetlands, and beaches that define the area, the project also honours the region's rich human history. The initial phase centres on major Māori land blocks within the corridor, offering tangata whenua the chance to reconnect with their ancestral land and its native ecosystems, flora, and fauna. "Let's do this methodically. Let's do this scientifically. Let's do this together." – Quentin Potae.

Te Ranga Wairua Trust have already deployed almost 200 self-resetting traps and dispatched over 12,000 pest animals. A belt of traps now spans East to West across the Peninsula; a specific focus has been protecting the ecologically significant wetland system and catchment at Harataunga.

The plan is to continue to grow the trapping network as funding allows. Landowners are now asking Quentin if they can join the conservation efforts at a rate we cannot keep up with! For more information or to donate to the project visit terangawairua.com



Mangaiti Gully Restoration - 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 Link



<https://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.

Predator Free Hauraki Coromandel - Community Group Meetings

Waikato Regional Council has sponsored four community group meetings over recent weeks in Opoutere, Coromandel, and Kūaotunu and Thames. These meetings have been a valuable opportunity to connect with volunteers and share updates on PFHC's work. We also discussed DOC's ungulate control programme and WRC's Kete Taiao Waikato project.

We were especially pleased to welcome Coastcare groups to our Kūaotunu meeting. There is strong potential to further strengthen connections between conservation groups, and we thank Andrea Whitehead for facilitating this link.

Key learnings from the meetings included:

- Most groups are undertaking some form of monitoring, including trapping records, 5-minute bird counts, lizard monitoring, and more.
- Many groups are currently purchasing equipment and materials at retail prices, highlighting an opportunity to collaborate on bulk purchasing and cost savings
- There is strong interest in more regular networking, with six-monthly meetings emerging as a preferred option.



Ecological Plant Shield Update – April 2026

The Ecological Plant Shield is a protective sleeve for plants. As an ecologist with over 17 years of experience in New Zealand, I have seen a lot of plastic-based products used in the horticulture and habitat regeneration space; and wanted to see if there were alternatives to leaving so much plastic in the environment. We tried cardboard-based plant shields but found they simply did not last long and attracted snails and other insects which damaged the plants.

Having experimented with several alternatives we found a rock-dust paper alternative that has exceeded our expectations in the field and have developed it into the Ecological Plant Shield. The main ingredient in the Ecological Plant Shield is calcium carbonate from waste leftovers from the marble industry. It is basically stone dust, recycled into a very sturdy paper product. Further details about the manufacturing process and environmental footprint can be found here:

<https://environmentalchoice.org.nz/our-news/case-studies/rockstock-revolutionary-paper-made-from-stone/>

Native plants protected by the Ecological Plant Shield Uses - Habitat restoration / plant protection in wet or dry sites for up to 5 years The Ecological Plant Shield is designed to protect plants from negative environmental and other factors, especially destruction by rabbits and birds by creating a physical barrier from the ground to up to a height of around 320mm. This allows the plant to grow out and above the plant shield until it is big enough to reduce the risk of destruction by these animals.

The Ecological Plant Shield also helps to protect the plant from wind and spray (salt or chemical), helps to retain ground moisture around the protected plant, provides a reflective surface for light to penetrate the growing areas, is easy to install, helps with maintenance and is easy to spot in long grass. It has been used to keep chickens off vegetable seedlings and to protect grape vines. The Ecological Plant Shield solves some of the negative issue found with other plant shields with regard to degradation and excessive plastic waste and

achieves the positive outcomes a plant shield should exhibit with regards to longevity and positive habitat restoration outcomes.

Highlights of the Ecological Plant Shield:

- creates a protective shield for plants made from a rock-paper composite
- will withstand environmental degradation for up to 5 years in the field
- has a reflective internal surface to enable light to reach the plant
- has a reflective external surface to make it easily located and visible in a field
- is compostable in commercial composting conditions
- helps to maintain a suitable internal microclimate to aid plant growth
- is less prone to de-lamination compared to some other plant shields
- offers a robust design to product weight ratio
- low weight allows for cost effective transportation and reduces carbon footprint
- is deliberately NOT made from biodegradable materials because these attract insects, snails and slugs which can harm the plants
- can withstand flooding without delaminating and can therefore be used in wetlands
- is competitively priced.



Native plants protected by the Ecological Plant Shield

Unique features - We are now into our seventh year of using the Ecological Plant Shield in the field; and have discovered some unique benefits of using this material over cardboard or paper. Plants are often planted in wetlands and lake margins, which are often subject to flooding in winter or after heavy rain. We are pleased to report that the Ecological Plant Shield performs well in flood zone areas, and the picture below shows them in a flood zone after 2 years of annual flooding – still functional. This is because this material, unlike cardboard or most paper, does not soak up water or become delaminated when wet.

Ecological Plant Shields in a flood zone - The longevity and robustness of the Ecological Plant Shield means that it can be re-used for more than one planting. We have shields that have been in the field for over 5 years now, and most are still functional, with some starting to disintegrate. In our experience a shield lasts at least 2 years.

If you are interested in the Ecological Plant Shield, please contact us via email or phone – natureproducts2019@outlook.com or 021 023 60119. Ben Wolf, Ecologist, Waikato

Central Waikato Predator Free Trust - Cambridge Local Defies Barriers to Help Nature

Cambridge local Kyren Andrew loves getting out in nature. Lack of sight hasn't deterred his determination to connect with the whenua. With support from Greg Townsend through his role with CCS Disability Action (he does not stop nor sleep), Kyren has gained hands-on trapping experience and is now actively contributing to local conservation efforts.

Born and raised in Northland, Kyren developed a strong connection to the whenua and moana from an early age. He has since been involved in iwi-led native planting projects across South Auckland, working alongside Ngāti Te Ata and local communities in Port Waikato.



Kyren loves hearing our native forests and birds return. His favourite bird call is the haunting song of the kōkako, and he has a special appreciation for the majestic kauri tree. Kyren checks traps once a week in backyards and at the Ngā Hau E Whā (the Cambridge Community Marae) where he supports Aroha Cambridge's work and is excited to do more community work and engage further with conservation work.

Pūkorokoro Miranda - Moths take off in the Findlay Reserve

It is dusk in Mid-March and the wind has dropped. I check the forecast - no rain and an evening temperature of around 17-18°C. It is a perfect moth monitoring night. I quickly gather together the necessary equipment: two battery powered light traps, two white sheets, a kneeling mat, a selection of egg cartons, head torch, notebook and pencil, specimen holding vials of different sizes, phone camera, migrant moth identification chart, warm clothes, x2.5 magnification glasses, magnifying hand lens, flask of coffee and half a packet of biscuits. I load up the Kaitiaki Ranger vehicle and then I'm off.

The Reserve is beautiful at this hour. Muted tones settle on the saltmarsh, the tall dying grasses become gold, and the darkening sky is studded with incoming birds. The sound of wings, contact calls and the smell of marsh are all around me as I set up the light traps. One is a simple LED strip light curled around a toilet roll holder and suspended above a small square trap box full of egg cartons which I place in the shelter of our native plantings. The other is more sophisticated, a German made LepiLED light that sits over a funnel emptying into a 20-litre bucket, also filled with egg cartons. The light emitted corresponds to the three sensitivity peaks of most nocturnal insects (UV, blue and green in the electromagnetic spectrum). I place this one up against the back wall of the Stilt Hide where it is sheltered and the wall makes a good landing spot for moths less inclined to go down the funnel.

Even before I have finished setting up, moths start arriving, drawn to the multi spectrum light arcing out into the night. I start my list: *Ptyomaxia trigonogramma* - a specialist native moth whose larvae/caterpillars feed on mangrove flowers and flower buds. I am happy it is here and have been amazed by the variety of different colour forms I can see in one night, ranging from such bold markings to more subtle tones. What makes that happen I wonder? Read full article [here](#)



P. trigonogramma ROSS NIGHTINGALE



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