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Thank You Tāne

Rakiura Tītī Islands
ADMINISTERING BODY

Manaaki Whenua
Landcare Research

UC
UNIVERSITY OF
CANTERBURY

UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
Waipapa Taumata Rau
NEW ZEALAND

Kā tangi te tītī.
Kā tangi te kākā.
Kā tangi hoki ahau.
Tihei mauriora.

The tītī is calling.
The kākā is calling,
and I wish to call.
Behold for there is life.

Contents

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Thank You Tāne

A New Chapter For The RTIAB

The Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body (RTIAB) wishes to thank Tāne Davis for his long and impactful service. Tāne advised the RTIAB of his intention not to stand at the RTIAB's February 2025 election. As a result, the RTIAB elected a new Chair, Jane Kitson, and a new Vice Chair, Corey Bragg, at that meeting.

In 2003, Tāne became the Chair of the RTIAB, a post he has held for over 20 years. He has overseen science projects, tītī research, biosecurity advancements, rat eradications, taonga species recovery and translocations, and the introduction of a regular rubbish service. Tāne was a foundation member of the RTIAB. He has served since the Ngāi Tahu Settlement Act in 1998, which saw 18 former Crown Tītī Islands returned to Rakiura Māori. Tāne played a crucial role in creating the Bylaws, Constitution, and Management Plan for the Rakiura Tītī Islands, working closely with kaumatua at the time. Those kaumatua have since passed away, but Tāne attributes the successful return and ongoing management of the Islands to their guidance and wisdom.

A recognised leader in the Southland (Murihiku) conservation sector and across Aotearoa New Zealand, Tāne has also contributed significantly at the national level. He is a Member and Chair of the Whenua Hou Komiti, and has represented Ngāi Tahu on both the Kākāpo Recovery Group and the New Zealand Conservation Authority. He is also a Registered Member of Ōraka Aparima Rūnaka. In recognition of his extensive service to conservation and Māori interests across the country, Tāne was appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2019.

Despite not standing for renomination for the Chair's role, Tane will continue to support the RTIAB as a continuing member and will remain actively involved in delivering work programs for the Rakiura Tītī Islands as the Works Program Co-ordinator through to June 2025. RTIAB have applied for further funding from TRONT to continue the Works Program Co-Ordinator position, however, it is yet to be approved. Funding for the Works Program role has historically been the responsibility of Te Rūnanga O Ngāi Tahu (TRONT), but the administration of the funding allocation and its implementation now rests with the RTIAB. This means that the Works Program Co-ordinator, will now be directly responsible to the RTIAB instead of TRONT. Tane says he has always been grateful for the support he has had from his own whānau, Rakiura Māori and their whanau, and for TRONT and RTIAB for supporting his role for the Rakiura Tītī Islands during his tenure.

The RTIAB's new chapter is marked by the two top positions being filled by two of its very own scientists. Dr Jane Kitson has been elected as the incoming Chair, and Corey Bragg as the Vice Chair. Jane has a Doctorate in Philosophy and a Masters in Science (Zoology), and Corey holds a degree in Zoology and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Wildlife Management. They have a passion for the Tītī Science Program which has been supported by Tāne and others for over 30 years.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koe, Tāne. Mā mua ka kite a muri.

Corey Bragg, Vice Chair, Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body

Tīeke Transfer — Putauhinu and Kundy Island to Orokonui Ecosanctuary 21st–28th January 2025

Juvenile tīeke.

In January this year, a significant conservation initiative took place involving the translocation of tīeke (saddleback) from the Rakiura Tītī Islands—Putauhinu and Kundy—to Orokonui Ecosanctuary in Dunedin.

Tīeke are a culturally and ecologically significant taonga species to Ngāi Tahu and a highly visible and charismatic advocate for conservation and the Tītī Islands, with which their history and survival is intricately linked. Translocation is a crucial tool aimed at returning tīeke to the South Island where they can be enjoyed and appreciated by the wider public, This particular translocation was a result of careful planning between the Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body (RTIAB), Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki and Orokonui Ecosanctuary.

A native and once critically endangered bird, tīeke are now a thriving species on nearly 20 predator free islands. Efforts to establish a viable tīeke population at Orokonui commenced back in 2009 with transfers from Ulva Island, followed by additional birds from Breaksea Island in 2013. These initiatives were promising until a stoat incursion in 2015 decimated the established population, emphasizing the inherent risks associated with such conservation efforts and resulting in a significant increase in biosecurity controls at the ecosanctuary.

After assessing the harvesting capacities of the source islands and potential hazards like bird flu, the decision was made to capture up to 50 tīeke from both Putauhinu and Kundy Islands. This decision aimed to maximise the chances of establishment in Orokonui while also enhancing the cultural connection between the sanctuary and iwi. The preparation for this specific translocation spanned five years.

The involvement of experienced tīeke catchers such as Tāne Davis, Russell and Teresa Trow and Pete McClelland, provided Orokonui staff with essential insights from their experience with tīeke populations for the capture, transfer and holding of the birds.

The execution of the transfer required significant logistical coordination. First, the Putauhinu catching team flew down and over three days captured 52 tīeke, using mist nets. These birds were transferred to Orokonui while the

Kundy team set up and caught an additional 52 birds which were then transferred to the ecosanctuary.

In the past, tīeke transfers have all been “hard release” ie let go straight away. In order to try and keep as many birds inside the sanctuary as possible this transfer was a mix of “hard” and “soft” (ie birds were held in an aviary for four weeks) releases and some had their wings clipped to stop them flying out of the fence. All birds had individual colour band combinations so they can be tracked to see which group do the best in order to guide possible future transfers.

As a new chapter for tīeke at Orokonui begins, it serves as an encouraging model for future conservation efforts, illustrating how kaitiakitanga and modern-day ecological restoration methods are closely intertwined.

Putauhinu Catching Team

Tāne Davis – Putauhinu Birder (RTIAB chair)

Elton Smith – Orokonui Ecosanctuary

Ros Cole – Te Papa Atawhai/Department of Conservation (DOC)

Pete McClelland –Contractor

Kundy Catching Team

Russel Trow – Kundy Birder

Teresa Trow – Kundy Birder

Bosun Metzger – Kundy Birder

Ros Cole – DOC

Jo Hiscock – Volunteer

Sharon Trainor – Volunteer

Pete McClelland – Contractor

Bosun Trow-Metzger helping clear the mist nets.

The birds were banded so they can be tracked and monitored.

Decision Science and Taupata

The quest to eradicate an invasive plant species from the Tītī Islands is drawing on both modern science and the mātauranga knowledge system in order to manage its increasing presence there. Taupata is a hardy shrub that does particularly well on exposed coastlines where most plants would struggle to survive. Although native to New Zealand, taupata is not naturally found on the Tītī Islands but it is quickly establishing itself there.

Dr Jay Whitehead specialises in complex decision science and social impact valuation and he is leading a collaborative effort to mitigate this 'weed,' which is increasingly threatening the ongoing sustainable harvest of tītī (muttonbirds) on the southern islands. Combining their knowledge and their resources, Tītī Islanders are being supported by Jay himself, as well as Manaaki Whenua and the Department of Conservation to navigate a complex decision-making pathway to find methods to control taupata.

The two knowledge systems at play are Western science and mātauranga Māori. Science is driven by systematic inquiry, empirical evidence, and the pursuit of understanding through experimentation and observation. Mātauraunga Māori is a traditional indigenous form of science that includes values, culture and a worldview that is applied to the natural world.

'As a scientist, and perhaps more importantly, as an economist, I am all too aware of the absence of mātauranga in my field,' says Jay. 'The best scientific outcomes are those which result after consideration of both of these realms.' Science can all too often fail to look at the broader context when applying Western methodology. Conversely, the application of mātauranga often lacks the tools and resources to find the best path forward.

Jay recently spent a weekend at Te Rau Aroha Marae in Motupōhue (Bluff). His quest is to help identify a community-driven solution for managing taupata in the southern islands, which is founded on options provided by science.

'I'm using a choice model to understand the community's preferences for managing this incursion,' says Jay. 'Every taupata management strategy involves trade-offs. My work is to help guide management decisions by understanding which trade-offs are acceptable from the community perspective. For example, is it acceptable to change tikanga (traditional customs) to control the incursion?' One management option might suggest that monitoring be undertaken on the islands out of season, something that is not traditionally done. Or perhaps there is a proposal to cut the trees down and poison the stumps. But if taupata branches are left on the ground, they can regrow.

'At the end of the day, the community must decide what approach is acceptable and this will rest on wisdom derived from kaitiaki over many generations.

'This challenge has so many complexities,' says Jay. 'There are multiple families on each island, and multiple diverse perspectives. Some islands are covered in taupata, some have none.' There are also collective challenges, for example, if taupata is removed from one island but not another, it will re-seed, and many, many more.'

Jay leads a structured decision-making process based on trust which is gained through careful consideration of stakeholders' values and perspectives. So far, he has undertaken around 40 interviews with members of the community. The remaining task is to track down those members who have no email address or mobile phone but who perhaps carry the most heavily weighted wisdom derived from kaitiaki.

Jay has assisted with multiple decision processes over many years, but he is especially passionate about this one. 'I am Ōraka Aparima, I am Ngāi Tahu and I am Kāti Māmoe,' he says. Although he has not yet had the privilege of experiencing a birding season, he feels honoured to be working with his whānau and assisting them to determine their own management solutions. 'It never feels like work! Their knowledge and wisdom are everything here; the role of science is only to help amplify this wisdom.'

Jay is hopeful that in finding a solution to control taupata, he is also contributing to the longer-term goal of enhancing the resilience of birding on the islands for future generations.

He Manawa Tītī

An ex-firefighter is the architect of a fire-prevention scheme that is targeting his very own whānau. Riki Davis, who served as a Firefighter for Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) right up until November 2024, is now busily putting his experience and knowledge of fire safety to good use.

The He Manawa Tītī project is about strengthening whānau resilience on the former Crown Tītī Islands to ensure people are taking the right precautions to prevent a fire from starting and are equipped to protect themselves from fire if necessary.

'Knowledge, tools and confidence are what we want to supply people with so that they are empowered with practical fire safety measures that fit their reality,' says Riki.

The 'reality' is the unique environment in which birders operate for several months a year. And the risk of starting a fire inadvertently is high since families take with them LPG, petrol, paraffin wax, candles, generators and other high risk materials.

'The islands are remote, they're off-grid, and they're exposed to the elements,' says Riki. There is extremely limited access to immediate help, which creates challenges for emergency response. Indeed Riki would know – he has been birding on his whānau manu – Putauhinu Island – since he was two years old.

In an emergency, the closest helicopter to the Tītī Islands is based at Bluff which is 40 minutes away. Help from anyone on nearby islands would not arrive for one to two hours. 'And while we have the luxury of StarLink (satellite technology) now, the reality remains that self-reliance is crucial.

Riki is now a Community Readiness and Recovery Advisor, based in Dunedin. Along with colleague Martin Jillings (also Rakiura Māori), he prepared multiple fire safety kits and distributed them to whānau at permit day 2025. "We sought interest via email and phone calls from whānau permitted to go to the Former Crown Tītī islands,' says Riki. 'At permit day, a total of 30 whānau each received a kit.'

Each fire safety kit contains:

- Thermal heat alarms – detect heat as opposed to smoke, ideal for work house and/or kitchen
- Photoelectric smoke alarms – Providing early warning in the event of a fire
- Fire extinguisher – ideal in extinguishing fire caused by cooking and/or wax copper
- First aid kits
- Airhorns – To alert others quickly in case of an emergency
- Fire safety instructions – Tailored guidance to help whānau prepare and respond in the event of an emergency on their motu/who to contact.

Riki and Martin distributing fire safety kits to whānau at permit day 2025.

And what of the project name? He Manawa Tītī comes from a whakatauki meaning someone or something of great endurance or strength. It refers to the ability of the tītī to stay away for long periods at sea. The birds are born on the Tītī Islands, then travel the vast oceans throughout the north Pacific to seek out a mate. They don't return to the Tītī Islands for several years until they are ready to breed. Riki likens this to his people. 'This initiative is a step toward long-term resilience, building on our collective responsibility to keep our homes and people safe.'

Once the season ends, Riki and Martin plan to look at opportunities for Home Fire Safety Visits for their whare on the mainland. There is also hope that the project can be extended to include families on the Beneficial Islands in 2026.

Riki invites anyone who would like more information about He Manawa Tītī to get in touch by emailing him at riki.davis2@fireandemergency.nz

A Year On – Mouse Detection on Big Island

Nearly a year on from the detection of a mouse on Big Island, biosecurity experts are cautiously reporting that no further sign has been found.

In March 2024, the quick actions of birders and boat operators were praised by conservationists and the RTIAB after two potentially major biosecurity breaches for the Tītī Islands were detected within the space of a week.

Donald Bragg arrived at his Big Island house in March 2024 and saw recent mouse droppings and chew marks on food. He phoned a member of the Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body immediately and traps provided by DOC were sent down that very day. A single male mouse mouse was quickly caught.

A dog indicating on a freezer motor during an inspection.

Soon after this incident – in fact, within the space of a week – it was discovered that a rat had stowed itself away on a vessel berthed at Bluff Wharf. Skipper of the Awesome, Peter Boyce, who has always been rigorous with his biosecurity procedures, was shocked when conservation detector dog Mawson and his handler Sandy King discovered a rat on board just prior to departing for the Tītī Islands.

As a consequence, the question that was raised at the time was 'are there any other mice on Big Island?' The RTIAB and Biosecurity advisers have been monitoring the 'predator free' island since the incident occurred, and happily it seems, the answer is no. It is looking increasingly likely that the mouse was the only one on the island and not part of an established population.

The mouse poo that was revealed when the panel was removed. This shows how easy it can be for them to stow away.

An initial check by conservation dog handlers Sandy King and Karen Andrew along with their dogs Mawson and Mica found no sign of mice. At the same time, mouse traps were set in and around the buildings. Most of these were checked in January 2025, along with another run by Mica and Karen, with no sign of mice.

'This is positive, but it is not cause for complacency,' says conservation contractor Pete McClelland. 'It is important to remember that the detections last year were reported immediately, which enabled a rapid biosecurity response,' he says. We were fortunate that it was a single male mouse but it could just easily been a pregnant female and we would have been dealing with a major incursion. The RTIAB were keyed up for a rapid eradication response if required.

Mawson inspecting a crate at Fisherman's Wharf in Bluff.

In the meantime, whānau on the island will continue trapping and looking for signs as this is the best way to monitor for the presence of mice.

These incidents have highlighted just how important preventative biosecurity measures are to ensure that the Tītī Islands remain precious jewels where our indigenous biodiversity can flourish.

If you find any sign of a rodent on the islands or on a transport vessel or aircraft, please report it to a member of the RTIAB as soon as possible.

Michael Skerrett – Longest Serving Board Member RTIAB

In a previous edition of the Tītī Times we brought you a feature on our newest-serving member of the RTIAB. It's therefore only right that we bring you a story on the longest-serving member this time round. Or one of them, at least.

Michael Skerrett is quick to clarify that he shares this status with two others – Stewart Bull and Tāne Davis. 'Stewart, Tāne and I are the three remaining originals,' he says.

The Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body was set up in 2003 to control and manage the Tītī Islands as a nature reserve, subject to the customary rights of Rakiura Māori to take tītī on a sustainable basis. Michael has served as a Board member since then. 'I am absolutely passionate about the protection of what's left of our customary rights and servicing our Rakiura Māori whānau to enable them to exercise their rights,' says Michael.

The Administering Body is lucky to have him. His CV boasts an astonishing chronology of governance and community service. Michael has spent many decades devoting his time and expertise to help drive positive change for Ngāi Tahu and New Zealand conservation efforts.

We asked Michael what his biggest achievement has been since RTIAB's inception. 'Getting the instruments in place.' he says. 'The constitution, the bylaws, the Management Plan…'

Michael has contributed to much of the Administering Body's early work including the preparation of an inaugural Management Plan in 2010 which set out how the islands are to be administered. He has also contributed to the Draft Management Plan 2024. The Draft Plan incidentally reached a milestone just recently, having been submitted to the Minister of Conservation for approval.

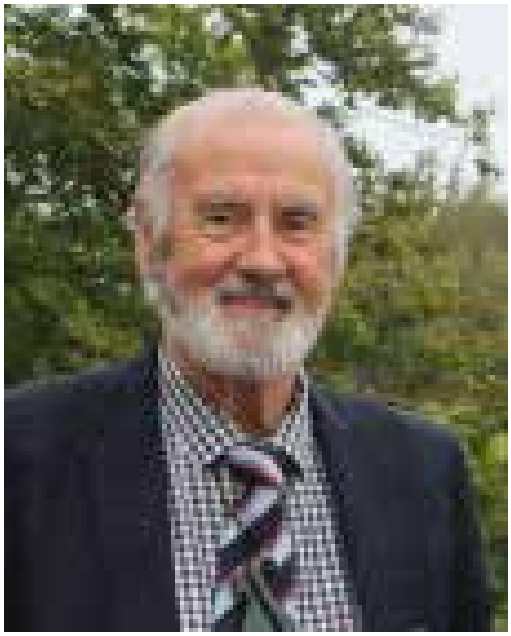
The Administering Body also has the ability to make bylaws relating to management of islands. Michael has been involved in the drafting of these, including those which set out requirements for permit applications and others which relate to the harvesting of tītī.

The setting up of the Administration Body has also led to the implementation of several significant work programmes relating to pest eradication and the protection of the islands' indigenous biodiversity.

Working alongside The Department of Conservation, these projects have taken up a large amount of Michael's time, as well as the Board's. The success they've had with these however, has led to flourishing populations of once-threatened species (including tieke/saddleback) which are now able to be transferred to other places in New Zealand where they remain endangered.

With the successes come challenges too. The biggest one in Michael's view is achieving the lofty goal of 'pest-free' status for the Tītī Islands. His hopes are pinned on the work being done on Rakiura, which is on track to commence an intensive predator-removal programme from an initial 10,000ha block in Autumn next year.

'Once rats, possums, feral cats and hedgehogs are removed from Rakiura, the Tītī Islands will have the footing they need to become permanently pest-free also,' says Michael.



Michael Skerrett.

Predator Free Rakiura: Project Update

Predator Free Rakiura is a collaborative project that builds on the hard work and experience of many, including:

- Aotearoa's long history of island eradications, including on the nearby tītī islands
- The work of takata whenua, local communities, and the Department of Conservation (DOC) on Rakiura
- Successful predator eliminations carried out by Zero Invasive Predators (ZIP) in South Westland and Te Manahuna Aoraki

A predator free future will create space for species like kākāpō to return, while also protecting our unique flora and fauna from further loss. In this future, nature and community can thrive together sustainably.

Right now, we're focused on planning the first operational stage of the project, which will be delivered throughout 2025. This stage is about learning; we will trial proven tools and techniques, refining them to suit Rakiura's needs and informing how eradication can be effectively scaled across the island – shaped at each step by ongoing discussions with the community.

Proposed Predator Control to Prevent Pukunui Extinction

At a community kōrero in Oban on 30th January, the Department of Conservation (DOC) shared a critical update about the pukunui/southern New Zealand dotterel, a species found only on Rakiura.

The pukunui/southern NZ dotterel population, found only on Rakiura, is facing extinction, despite extensive efforts from the Department of Conservation's Pukunui Recovery Team.

There are only 101 individual birds left due to predation from feral cats. Ground control methods, including trapping, have not been effective enough to reverse their steep decline.

Predator Free Rakiura plans to eradicate feral cats, possums, rats and hedgehogs from the island once and for all. While this gives hope, we know we can't wait until this vision is achieved, and we need to act now to save pukunui.

Pukunui/southern NZ dotterel at Awarua Bay. (Bradley Shields)

By supporting DOC with operations to protect pukunui this coming winter, ZIP has an opportunity to gather critical knowledge to inform the wider predator eradication effort towards a predator free Rakiura while responding to an immediate conservation crisis.

Predator Free Rakiura had originally proposed to carry out a predator elimination trial across 10,000 ha at the southern end of the island during autumn 2025. This planned elimination trial will now take place in 2026. The approach in this area will be refined based on what is learnt through ongoing discussions, research and trials throughout 2025.

Join The Discussion

Over the coming months, we'll continue to engage with key interest groups and with the wider community on the next steps for the project.

We encourage you to get in touch with any questions or comments – we want to hear from you so that we can take all views into consideration as we develop the plan.

Keep an eye on the project website for more information and regular updates: www.predatorfreerakiura.org.nz

Sign up to receive updates directly by emailing us: info@predatorfreerakiura.org.nz

To receive updates on the Pukunui Recovery Project, email pukunui@doc.govt.nz

Taupata Update

Taupata is now a word our Tītī Island community know too well. This shiny-leafed scrubby tree has made manu unworkable on some Tītī Islands already and is gaining a foothold on others. It is very difficult to eradicate – it's our gorse.

The Rakiura Tītī Island Administering Body and the Rakiura Tītī Committee have both made it a priority to deal with and it has been the centre of a research workstream within the MBIE-funded Te Weu O Te Kaitiaki programme.

Manaaki Whenua Taupata's team, lead by Kate Orwin, as well as RTIAB scientist, Corey Bragg, have gathered considerable information on this tree but there is still so much to learn about it. They are part of the Te Weu O Te Kaitiaki group of scientists who are working on the issue.

The two Tītī governance groups, along with the scientists, held a hui in January this year at Te Rau Aroha Marae. It was well attended by birders from a number of islands which are affected by taupata including Pikomamaku, Horomamae, Te Poho-o-Tairea (Big Island), Betsy, Pukeweka, Slope Point (Ruapuke) and Tiā.

The aim was to share information and as the ones who have been dealing with it for many years, the birders contributed a lot. The taupata invasion is proving to be devastating in many ways. Birders say it is dense, so birds get tangled in it. It out-competes our tītī scrub trees and it sucks up so much water that the ground has the look and consistency of cocoa powder. That has a big impact on the burrows which can collapse and kill the birds and probably even prevents tītī from digging strong burrows for chicks.

Feedback from the birders also included how herbicides were performing, how shading slowed growth so tracks with canopy cover are more resistant, how planting desirable plants can crowd out the taupata and how hedging can reduce berry production. Rick Topi noted that on Ruapuke, grazing animals keep the spread in check, making it less of an issue there.

It was sad to hear that some birders are prevented from going to parts of their island anymore as they can't navigate the scrub or because there are simply no longer enough tītī in the areas dominated by taupata to even bother birding there.

Kate Orwin delivered a presentation which encapsulated all we know about taupata and provided some practical suggestions on dealing with its spread.

It is thought that taupata first arrived in the Tītī Islands to the northeast in the 1950s. When taupata first arrives on an island it can seem quite innocuous. Then after about 10 years it starts to spread. "It's something that takes birders by surprise – first there is not much of it, then suddenly there is a whole pile of it,"Kate said.

Birds spread taupata seeds. Native birds like tui consume and carry seeds up to 2 kms away, while kererū and starlings are thought to be responsible for wider dispersal - up to 30 kms. This means there is potential for disbursement of taupata seeds to all of the Tītī Islands over time. It also means that taupata invasions could soon become a problem for both Rakiura and some areas of Southland.

Scientists have worked hard to establish which herbicides are the most effective and which ones have the lowest environmental impact. They carried out tests in August and September 2024 when there were no birds around. They have given birders some good practical knowledge on how best to deal with it. Cutting it down at the wrong time risks spreading the seeds and the plant is capable of

Corey at the Taupata Hui.

growing back from the stump. On top of this some poisons aren't very effective.

The hui was also attended by staff from DOC and the Southland Regional Council who gave a great practical demonstration of how to poison the trees. Although it has its disadvantages, poisoning is the most effective method to kill the tree if the correct chemical is used properly.

The Department of Conservation's Trevor Huggins led a practical demonstration on how to remove taupata on a tree at the Te Rau Aroha Marae. Trevor has been involved in dealing with taupata infestations on Rarotoka. Rachel Jones, Environment Southland's Biosecurity Officer (Plants), also attended and is supporting the taupata response.

Social Scientist Jay Whitehead also attended the hui to get a better understanding of how we all feel about taupata and the methods we can use to manage it.

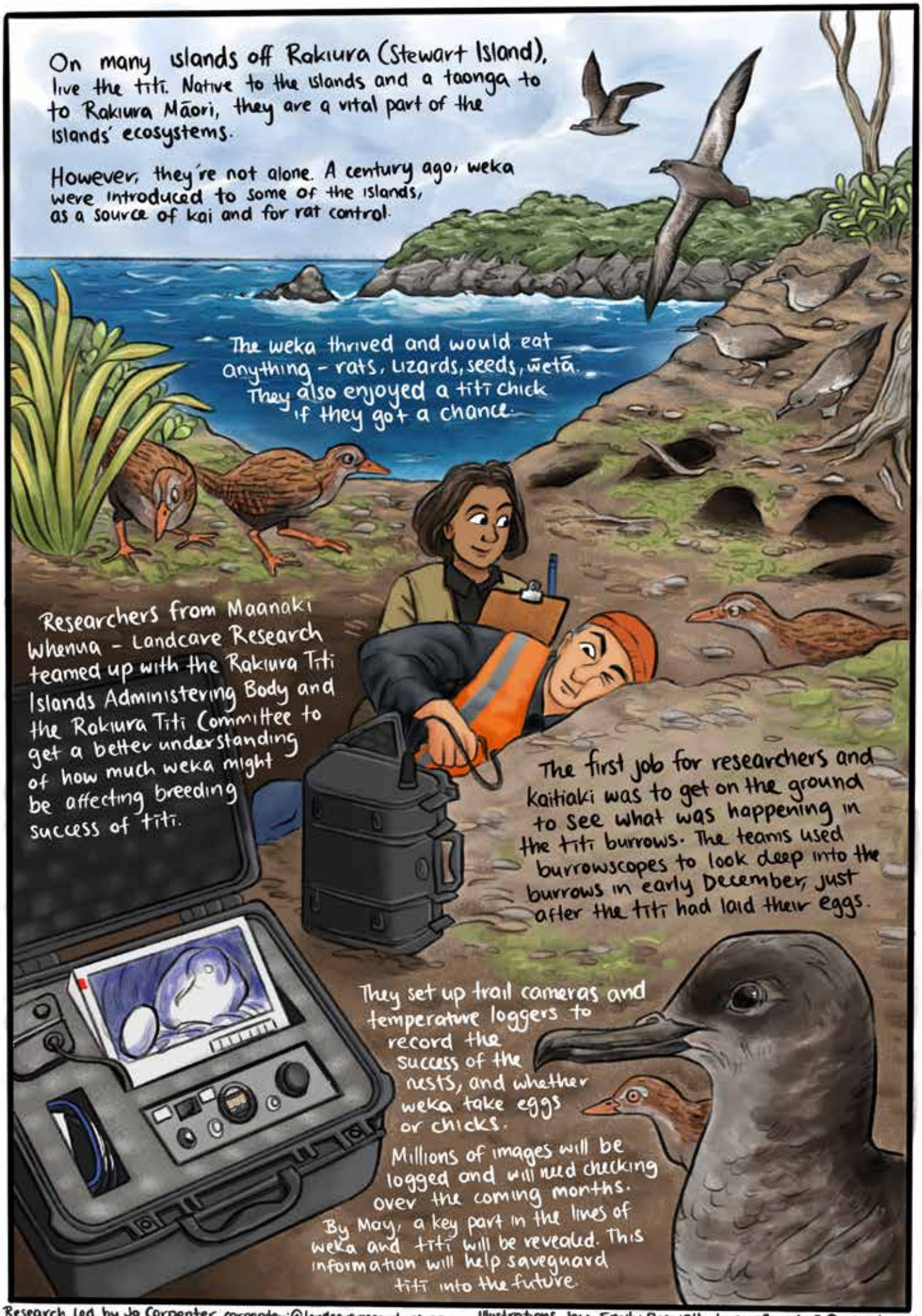
The common conclusion was that we must work together to deal with taupata – it's our best chance of minimising its impact on our fragile islands.

Current approach to taupata removal:

- Seedlings: pull out.
- Glyphosate-based herbicide: A high efficacy, relatively low environmental impact option. For a 1-5 cm diameter of the trunk at the base: cut n paste glyphosate (Glimax – 400g/L).
- For greater than 5 cm diameter at the base: drill and fill glyphosate (510g/L), increase dose as diameter increases.
- DOC use Bamboo Buster (240g glyphosate/L)
- Person Protection Equipment: nitrile gloves, full skin coverage, safety glasses.
- NOTE other herbicides may require additional PPE.

Some practical tips:

- A two-person team works well
- Apply herbicide immediately after cutting or drilling (otherwise the tree shuts off its transport system and the herbicide won't work as well, even a minute or two makes a difference).
- Drill with 135 Nm of torque for drill and fill.
- Cut and paste – cut close to the ground, paste both cut edges, and suspend cut off portion above the ground.
- Keep good records of dose and chemicals used.
- Taupata glows by torchlight – one way to spot seedlings.
- Think about what you're going to do with the dead stems.



Research led by Jo Carpenter, carpenterj@landcareresearch.co.nz Illustrations by Emily Boswell, boswellemily3@gmail.com

Obituary — Geoff Young

Written by Sascha Wall

My first season on Ernest Island was in 1999. I was four years old, travelling in the care of my grandparents, Trish and Geoff. My great grandfather, Douglas Young was with us too. I don't remember much of my time there that year, but my nan, Trish, our memory keeper, took copious amounts of photos through which I have been able to connect with those moments. In most of the images, I am wearing a little black-and-red, water resistant suit that Nan made me, to keep my clothes from muddying from the surrounds of our natural environment. It became my signature over the next few years on the island with my grandparents.

As I reflect on the childhood years I spent at the island, I think of the smell of old books, tītī feathers, hot wax and salt. I can hear the ocean and the waves moving up toward the sand of the beach I've been told we are lucky to have. I can hear the gentle hum of our generator and feel the warm glow of low light illuminating the house as the sun starts to set at 5pm. I can see a slow-shutter-speed blur of my papa's restless movements as he moved from task to task, without telling anyone what he was doing. Even the ngahere there has a smell, a feel and a sound so distinctive that I could never shut my eyes and pretend to be anywhere else. I have never in my life, known this combination of senses without knowing Geoff was somewhere nearby.

My Papa was a quiet man, and he was very tau. Nothing and no one could ever shake him. The way that children and animals were naturally drawn to him can be attributed to his calmness. I like to think the inside of his brain resembled the neatness and order of his abundant māra because he spent a lot of time deep in both.

Papa seemed to be so content and satisfied in silence, never needing external validation from anyone and moved with quiet confidence in everything he did. What he didn't communicate with his words, he showed through his actions.

The careful ordering and packing of our kai for the birding season said: "I'll sustain us with what we need. No more and no less."

The cutting of each track at the start of the season said: "I'll clear the way for all of us."

His pest-control and eradication efforts said: "I'll ensure there is a future for this taonga of ours."

The central pou in our whānau and the quiet kaitiaki of our island, Papa showed us how to do everything. From catching tītī to plucking them. From cutting, to gutting, to salting (my job), to packing, to the 'G+D Y' traced in vivid on the lids of all our buckets. It was all muscle memory for him – every task repeated in the exact same sequence over and over as if it were second nature. I loved seeing Papa in his element like this because he showed us day in and day out, for two solid weeks, what hard mahi looked like.

Where Papa would sustain, Nan would nurture. He made the home, and she decorated it. Nan brought the warmth and the fun to papa's steady consistency and together, they created harmony within the hearts of all of their mokopuna.

Geoff's legacy lies in his humble leadership – through showing us the way all the way without needing the spotlight.

It will be strange to return to the Island without our old mate but as was the case even when he was here, we will not hear him, we will feel him in every little necessary task it takes to keep our home and our practices alive on Ernest Island.

Nā, Sascha Wall.

Geoff Young.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza – Factsheet

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), or bird flu, is a highly contagious virus that can infect all species of bird (wild and domestic) and caused significant mortality in species of seals and sealions.

Background

The H5N1 strain of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has spread globally to all areas since December 2021 except Aotearoa, Australia, the Pacific Islands.

The likelihood of HPAI arriving in New Zealand on pathways that Border Services manage is low. HPAI is currently spreading internationally in wild birds, which is the most plausible path by which it would reach New Zealand. As information emerges about the distribution of the disease in Antarctica, there will be a better understanding about the likelihood of HPAI reaching New Zealand through wild bird movements.

Once in New Zealand, it could spread by direct contact between infected and healthy birds, or through contaminated equipment and materials, including water and feed.

We are actively monitoring disease spread, particularly towards the Ross Sea region in Antarctica and globally. We're talking regularly with colleagues around the world so we can learn as much as we can about how the disease is behaving as it spreads, and what other countries are doing to manage the disease.

International experience has shown that a One Health approach to the current strain of HPAI is essential. If HPAI is detected in New Zealand or its territories, Biosecurity New Zealand will be the lead agency and will coordinate any response in partnership with the Department of Conservation (DOC) and the Ministry of Health.

Various native sea birds congregating at sea (DOC).

Species at risk

We don't know exactly what impact HPAI would have on native species; based on overseas evidence, it's more likely to affect colony nesting birds, seals and predator/scavenger species. Species, such as red and black-billed gulls, gannets, terns, seals and other seabirds are likely to be impacted due to the close contact transmission of the virus through secretions and faeces, as well as predator/scavenger species such as raptors.

Transmission to mammals

Any animal that consumes or interacts with an infected bird/ mammal or the carcass of one, is at risk of catching HPAI. Various mammal species have contracted HPAI in this way with varying susceptibility and mortality rates.

Mammalian infections significant to Aotearoa are mortalities in species of: sealions, seals, canines, felines, and mustelids.

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

April 2025 DOC-7543678

New Zealand Government

Alan Tennyson among white-napped petrels, Macauley Island, Nov 1988 (DOC).

What to look out for?

While there are many other possible causes of illness and death in wild birds, be aware of HPAI so you can minimise risks to yourselves and other animals if you encounter sick or dead birds.

The most obvious sign of HPAI is sudden death in several animals. Other signs can include weakness, tremors, paralysis, difficulty breathing, lack of co-ordination, blindness, trembling and diarrhoea.

If you see three or more sick/dead wild birds or marine mammals in a group, report it immediately to Biosecurity New Zealand's Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline on 0800 80 99 66. Provide as much detail to Biosecurity New Zealand as you can, including:

- a GPS reading or other precise location information
- photographs and/or videos of sick and dead birds
- species identity and estimate of numbers affected
- note how many are sick or freshly dead, and the total number present.

Biosecurity New Zealand will take details and an incursion investigator will be in contact with you. Follow any instructions from Biosecurity New Zealand for handling of sick or dead birds.

To date, nearly all human infections with avian influenza have been in people closely interacting for prolonged periods of time with infected animals. Do not handle sick or dead birds if you suspect HPAI.

Management Options

Once HPAI is spreading in wildlife populations in New Zealand it will be here forever with periods when outbreaks are high.

Effective management targets population support through the species recovery programmes; focussing on increasing baseline health and increasing population resilience.

DOC is developing response plans for all Districts, identifying high risk sites and activities.

During periods of active outbreaks, areas of Public Conservation Land and Waters may have restricted access or be closed. This is to reduce stress on wildlife and prevent humans (and their pets) from catching the disease or disturbing birds, spreading the disease to more locations. These decisions will be made based on a variety of factors including the nature and site of the outbreak, species infected, and time of year.

International experience has shown the collection of bird carcasses does not reduce the impacts of an outbreak and in some instances, due to disturbance of sick and/or recovering birds, makes the outbreak worse. In some scenarios it may be necessary to collect and dispose of carcasses to mitigate a worse risk to human health or a species of concern. Carcasses will be collected and disposed of under strict biosecurity protocols.

For a few species, using vaccination might be an effective tool during outbreaks to protect a core breeding population to prevent species extinction.

In early 2024, DOC began a trial to assess the safety and efficacy of the vaccine in the five species:

- Kakī (Black stilt)
- Takahē
- Kākāpō
- Tūturuatu (Shore plover)
- Red-crowned kākāriki (as a surrogate species for kākāriki karaka/orange-fronted kākāriki)

It is not possible or impactful to vaccinate all endangered birds, due to the efficacy of the vaccine and the feasibility of catching wild birds. We will focus on those species reliant on captivity where the full two doses of vaccine can be given and reassess as we learn more about susceptibility of native species.

More Information

DOC website: www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/wildlife-health/avian-influenza/
MPI website: www.mpi.govt.nz/HPAI

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