

TiTi Times

KAITIAKI ISSUE

Farewell Tiny

In fond memory of Nicholas (Tiny) Graham Metzger (Kāi Tahu: Kāi Te Ruahikihiki, Kāti Rakiāmoa) of Awarua, who passed away on Thursday morning July 30th aged 93



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.

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Kupu Whakataki/Foreword

Chair's kōrero

What we know and what we don't

There is understandable concern among our whānau as we hear that Avian Flu (HPAI) has reached our shores. Throughout the year we've done our best to keep you updated on what is known about this virus, but the reality is that there is still a lot we don't know.

As a tītī community, we are unique. If HPAI were to significantly affect our manu, it would have implications for all of us. However, we also have important strengths on our side. While some bird populations overseas are recovering from HPAI outbreaks, there is still much we do not know about what the virus could mean for our tītī. Ongoing monitoring helps us understand what is happening, while our collective experience and observations mean we are well placed to respond to change. As Taupata showed, we can come together and work through challenges as a community. Should our manu be affected, our response will be grounded in tikanga and guided by mātauranga Māori, with science helping to inform our understanding and decision-making. Together, these knowledge systems will help us navigate whatever lies ahead.

Adding to the uncertainty is the prospect of another strong El Niño event, which will place further pressure on our manu. If that occurs alongside HPAI, our tītī could be facing challenges on multiple fronts.

We also acknowledge the passing of one of our most respected kaumātua, Tiny Metzger. Tiny played a pivotal role in retaining and strengthening many of our tītī practices, sharing his knowledge generously with whānau over many years. As we face new challenges and uncertainties, we can take confidence in the legacy he leaves behind. The mātauranga, tikanga, and practical wisdom he shared will continue to guide us and future generations

In this edition you'll find a pictorial snapshot of whānau at work and play on the islands, reflections on the wonderful visit from our Inuvialuit relations from northern Canada, updates on the plastics research programme, and reports from our work programme coordinator on the work currently underway.



As always, thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition.

The next Tītī Times will be published in time for Christmas. Until then, take care, stay connected, and continue looking after one another, our manu, and our traditions.

Jane Kitson,

Chair, Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body

Farewell Tiny

Unutai e, unutai e
Ko te wai anake te oro ki Mokomoko
Mā wai te rimurapa e kōhi
Mā wai te kiri tōtara e tihore
Mā wai te harakeke e hāro

E Pōua e
Me he tōtara ko hika
Me he waka ko tikoki
Me te rāhui kura o Tāne ko horo
He kauwaka koe mō te ao o nehe
Nāu tuawhakarehe i tuku iho mai
E ora ana kā rikarika o rātau mā
i kā haumāiui o ōu uri
Ko riro koe hei tuhikura e whakawehi ana i te patupaiarehe

E Pōua e
Hanatu atu rā ki tō ipo
Haere atu rā ki ō nui, ki ō rahi
Haere tahi rā me ā mātau roimata
Mei kore koe
Mei kore tō ū titikaha ki te ōhākī o ō hākui te pōhā hoki e
riro tahi me koe
Te whakawhitika o te rā, ko tō kē
Te toka tūmoana ko mōnenehu
Te wai o rua whetū ko mimiti

We sadly acknowledge the passing of Nicholas Graham Metzger (Kāi Tahu: Kāi Te Ruahikihiki, Kāti Rakiāmoa) of Awarua, who passed away on Thursday morning aged 93.

Born in Invercargill in 1932, Graham – known universally as Tiny – was raised at Greenhills, a small village located in the north-west corner of Bluff Harbour. Tiny's father, Nicholas James Metzger, was a Bluff local of German, Polish, and Irish descent. Tiny's mother, Mouru Caroline "Bubba" Haberfield, was a daughter of William Isaac Haberfield (Jnr) and his second wife, Frances Mercy (née Bailey; formerly Spencer). Both of William's parents were Kāi Tahu. His father, John, was born and raised at Moeraki; a son of Meriana Teitei. William's mother, Elizabeth "Noki" (née Honor; formerly Newton), was born at Whenua Hou; a daughter of Popoia. Before shifting to Greenhills, John and Noki lived on the nearby Ōmāui Native Reserve. In the early 1950s, Tiny purchased land from a Pākehā farmer opposite to where the Haberfield whare stood. John and Noki also participated in the annual tītī harvest on Pikomamakunui island, a small island located between Ruapuke Island and Rakiura. Tiny was first taken here when he was seven months old and undertook the best part of 80 seasons on the island where he built his own house in 1969.

In his younger years, Tiny was raised substantially by his maternal grandparents, Big Nana and Pōua Bill,



and their blended whānau, which included his uncles Stewart Spencer, George Spencer, “Boy” Haberfield, and “Buku” Hemara, and Auntie Koa Haberfield. Tiny attended Greenhills School and then Southland Technical College before completing a carpentry apprenticeship with his Uncle George. He met Maurine Tinnock at secondary school and they married in 1954, going on to have three children: Paul, Robyn, and Barbara.

In 1958 Tiny and Maurine built their marital home in Bluff’s west end during which time he was working as a boatbuilder and rowing competitively. He was part of Awarua Boating Club crews that won regional and national titles and later coached highly regarded Bluff and Southland crews. He also repaired the club’s damaged skiffs and led efforts to build a substantial boatshed, and later another nearby boatshed for Te Ara o Kiwa Sea Scouts, with which he had a long involvement, and for whose cutters he hand-built sets of oars among other things. Tiny worked as a wharfie for approximately 30 years until 1988. From this time, he increasingly dedicated himself to Kāi Tahu affairs.

He was elected to the Executive Committee of the Waitutu Incorporation in 1985, which he served on continuously until the 2010s, for a long time as Deputy Chair. He and the incorporation’s long-serving chair, John Southerwood, were crucial to negotiating the Waitutu Block Settlement Act 1997. Tiny was especially keen to ensure that shareholders could exercise authority over this whenua and led the construction of a substantial lodge complex near the mouth of the Wairaurahiri River between 1998 and the mid-2000s. He also worked closely with the Department of Conservation in the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of a management plan as part of the overall Fiordland National Park Plan.

Tiny was among the first Tangata Tiaki appointed at Awarua under the South Island Customary Fishery Regulations 1999 and drove the establishment of mātaihai at Waitūtū and Pikomamakunui, whose coastlines had been decimated by commercial pāua divers in the late 1980s.

In 1995, Tiny and his daughter Barbara developed and led horticulture and carpentry courses at Te Rau Aroha for unemployed locals. This enabled a nascent Te Rūnaka o Awarua to purchase, re-pile, reclad and re-roof a house neighbouring the Te Rau Aroha Marae complex, which became the rūnaka office. He was awarded a QSM in the 1996 New Year Honours. Tiny first visited Takahanga Marae in the mid-1990s and became deeply fond of the late Bill Solomon and Ngāti Kuri and was hugely saddened by Bill’s untimely passing at Te Rau Aroha in February 2001. Between 1999 and 2003 when the wharekai and



new wharenui were decorated at Te Rau Aroha under Cliff Whiting, Tiny and Maurine became part of the “A-Team” which prepared the great bulk of the tukutuku, kōwhaiwhai, and whakairo.

Cliff was impressed by Tiny’s knowledge of mahi kai, especially relating to toheroa, pāua and pātiki, and his ability to source quantities of quality local tūtū, toitoi, and pingao. Tiny also made trips to Te Tai Poutini to harvest kiekie and prepared the tōtara flitches for carving with his own portable chainsaw mill. However, Cliff was most impressed by that for which Tiny was well-known throughout the iwi and across Te Ao Māori: he mahi pōhā.

Before her death in 1966, Tiny’s taua, who was a massive influence on his life, decreed that her descendants would continue to persist with pōhā-tītī at Pikomamaku. Tiny faithfully followed her directive and ensured all his children, grandchildren and even some of his great-grandchildren, were taught how to prepare harakeke and weave kete, harvest rimurapa and prepare pōhā, carefully source tōtara bark, and prepare preserved tītī without any sharp edges.

When rimurapa was destroyed at Ōmāui by pollution in the late 1970s, Tiny sourced all his rimurapa from Kākā Point, though it too started to come under environmental pressure in the 1990s as that township grew. Tiny also protected and planted out harakeke cultivars and had favourite bushes along the Bluff Road that he had worked since his childhood. For this commitment Te Waka Toi

presented Tiny with He Tohu a Tā Kingi Ihaka in 2004. Since 2016, which was Tiny's last season on his beloved tītī island, his daughter Barbara and mokopuna Michael Stevens, have been key to keeping this material tradition going, which brought Tiny enormous satisfaction.

Tiny kept a diary every day of his life since the mid-1950s and during his time on Pikomamakunui carefully recorded the weather, moon phases, condition and number of tītī, people on the island, and where tītī were being harvested. This information was a uniquely rich data source for Professor Henrik Moller and the "Kia Mau Te Tītī Mō Ake Tonu Atu" research project hosted by the Department of Zoology at the University of Otago between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s. Tiny was an early supporter of this project, when many muttonbirders were opposed to it, and he and Henrik became valued confidantes and trusted friends.

In 2003, Tiny and Maurine shifted to a smaller property opposite Te Rau Aroha. Tiny continued to toil at the marae – building fences, clearing drains, and oiling door and window hinges with great regularity. Whenever they could, he and Maurine provided the marae kitchen with surplus

vegetables from their large gardens and faithfully helped welcome manuhiri and provide manaaki right up until mobility issues made that too challenging. In early 2023, Maurine's declining health necessitated their move into an Invercargill aged care facility where she died in March 2024.

Tiny's pōua was a Methodist and his taua an Anglican, while his mother married a Catholic. Tiny married a Presbyterian whose family had been strong in the Salvation Army. When asked what this might mean when he died, Tiny liked to say none of it mattered as he was going to go to "Māori Heaven"!

Tiny is being brought on to Te Rau Aroha Marae today, 31 July, at 4.30pm. A service will take place there on Monday 3 August from 10am, followed by the nehu at Greenpoint Cemetery.

We are grateful that Tiny lived a long and rich life. Even so, the loss of knowledgeable kaumātua, especially those who selflessly serve our communities, always hurts. We therefore send our aroha to Tiny's whānau and Te Rau Aroha Marae at this difficult time.

E Pōua e

Moe mai, okioki mai

Inuvialuit-Māori Cultural Exchange Continues in Aotearoa

Last month, Rakiura Māori (and Ōtākou Rūnaka) welcomed six Inuvialuit manuhiri from the western Canadian Arctic as part of the second stage of a reciprocal cultural exchange focused on Indigenous harvesting, monitoring, and stewardship.

The visit followed the journey of Rakiura Māori representatives to Tuktuuyaqtuuq in July 2025, where they spent time with Inuvialuit harvesters, community leaders, and future leaders learning about qilalugaq (beluga), and the community-led monitoring and co-management systems that support Inuvialuit responsibilities to the species.

This return visit to the deep south brought the exchange into the world of tītī.

The Inuvialuit group included participants with different roles in their communities, including leadership, education, resource work through the Hunters and Trappers Committee, and emerging young leaders.

While in Southland, the manuhiri travelled to Rakiura (Stewart Island) where they met Tina Nixon (Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body member) and Gail Thompson (Rakiura Tītī Committee member). Both Tina and Gail provided context and background on muttonbirding, as well as the systems of governance and management for tītī and the islands.

Tina, who chairs the Joint Research committee between Bioeconomy Science Institute and the Rakiura Tītī Island Administering Body, says she was humbled to be asked to meet the Inuvialuit visitors in Oban Rakiura.

“We share a deep love and understanding of our environments. The group were keen to learn our ways and shared their knowledge freely and it was interesting to hear how their tribal affairs are run and how they are also constantly monitoring their harvest species. At the heart of our two cultures is a deep understanding of the need to ensure the sustainability of the species we harvest. We are so different but also had so much in common.”

Gail Thompson, a member of the Rakiura Tītī Committee, also helped welcome the manuhiri during their time on Rakiura and shared local perspectives on the tītī harvest, the islands, and the responsibilities carried by whānau across generations. Reflecting on the visit, Gail said, ‘like Rakiura Māori, our Inuvialuit manuhiri are deeply protective

of their mātauranga, their values, and the responsibilities they carry for their whenua, moana, and species. What stood out to me was how important it is for both our peoples to teach our rangatahi, so they understand not only the practices themselves, but the values and tikanga that sit behind them. If we want our cultural and traditional practices to be preserved for the future, we must continue to pass on that knowledge with care, respect, and purpose.’



Sophie in the pluckhouse.

Based on their feedback, our manuhiri were well cared for by the whānau on the respective islands that they visited. They were able to experience how tītī are harvested and processed first-hand. They also learned a bit about how the health of the tītī population and islands is evaluated by the birders each season. For example, they learned how to

identify kiaka; chicks that are weak, in poor condition, or have not been fed properly. As Lania Davis, a muttonbird and whānau host, described decisions about harvesting are guided not by one source of knowledge alone, but by whānau practice, earlier scientific research, and careful seasonal observation:

“We have a set amount our whānau harvest per main manu – research was done by scientists many years ago on the estimated population for Rukawahakura (and other Rakiura Tītī Islands) this helps guide us to remain below the sustainable harvest markers we were given which work well alongside our own observations and matauraka each season. We look for cleaned out burrows, down around holes – how early in the season the chicks are coming out, any kiakas found.”

Throughout the visit, the exchange created space for sharing knowledge, stories, food, language, values, and harvesting practices.

While tītī and beluga belong to very different lands and waters, the conversations revealed many shared responsibilities: caring for species, sustaining customary practices, teaching younger generations, monitoring change, and protecting the relationships that connect people, place, and the natural world.



Doing the mahi in the pluckhouse on Kundy Island.



The team from Tuuktoyak observing what goes on in the pluckhouse.

For Sophie Stefure, an Inuvialuit hunter, harvester, and fisherwoman from Tuktuuyaqtuuq, it was the similarities between the two cultures that stood out. 'What I really appreciate the most is all the sharing that's been happening. They shared their culture. They welcomed us with open arms, sharing each part of their culture, from their food, their language, their values... hunting, fishing, monitoring, how they take care of the land and their animals, and how much they value all of those things. And we have so many similarities in that way, between our two cultures, even though we're on the opposite sides of the world.'

Another member of the Inuvialuit group, Tyrone Raddi, reflected that the visit inspired him to think differently about youth trips on the Tuktuuyaqtuuq Peninsula, often referred to locally as 'Tuk Pen,' especially the importance of bringing language into land-based learning. 'From a leadership standpoint, what they did with their language in order to revitalize it is something that's inspiring and gives you hope. Any program that I do moving forward, and that I'm going to support, I'm going to make sure language is incorporated into it. I do Tuk Pen trips with youth, and from now on I'm going to bring an Elder or someone who

speaks, even if we start off with a few words each trip. That's something to build on.'

The exchange was supported by the Ārramāt Project, Te Weu o te Kaitiaki – Indigenous Revitalization Pathways programme, the Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body, and carried by the generosity of the whānau, harvesters, knowledge holders, and community members who gave their time, opened their homes and places, and shared what tītī means in practice.

For both Inuvialuit and Rakiura Māori, harvesting is not only about taking from the environment. It is about responsibility, observation, teaching, identity, and caring for relationships that have been maintained across generations. This exchange strengthened connections between Indigenous peoples from opposite sides of the world who are each working to uphold their own ways of knowing, harvesting, monitoring, and caring for important species.

The visit marked the completion of the reciprocal exchange, but the relationships and conversations will continue.



Sophie Stefure with her harvest.



Kyle learns how to wax tītī.

Halen's Haven

Halen Norton is a busy guy. What with working full time as a Terminal Manager at Grain Corp, plus juggling four tamariki (with one more on the way), I consider myself lucky to grab a half hour with him one afternoon to learn a bit about his whānau birding customs.

Halen recalls his first season as an eight year old, back in 2000. In fact, most of his childhood trips are hard to forget. 'The season always got off to a slightly intimidating start,' he recalls. The Marine Countess carrying him and his whānau would sidle up perilously close to the rocky coast of Pohotaiwai Island, where his whānau house is located. The swell would more often than not pitch them about as most of the adults made their way ashore on the dinghy. The gear was then tossed from the boat to those waiting on the rocks. Finally, it was time to offload the kids. 'And in the same way as the gear, we were thrown ashore too!' says Halen. Mostly, each child was thrown and caught with no problems. 'But there was occasionally the odd one who found themselves in the ocean!' he laughs.

Halen's now just completed his 18th season. His whanau share their family house on Pohowaitai with several other whanau. It once belonged to his Poua, Nash. Each season he shares his with his uncle, his cousins, his kids, and their kids.

'It's the largest house on Pohowaitai,' says Halen. It's essentially a large work shed with an upstairs living area featuring an open plan kitchen, bunks, a deck, and most importantly, a flushing toilet. Which the neighbours are always welcome to make use of if they're passing by. 'But if we start to run out of water, then it's out of bounds!' laughs Halen.

These days Halen is accompanied to the island by two of his children – Nia, 14, and Aubree, nine. Nia has just completed her sixth season and Aubree her fifth.

Halen's partner, Renee Bull, is affiliated to her whānau house at Murderer's Cove. Her and Halen have a blended whānau, so each year she takes their other two children – Hohepa (8) and Māreikura (5) to bird on Taukihepa (Big South Cape Island).

Seasons can be bountiful or hard going. '2022 was definitely one of the better ones,' says Halen. 'It was the first one after Covid, and the birds were huge! The birds that year in fact, were so big, only 14 to 15 could fit into a bucket, as opposed to the usual 20. The torch itself lasted considerably longer than usual as well.



Halen bringing a few hui home after a day's mahi during the nanao.

Halen puts the good season of 2022 down to the lack of activity on the moana worldwide due to Covid and the world essentially shutting down. This is likely to increased feed for the ocean's ecosystem. His view is that there's a natural balance of things every five to seven years. 'We can't have a boom year every year,' says Halen. 'Cooler oceans bring the fish. But there are warmer periods where the fish remain deeper.'

When I asked Halen to recount his best birding memory, 2023 came to mind. 'During nanao, I came across a white tītī on the ground.' These of course are extremely rare and generally considered tapu because many believe they represent the ancestors. 'Of course I put it back,' says Halen. But what is even more incredible, is that the following year, Halen discovered another in the neighbouring burrow! 'I think the two manu share whakapapa,' says Halen, 'given they were both found next door to each other.'

If Halen's surname seems familiar to you, it may be because his Poua Nash has featured more than once in the Tītī Times. Halen has many fond memories of Nash, but one of the more humorous ones stems from when he was 10 or 11. 'We used to love winding him up,' he says. 'We'd watch him lay all his gear for the season out on his front lawn at Bluff to be assembled ready for the boat. Then we'd swoop in and grab stuff and make off with it, just to see the mad look on his face.' One day, a stranger did the same thing. Poua was so angry this time that he grabbed the guy and head butted him!

Soon after, the whānau had just landed on Pohowaitai and Nash was unhooking the lifts from the chopper. The hook was released from the gear but then swung back



Norton whānau heading down on the chopper 2025 season. Back row: Halen on the left, Renee in the middle, Nia to the right. Front row: Mareikura to the left, Hohepa-Rewi and Aubree to the right

and struck him on the head resulting in a golf ball sized lump appearing. Later, Halen's mother Jeanette was cleaning up the wound when she discovered a tooth sticking out of the lump – 'we figured it must have belonged to the guy the old boy had head butted!'

Nash Norton passed away on Pohowaitai Island in 2021. 'He'd never missed a season since he started birding around his early thirties,' says Halen, which would mean he'd completed around 50.

The house on Pohowaitai belonged to Nash, but Halen's Uncle Houston and the rest of the whānau continue to take care of their island. 'Kaitikakitanga is important,' says Halen. Being a birder isn't about filling buckets, it's about passing on mātauranga to the next generation and having them understand we are there to look after and protect these taonga.

It is our responsibility to ensure the harvest is sustained mō ake tonu atu. Halen's whanau are not the only whanau to occupy a house on the island. 'Several families bird there each year,' Halen says, 'so the kaitiakitanga is shared among us.'

So is nanao. Whānau draw straws each year for the rights to nanao on appointed manu/areas of the island. In the rama/torch season the island is open to bird anywhere.

Halen's dream is to eventually have his immediate whānau in their own dedicated kainga/home. 'The current house definitely feels smaller each year as our whanau have more babies and our little ones grow bigger.' One day, him and Renee will look at building or buying a place together.

For now, the island remains a haven where the whānau can express kotahitanga each year and continue to build special memories.



2023 season – Nia holding the white Titi.



White Titi caught and returned during the nanao 2023 season – Halen and Aubree.

Ruawahakura Trapping Update

Lania Edwards

Kia ora koutou,

On Sunday 12th July 2026 we flew to Rukawahakura to rebait and reset our trap network. It hadn't been done since the end of May.

We had great weather for this and had no issues getting around to get them all checked and rebaited.

Our 6th DOC200 trap (closest to Joss's passage) had a very decomposed rat in it. Since our last three checks, this is the 3rd DOC200 located near Joss's Passage to have a rat in it. We suspect this is because it's very busy with boats travelling through all the time, so most likely a rat jumped ship and met our trap network.

Being a mast season we were expecting to have more rats in traps. Biosecurity dog handler Sandy King mentioned recently that there have been a lot of live rats found on vessels and seen on shorelines around Rakiura.

We encountered no other rats in or under any other traps around the island and saw no sign of live rats present. We did however see and hear an abundance of manu including tieke, robins, kakariki, bellbirds, tūī, also the pekepekekiore/ mushroom which is another positive sign of no live rats.

Everything went smoothly and there were no other issues to report. We hope to next check the traps in August.

Lania



Decomposed rat.



Pekepekekiore_mushroom.

WHANAUNGATANGA IN ACTION



14 year-old Elijah Turner catching birds
(photo taken by his mum Shaye Turner).

We LOVE to receive your pics and lately there have been SOOO many! These are just a small selection of the huge amount we've been provided with. Thank you to all of you who have taken the time to share with us your special manu memories. There is so much whanaungatanga evident across all of the mahi you people are doing out there. If you don't see your photos here it doesn't mean they won't appear in future issues. So do keep them coming!

Right: Lachy Mitchell
with his first bird to
bring home. Photo
Emma Mitchell.



Below: Sisters Alizzae
and Manākai catching
birds on the ground.
Photo Luana Milnes.



The Poutama train heading home. Photo Emma Mitchell.





*Alex Mitchell carrying his birds home.
Photo Emma Mitchell.*



Athena Norton dewaxing. Photo Luana Milnes.



*Manākai Norton and his feathery friend.
Photo Luana Milnes.*



Little birders. Photo Amanda Bull.



Above: Whānau ready to farewell the island. Photo Amanda Bull.

Below: 3 year old Alexandra Kingipotiki plays in the plucked feathers while the adults catch birds. Photo Riki Potiki.



Above: Three generations in the pluck box. (From left: Chris and Martin Gray, Eleanor Russell, Lexie, Kayson and Antony Gray). Photo Martin Gray.

Below: No one is too little to help process birds! Photo S. Ryan.



Plucking birds in the pluckhouse. Photo Martin Gray.

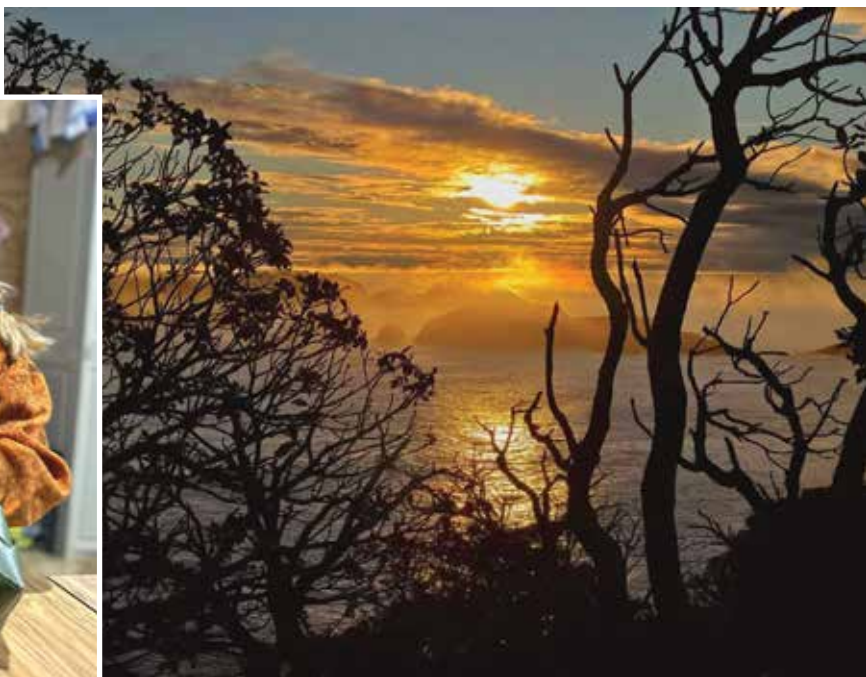


Above: Weaving a basket with Taus. Photo Martin Gray.

Left middle: Kayson carrying his tītī. Photo Martin Gray.

Right middle: Steve, Mason, Levi, Jane, Mackenzie & Jesse Rout, with Alex & Lachy Mitchell on the helicopter pad. Photo Emma Mitchell.

Below: Waipuna-a-Rangi in the bush. Photo Amanda Bull.



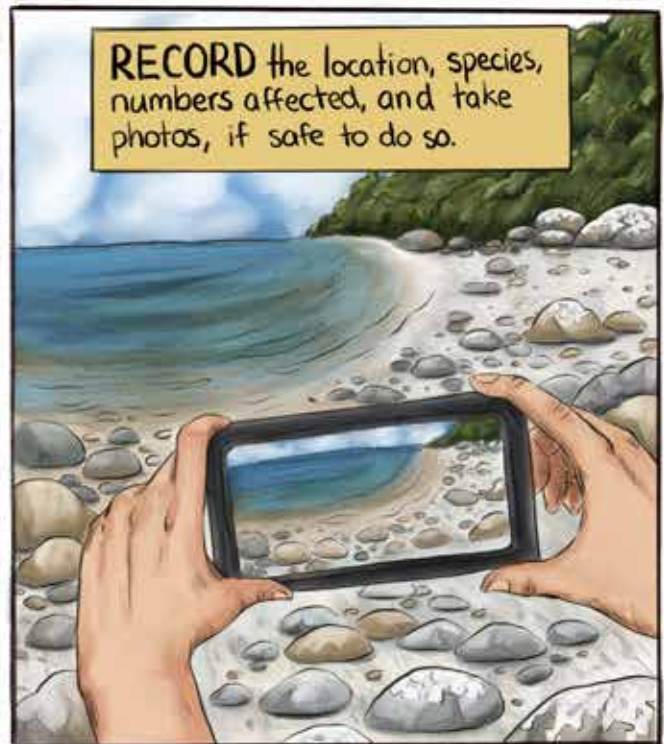
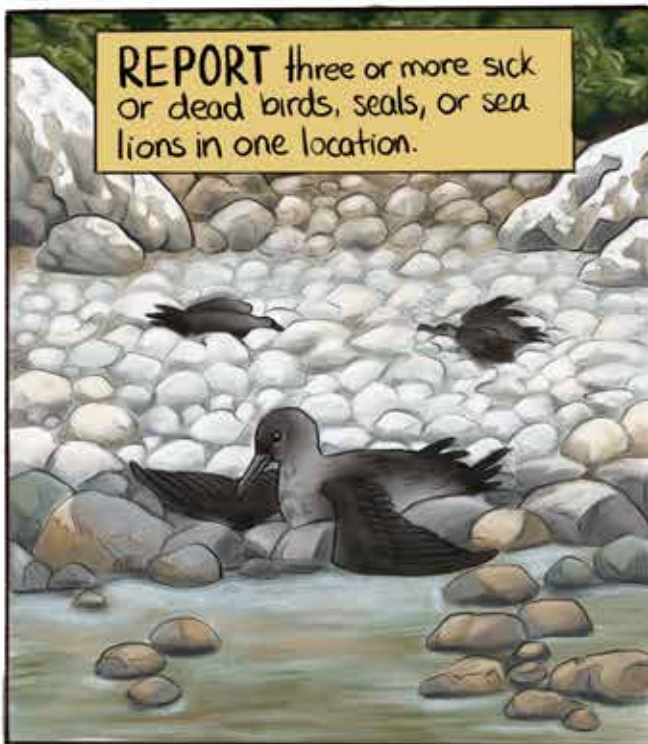
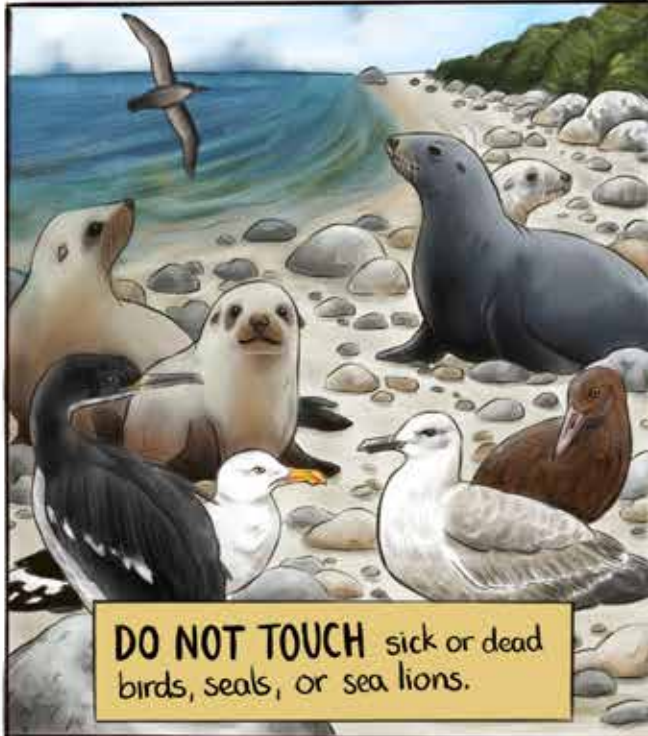
Above: Sea mist over Pohowaitai, Tamaitemioka, Putauhina, Huirapa and The Nuggets. Photo Martin Gray.



Tawera, Amanda and Anahera on Rahui. Photo Amanda Bull.

BIRD FLU

KNOW WHAT TO DO



Report all information to the MPI Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline (0800 80 99 66). MPI advises that the risk to human health remains low, with the highest risk associated with direct contact with infected birds or marine mammals. Additionally, it would be great if whanau let the Committees know about any sightings so we can build a picture of what is happening across our takiwā.

Guidance for dealing with sick or dead birds during an H5 bird flu outbreak



General public and private landowners

Who should read this

This guidance is intended for the general public and for people who have sick or dead wild or domestic birds on their property.

It provides information on keeping safe and disposing of dead birds during an H5 bird flu (H5N1 avian influenza clade 2.3.4.4b) outbreak in New Zealand. However, it is useful advice for dealing with sick or dead birds generally.

About avian influenza

Bird flu is a highly contagious viral disease that mainly affects birds. It can also spread to mammals including, on rare occasions, people.

There are two main types of avian influenza:

- High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI), which can cause severe signs and high death rates in birds. There are a number of strains including H5, H7, and H9.
- Low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI), which typically causes few or no signs in birds but can possibly mutate to HPAI.

H5 bird flu has caused the deaths of millions of birds overseas, including both wild and domesticated birds, such as poultry and other pet birds, and is now in New Zealand.

Human infection with any strain of bird flu is rare. It is usually only found in people who have had a lot of contact with infected birds or other infected animals. Sustained human-to-human transmission has not been reported.

Overseas, some mammals, including dairy cattle in the United States, have been infected after contact with infected birds. With supportive care, infected cattle generally recover in two to three weeks.

H5 bird flu is not a food safety concern and the risk to human health is assessed as low. However, if it becomes widespread in the wild bird population, we won't be able to eradicate it from wild birds or prevent them from continuing to spread the virus. By following good biosecurity practices, we can limit its impact.

If you suspect H5 bird flu, contact MPI's exotic pest and disease hotline

If you see three or more sick or dead wild birds or marine mammals (such as seals or sea lions) in a group, report it immediately to the exotic pest and disease hotline on **0800 80 99 66**. The hotline operates 24/7.

Do not handle or move dead or dying birds unless advised otherwise. This helps prevent the spread of the virus and protects your health.

Provide as much detail as you can, including:

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

We will note the details and an incursion investigator will contact you.

If you find sick or dead birds

During an H5 bird flu outbreak, you may find sick or dead birds in public areas such as national parks and reserves, beaches, parks, roads and footpaths, private land, or areas that government agencies or councils are responsible for.

Sick or dead birds can carry diseases that can cause illness in humans, not just bird flu. For this reason, it is good practice to avoid touching or interacting with birds or anything contaminated with bird faeces or secretions. Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and good hygiene if you need to handle sick or dead birds.



A Year of Progress Across the Tītī Islands

Reflections from the RTIAB Work Programme Coordinator

It has been a busy and varied year in the role of Work Programme Coordinator for the Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body, with work ranging from biosecurity and bird flu preparedness through to weed control, health and safety, rubbish removal, research support and whānau engagement.

H5AI

By now the Tītī Island community are well aware of the imminent threat to the islands posed by avian bird flu (H5AI). While New Zealand remained free of the disease through the 2026 tītī season, a great deal of work is ongoing to ensure our community was not caught unprepared should it arrive. This has involved building relationships with key H5AI response organisations such as Te Tira Whakamātaki, MPI, Te Whatu Ora-Health New Zealand, Environment Southland and DOC. The RTIAB has invested a significant amount of time helping agencies understand the realities of tītī harvesting and ensuring our community's perspective is reflected in planning and preparedness discussions.

More recently, the confirmation of H5AI in New Zealand has reinforced the value of this groundwork, with ongoing engagement helping ensure birders remain informed and prepared. It will continue be critical to ensure our community is adequately prepared for whatever eventuates next birding season.



Taupata update

Taupata continues to be one of the most significant ecological threats facing the islands. Considerable effort has gone into working alongside Manaaki Whenua, DOC and whānau to support control operations.

Equipment and advice have been provided to several islands, while planning has progressed for larger-scale control work. The hope is that successful operations will not only reduce the threat but also help build support and funding for future programmes



Supporting Biosecurity on the Ground

Strong biosecurity remains one of the best safeguards for the islands. Our work has involved assisting the detector dog inspections with the checking of boats, helicopters and freight heading to the islands. While no live rodents were detected, several indications of previous rodent activity highlighted just how important vigilance remains. A rodent incursion response kit that can be housed with one of the helicopter companies has also been developed.





Rakiura Titi Islands
ADMINISTERING BODY

Looking After Our Environment

The programme also supported a number of conservation initiatives, including DOC bat surveys and the deployment of bat detection equipment on several islands. Health and safety support was also provided to whānau involved in predator-control and other island management activities.



Improving Emergency Preparedness

Work has also begun to strengthen emergency response capability. Discussions with the Otago Rescue Helicopter Service have focused on improving information about landing sites, hazards and access requirements to support future medical evacuation responses.



Cleaning Up the Islands

A practical but important piece of work has been supporting rubbish removal from islands. Old structures and accumulated waste have been removed from several locations, helping improve the condition of island sites for future generations.



Looking Ahead

The past year has highlighted the value of strong relationships, practical planning and whānau-led action. Whether preparing for bird flu, tackling taupata, strengthening biosecurity, supporting research or improving emergency preparedness, the focus has remained on protecting both our islands and the people who continue tītī harvesting. I also wish to thank all of those who have provided support and advice to me in this role as it has been invaluable.

Zane Moss
Work Programme
Coordinator, RTIAB



Understanding PFAS Levels in Tītī Chicks

Brendon Dunphy,

Integrative Biology Lab, Waipapa Taumata Rau/The University of Auckland

Context Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (hereafter PFAS) are found in all manner of modern products e.g. non-stick pans, firefighting foam. They are extremely persistent compounds, which have been termed ‘forever chemicals’ (Figure 1). This is on account of their inability to be broken down by biological processes. PFAS enter the marine environment through multiple sources e.g. groundwater discharge, wastewater effluent. As such they are rapidly transported by oceanic currents, with no part of the ocean now considered ‘free’ of PFAS.

Due to their biomagnification in food webs, concerns are growing on their impact on marine predators such as seabirds and also the human communities that consume them. High PFAS levels impact birds and humans by reducing immune function and fertility levels.

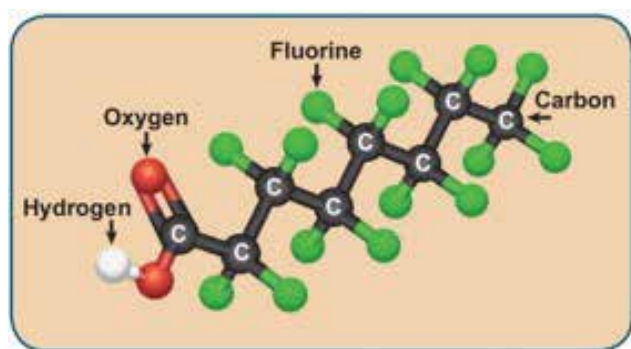


Image credit: NIEHS.

Figure 1: PFAS molecule showing chemical structure.

Migratory seabirds that feed on fish (such as shearwaters) are exposed to higher levels of PFAS. Moreover, different tissues (feathers, muscle) have different PFAS levels so identifying best tissues to monitor for each species is also important to understand. At present, the EU sets a limit of 8.0 µg PFAS per kilogram of bird. However, there are no published studies on PFAS in NZ seabirds, thus we have little idea of what levels of PFAS our birds present with.

Our project: To begin to address this we are undertaking a pilot study looking at PFAS levels in tītī chicks and will test PFAS levels in muscle. We will also obtain adults killed as fisheries bycatch to look at PFAS levels across life stages.

Our team consists of experts from Waipapa Taumata Rau/University of Auckland and experts from France. Tītī samples will be analysed in New Zealand at the Auckland Uni’s School of Chemistry. This allows us to answer two key questions: 1) What levels of PFAS are there in different chick tissues? 2) Do chicks have higher PFAS levels than adults?

Implications: Getting a handle on PFAS levels in tītī can allow us to understand risks and impacts. I should point out it’s not all doom and gloom. A recent study showed a sharp drop in PFAS levels in gannet eggs once regulations were introduced see Fournier et al. (2026) below. So, understanding PFAS levels will be necessary to look at how we manage the risks, and optimise what our responses will be.

Fournier, A., A.Kerric, and R. A.Lavoie. 2026. “Half a Century of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances in Northern Gannet Eggs: Impact of Regulations.” *Journal of Applied Toxicology* 1–14.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/jat.70175>.

Biosecurity Project Completes Ninth Season of Protecting the Tītī Islands

The 2026 Tītī Islands Biosecurity Project has successfully completed its ninth season, with surveillance carried out between 12 March and 19 May. Once again, detector dog teams Karen Andrew and Sandy King, accompanied by dogs Mica and Mawson, played a vital role in helping protect the islands from unwanted pests.

A total of 186 inspections were completed throughout the season, covering both vessel and helicopter departures. 'The results are reassuring,' says Sandy, 'No live rodents were detected in any gear or on any vessels inspected. This means people are being vigilant and taking good precautions when they travel to and from the islands.'

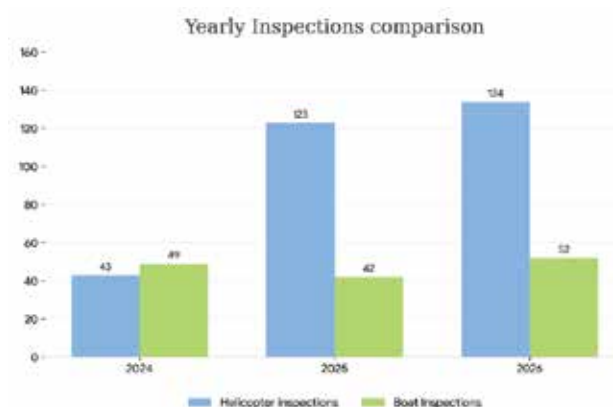
The detector dogs made indications on 25 loads during 16 vessel departure inspections. Follow-up checks confirmed these were residual scents rather than live animals, which shows just how sensitive the dogs' sense of smell is! No rodent scent was detected on any vessels themselves.

In total, 52 vessel departures were inspected. At least five departures were missed because departure times were not notified. 'It's really important for skippers to communicate departure plans as soon as they are able to so that inspections can be arranged before gear leaves for the islands,' says Sandy.

Helicopter operations continued to present logistical challenges due to the large number of flights and multiple departure locations. 'On busy days, between one and 14 flights departed from up to four different locations, making it impossible to inspect every flight, Sandy says.' Of the 144 helicopter departure notifications received, 10 inspections were missed.

Inspections were undertaken at helicopter departure sites in Bluff, Invercargill and Fern Gully on Rakiura. While no live rodents were detected in gear, the detector dogs regularly indicated the presence of mice at all mainland helicopter departure sites, and rats were detected at Fern Gully. One indication was also made on personal gear travelling by helicopter, reinforcing the need for everyone to remain vigilant when packing equipment.

Another biosecurity risk the team continue to encounter comes from dried vegetation, seeds and soil which were all commonly found on the bottoms of cages and containers. These materials can harbour pests or invasive species and should always be removed before departure.



Comparison of numbers of helicopter and boat inspections done in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

The dogs also found evidence of both rats and mice around the Rakiura Shipping storage shed in Bluff. Gear stored in or near the shed, particularly overnight or for extended periods, is at greater risk of rodent contamination. Similarly, loads that are inspected but then remain on the wharf for several hours before departure, especially after dark, or vessels that anchor overnight near Rakiura before unloading, are exposed to a greater risk of rodents boarding after inspections have been completed. 'We urge people to use rodent-proof containers wherever possible and to clean and check gear before packing,' says Sandy. 'Inspecting items for signs of rodents such as chew marks or droppings, and packing and arranging for inspections as close to departure all help minimise risk.' Keeping other dogs away during inspections also allows the detector dogs to work more efficiently.



Mouse scats on load stored at freight shed, Bluff – indicated by Mica.

The continued success of the programme relies on the support of everyone involved in the harvest. Encouragingly, this year's project was again met with strong cooperation from birders, vessel operators, truck drivers and crane operators, many of whom assisted by sharing departure information and ensuring loads could be checked before being loaded onto vessels.

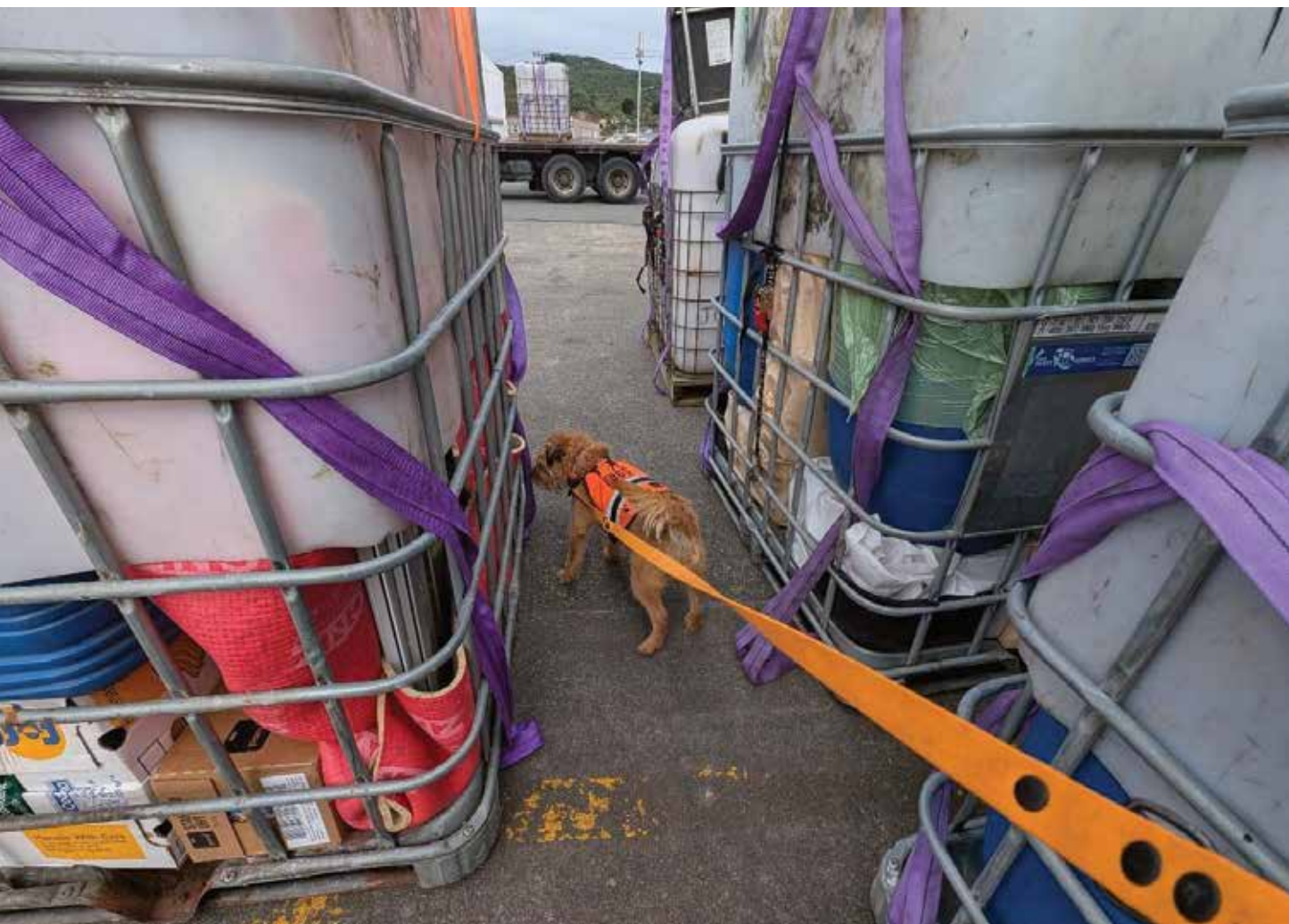
Sandy and Karen have both noticed a growing appreciation for the detector dogs and the work they do. 'More people are recognising the important role they play in protecting the Tītī Islands, and many have expressed their gratitude for seeing them on the job.'

'Protecting the islands is a shared responsibility. Thank you to all those who continue to play their part in helping to ensure the taonga species that occupy them can thrive.'

Below: Mica getting in amongst it. Open cages like these present additional risk if left for long periods where rodents are present.



Mica on the job



Searching for Greater Short-Tailed Bats on Pukeweka

Kia ora koutou

We thought it was time to share a bit of an update about our recent Pukeweka visit in late February-early March 2026.

What a special island; we were greeted by tīeke, korimako and tūi and some windfall. Needless to say, Cliff Kelland, our host, soon had things sorted and extended us his manaaki and generosity of time and knowledge. The weather was pretty reasonable too, considering the time of year.

Of the six nights we had on Pukeweka, four of those were suitable for us to use harp traps (our main capture device with strings and a bag that the bats hopefully fly into). We had bat detectors out every night recording, despite the wind and rain. We watched the entrance of Bat Cave on Rerewhakaupoko/Solomon Island with some flash night scopes and binoculars provided by Ian of Davidson Watts Ecology – who knew how many seabirds really are flying in the half-dark!

While we did not trap or record any bats on Pukeweka this time around, we are stoked to confirm that the bat detectors worked well on the Titi Islands and did screen most of the nightly seabird chorus out. We also confirmed that harp traps are safe and an appropriate tool to use on

the Tītī Islands. In over 200 hours of harp trapping, only 1 tītī was caught, and it was happily resting in the bag until it was released.

The support of both the Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body, the Rakiura Tītī Committee and their island whānau for the next stage has been outstanding. We had bat recorders (all kindly on loan from Ian again) out on seven islands this season, with an emphasis on targeting the rātā forests and the last recorded locations of the greater short-tailed bat. We are still going through the recordings. This was the largest ever survey for bats across these islands, so we are super appreciative of all the whānau who have stepped forward to deliver this mahi.

We will continue to work with the Rakiura Tītī Islands Administering Body and the Rakiura Tītī Committee to progress further on-island harp trap surveys next season, if supported. We remain hopeful and positive about finding a bat. The stories from those who recall the days when bats would “brush past your ears” and “there were hundreds in the cave” continue to inspire us.

Thank you also to DOC and to Re:wild for supporting the search with funding.

Ros Cole, Kerry Borkin (DOC), Ian Davidson-Watts (Davidson-Watts Ecology).



Lesser short-tailed bat. The New Zealand greater short-tailed bat is an endemic, critically endangered species that is now considered extinct. It was last sighted on Stewart Island in 1967.



Lesser short-tailed bats caught in a harp trap.



Mackenzie & Mason Rout sit with Lachy & Alex Mitchell watching Jane Rout plucking birds. Photo Emma Mitchell.



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