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*COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER – Mahi tahi!!*

## Rangers' Report – August 2021

### Operational Summary...

Nga mihi mahana koutou (warm greetings to you all)

Well, here we are again, another lockdown has us all nestled into our safe bubbles (except for those awesome essential workers), is it not amazing to think that these forms of jargon (lockdowns, bubbles, MIQ, Delta variant etc) are all now common place in our lives as we navigate our way through. My family and I do have to admit we enjoy a bit of lockdown, probably because we are at that stage in life where 'normal' life is ridiculously busy, so we really enjoy slowing down and having the time to pause and really enjoy each other and the beautiful natural resources we are so lucky to have at our property and at the Whangarei Heads in general!

I suppose another benefit of these changing times is that we are more capable than before at building our resilience and new skills to get us through. In a similar way, the BHCT restoration project at Bream Head/Te Whara is also strong and resilient to the challenges of change; be it environmental changes, technological changes or social changes. Of specific relevance, is the projects' ability to manage the potential negative effects of Covid lockdown restrictions due to the continuous application of an intensive predator control programme. The continuous availability of a mix of toxins and traps ensures predator numbers are kept exceptionally low in this suppression system at all times, and when change occurs this fresh, up to date network is ready and capable to ride out times when access is restricted or limited. The most important result of this is that our precious native species from birds big and small, to lizards, to invertebrates and freshwater species are all better protected consistently without dramatic fluctuations from threats and change. It was fortunate that just prior to lockdown our wonderful, committed team of volunteers and contract rangers had visited their intensive network of traps and toxin stations, as well as monitoring sites for the GFP – so the network was in very good shape. The rodent and toxin can last in good condition at this time of year in the bush for 6-8 weeks, so this keeps the fast breeding potential of any residual rodents, plus any possible rodent invasion into the forest under tight control. Unfortunately, not being able to keep our trap network on its normal fortnight rotation is a bit of a problem, however due to the slower breeding cycles of predators such as possums and stoats for example, not checking the traps for four or even six weeks at this time of year is not highly risky and for possums we actually have the benefit now that we are using double tap toxin, which is very effective at killing both rodents and possums (more tools in the toolbox). Although we have good systems in place there's nothing like getting out in the forest regularly to really understand the how the ecology is responding and performing to the management systems we are using to try and protect it, and there's nothing like getting out for a good walk to rejuvenate one's mauri/soul too!

Therefore, actual on the ground mahi achieved in and around the reserve during August was limited to the first two weeks leading up to lockdown at midnight on Tuesday the 17<sup>th</sup>. As already outlined our volunteers and rangers were super busy during those two weeks again covering the 65+ km's of trap/toxin lines and 2000+ devices ensuring all the predator control equipment and systems were in absolute tip top shape. Our ranger team did some very long days packing in even more gear to finish the gfp protection intensification, as well as conduct a simple check of the burrows to attain a baseline of how many adults were already within burrows. This check was later followed up by our very own seabird lady Cathy Mitchell, who confirmed active burrows with adults on eggs. The Busby Head trappers crew who meets every second Sunday of each month finished the lowering of the bait stations on their lines and continue to do a splendid job of keeping their lines and devices in excellent condition. Of considerable note was the exciting initiation of the first Predator Free Whangarei (PFW) bait station installation contract which the Trust secured

and is now delivering on a large Taurikura ridge private property. This contract is a true testament to the capability of BHCT to efficiently and effectively deliver such services and is all based on the proven quality and transparency of the Trusts' full ecological restoration experience (more about this project and possible other PFW contracts later in the report) efficiently and effectively.

In terms of predator trap catch rates the results are very similar to August 2020 with extremely low rates across all targeted species, particularly rats who returned zero catches out of the hundreds of available trap nights. The only real animal to score in the catch department were mice, but only 10 were caught and only two of these were inside the reserve. The year on year total trap catch rate comparisons are going to be skewed again due to this year's recent lockdown, because our team have not been able to make as many trap checks as other more 'normal' years. And, as if that all wasn't enough excitement for you all, the mustelid trapping team were very stoked to catch a large male stoat out at the gfp site just before lockdown, it was highly likely the one we had seen once on our infra-red camera at the study site a few days earlier – those are the big catches that get us pumped!!

This month saw other important tasks and activities achieved such as:

- Smugglers maintenance group led by Colin Edwards, had a jolly good time and smashed back more weeds to keep this stunning part of the reserve in grand shape.
- Hut and Track maintenance by our super volunteers
- Bait bagging again – Thanks Roger Clarke!
- Trap clip cleaning – kia ora Kim Tito!

## Monthly predator control results: August 2021

Pest	Total # caught this month	# caught this month previous year.	# of total rats caught Norway or Ship rats?	Total # caught inside res. this month (i.e. not on boundary/buffer).	Total # caught inside res. this month previous yr (i.e. not on boundary/buffer).	# caught 2021 YTD	# caught 2020 YTD.
Rat	0	1	-	0	1 of 1	47	38
Possum	1	0	-	0 of 1	0	9	14
Stoat	1	0	-	1 of 1	0	9	5
Weasel	1	0	-	0 of 1	0	18	16
Ferret	0	0	-	0	0	0	0
Feral cat	0	0	-	0	0	0	1
Mouse	10	0	-	1 of 10	0	55	45
Hedgehog	0	0	-	0	0	13	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2 of 13</b>	<b>1 of 1</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>126</b>

### Analysis:

- August 2021 – data impacted by Covid 19 lockdown – two weeks without trap checks will impact upon results.
- Extremely low catch rates for most species in August 2021.
- More mice caught than August 2020, but only 10 mice out of hundreds of available trap nights. No rats caught at all!!
- Just last month the trap catch rates indicated “increased rat catch rate inside reserve, may be tail end (sorry about the pun) of normal autumn rodent spike. August trap data and August rodent tracking survey will be interesting to watch if this trend decreases or not”. August 2021 trap data for rats returned 0, confirms July 2021 spike was an autumn spike only. It will still be interesting to see what the September tracking tunnel results return too.
- Only 1 possum, stoat and weasel caught in August 2021.

**Local support...** I would just like to take this opportunity to thank some local folks/organisations for their great support recently. Neil Dobbs lives at the lovely property affectionately known as Manaia Gardens in McKenzie Bay. Neil's business is called Work Injury Care and he has been supporting BHCT for several years now training and accrediting the contract rangers with their certificates to use and handle some of the controlled substances needed for our mahi to control predators. Neil has been very generous in donating some of his time to the project because he likes to support local businesses and the successful conservation outcomes we are achieving in our community. Many thanks Neil. I would also like to acknowledge again the amazing Kiwi Coast team, in particular Ngaire Sullivan, who has also supported the Trust very well over the years and recently funded all the costs for some of our team to get accredited for required certification and licenses.







*Geoff (centre) with Kruger (left) and Ngawaru checking the standards required to install the stations and cut the tracks.*

## BHCT delivers early PFW contracts...

After positive planning and negotiation with Northland Regional Council PFW staff, the BHCT was recently very proud to sign up the first service delivery contract with a community group for the PFW possum eradication project. On a beautiful sunny morning in early August, long term BHCT trustee Geoff Pike and BHCT project manager Adam Willetts met with two awesome local Ngatiwai hapu members Kruger Keremete and Ngawaru Munro at the base of the lovely Prince-Pike Taurikura ridge farm property off Robinson Road. Kruger and Ngawaru have been part of a fantastic local hapu group working for the last few months with the legendary Mike Urlich controlling weeds around Whangarei Heads as part of a tripartite partnership known as 'Waka Hourua' between Weed Action Whangarei Heads, Ngatiwai hapu (Ngati Korora/Te Waiariki) and BHCT. To continue this partnership and provide real jobs for local whanau, hapu, iwi in our rohe the BHCT has engaged these two fine chaps to work alongside Geoff Pike to cut the tracks and install the necessary bait stations. Once finished, they will have formed the necessary network on the property to deliver the toxin that will knockdown any possums. The possum knockdown phase is the first stage in the PFW possum eradication project and will be critical to the success, so absolute attention to detail is essential and is being audited by NRC staff at regular intervals. The team had been cracking along nicely through the first two weeks of August but then had to put the brakes on when lockdown hit us on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Despite this slight setback however, the team is now back into the contract work again as of 8 September 2021 and enjoying being back outdoors and getting back to nature. Geoff has provided a cool picture of a kaka (see below) and has reported seeing or hearing one everyday they have been at the site!! I am also happy to report that BHCT has been in negotiation with PFW and has

signed a contract to deliver the install of possum 'mop up' and detection devices throughout Bream Head Scenic Reserve (BHSR). The mop up phase comes after the initial possum knockdown has been proven successful and is then followed by the detect and respond phase. BHCT can go straight to delivering the mop up install on BHSR because of the proven low trap catch rates the Trust has been able to attain over the last few years due to its sustained, intensive predator control programme.

In summing up the mahi so far Geoff wrote this:

*'I have found it very rewarding rediscovering all these patches of lovely bush when I was starting to think that all we had on our place was moth plant! The boys are working very hard and are keen to learn new skills. I hope they will be ready to carry on this work by themselves at the completion of this contract'.*



*Can you spot the kaka??*



*Check out that for hard yakka, cutting tracks through fields of pampas weeds is no easy task!!*



# Introducing Hadden Morrison...

Kia ora koutou katoa,  
Ko Whitirea Park te maunga  
Ko Pauatahanui Inlet te moana  
Ko Mana te whenua  
Ko Ngati Toa Domain te whare  
Ko Hadden Morrison tōku ingoa  
*(editors note: Hadden is originally from the Mana region just north of Wellington, overlooking Whitirea Park and the beautiful Pauatahanui Inlet).*



It's been a real pleasure and honour getting out into some of Aotearoa's ātaahua taiao and helping with the mahi BHCT have so successfully sustained over the past 25 years. Having recently moved to Whangārei Heads after stints managing remote lodges in Kangaroo Valley, NSW and Pureora Forest Park, I'm now happy to call the Heads home and have been grateful for the welcome so many of you have given my wife, my newborn son Munro & I since arriving.

I'm currently a 'dog's body' - doing whatever is needed on the hill and learning the ropes quickly. I was lucky enough to spend a bit of time with Simon Braithwaite out on the hill before he left and have voluntarily been doing G-Line for the past year and a half. I'm currently doing SW Mustelids, C & A West, Au, B, Q, Placo and NW Boundary but happy to pick up anything that needs doing. There's no better office in the world!

## Rangers' reports... *Written by BHCT ranger Keith Townsend:*

Before we all got locked in our bubbles in August I had the opportunity to attend the annual Sanctuaries of New Zealand conference. A three day gathering of likeminded conservation enthusiasts from around the motu. It was the most rangers I have ever seen in one place! Many were representing unfenced reserves like BHCT, a lot were from predator-proof fenced sanctuaries too. What stood out for me was the real sense of community shared between the group. These were people with same struggles of chasing hard to catch stoats, weedy regenerating forest and supporting threatened species. This year the conference was in Raetihi and had a kaupapa Māori focus, showcasing a new iwi led initiative in the central high country. I returned with my kete of knowledge full to the brim and motivated as!



*A beautiful image of Te Whara from Ocean Beach during a lockdown 'beach patrol'*



**17<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL SANCTUARIES WORKSHOP 2021**

10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> of August 2021, Raetihi.  
Hosted by SONZI and Uenuku Trust



## Meet a volunteer...

*Written by Volunteer Grant Stevens:*

Pam and I came to Whangarei in 1975 on returning from overseas and we have always been involved with conservation projects around NZ. Pam is a long time chairperson on the Matakoho Limestone Island project. I am a retired civil /structural engineer and have maintained a lifetime love of tramping especially in NZs wilderness/mountain areas. I first became aware of the B H project when Cathy and Pete Mitchell left Matakoho Limestone and Pete became a BH ranger and a little later I started helping Alan Willis on his bait line. The bait lines are great to get you into the wilder nooks and crannies on the hill and encounter some of the less common birds such as robins, more-pork and kaka. I really enjoy walking uphill, so the 4 times yearly tracking tunnel run is great for the fitness.

Congratulations to the BHCT project for running a great volunteer programme with good communication and engendering the knowledge in all volunteers that their work is appreciated.



## Grey faced petrel burrow survey...

As you may have read and be aware, ground based nesting seabirds such as Oi/grey faced petrels have been back on terra firma for a few weeks now, tucked up snug and warm in their burrows and sitting on eggs. Our local seabird champion Cathy Mitchell spent a full day clambering around the steep terrain at the eastern tip of the reserve checking each of the burrows in the gfp monitoring site. Using an endoscope camera Cathy was able to confirm 10 gfp adults were indeed sitting on eggs, and another four gfp adults in burrows were most likely on eggs too. So, out of the possible 18 burrows we monitor we have a likely 14 gfp eggs being incubated. Just as I have often written in previous ranger reports at this time of year, this breeding season period provides a mixed bag of emotions, and one must balance the exciting but nerve wracking news at the same time. The real worry about our precious taonga now begins, firstly we must protect the eggs from rodent protection. Next, we must try to protect the adults and eggs from possible stoat predation, and then if we are fortunate enough to support these seabirds through this initial stage, we have to work extremely hard to protect any hatched chicks and guide them through to fledging in late December/January. It all definitely gives me some more grey hairs each year!! We know that if we are successful in protecting these hypersensitive species, then most other species we have residing in the reserve have a great chance of surviving over the breeding spring/summer season too. A huge thanks to Cathy for her time, expertise and energy with part of the overall restoration project.



# Weed of the Month

(from the Whangarei Heads Weed Action website <http://weedaction.org.nz/weed-of-the-month/>)

## Jasmine *Jasminum polyanthum*



**What does it look like?** This is an evergreen climbing vine that grows up to mid-canopy height. It has very long, non-woody, round, tough, stems that root at the nodes. Smooth edged leaves are arranged in opposite pairs on stems, and are divided along the midvein into usually 7 leaflets with the terminal leaflet (up to 7 x 2.5 cm) the largest. Leaves are dark green when mature, new growth is tinged with red. It has masses of highly scented, small white tubular flowers, mainly in spring followed by occasional glossy black fruit.

**Why is it a problem?** Highly shade tolerant vine which grows rapidly over forest floor, and into the canopy, forming dense, long-lived masses that smother and kill all plants from ground level to medium to high canopy. Stems layer profusely and runners spread long distances over tough sites under buildings, rocks, and so on. Ingress into established forest is rapid via ground or canopy. High shade tolerance means it can flower under full canopy, and tolerates drought, damp, wind, salt, differing soil types, and damage. Extremely hard to kill.

**How does it spread?** Birds readily spread seed where it is produced, but most spread is from fragments dumped in greenwaste and by runners from garden infestations at bush margins. Very rapid growth from stem fragments.

**How much of it do we have on the Whangarei Heads Peninsula?** Jasmine infestations are quite localised around the Heads because it does not produce much seed. Infestations are usually concentrated around gardens, and on bush margins and roadsides where garden waste has been dumped. Where infestations do occur, they are frequently extensive. These infestations are of particular concern where they occur at bush margins and are rapidly infiltrating the bush.

**What can we DO about it at Whangarei Heads?** Jasmine is very hard to kill once established so the best thing to do is to ensure you don't introduce it to your property, deliberately or accidentally, and ensure that you dispose of your garden waste responsibly if you have it at your place. Controlling infestations thoroughly when small and following up until eradicated will also save significant effort, focusing first on keeping it out and away from bush areas. For large well established infestations control is still achievable, the approach just needs to be tactical, moving in a rolling front and undertaking the necessary follow up to ensure complete kill at the retreating margin.

How do I control it?

**Special disposal notes: Spread primarily by garden dumping. Dispose of appropriately.**

- Manual control difficult due to growth form (stems root wherever they contact the ground). Vines can be progressively rolled up, and disposed at a refuse transfer station, or by drying thoroughly and composting, or drying and burning, or burying deeply. Stem fragments left in soil after rolling will re-sprout, and then these can be manually pulled (or followed up with herbicide methods below). Intensive follow up required to locate and pull regrowth from any remaining stem fragments.
- Prune vines as close to original stem as possible, then immediately treat cut stem with (5g metsulfuron + 1ml penetrant/1L water), or (250ml Banvine® + 10ml penetrant/1L water). Dispose of all cut stems at a refuse transfer station, or by drying thoroughly and composting, or drying and burning, or burying deeply.
- Cut back & spray regrowth (wait for healthy, mature foliage) with (5g metsulfuron+10ml penetrant/10L water), or (120ml Banvine® + 10ml penetrant/10L water).

Not prolific seed production – spread largely through dumped garden refuse. Very rapid growth from stem fragments. Once established it is hard to kill & dispose of – prioritise preventing spread into new areas. Most infestations will require several follow-up treatments.



## Coming up in September:

**Predator Free possum detection device install begins...** BHCT contract ranger(s) will install the new devices that will form a full reserve intensive grid network to detect possums in the reserve using lured cameras and remote reporting leghold traps.

**Conservation week (4-12 September 2021)...** BHCT events team will organise and run online events throughout Conservation Week such as colouring in competitions and a cool online quiz, prizes to be won!

**Load the road install...** BHCT rangers will add more traps and monitoring equipment along Ocean Beach Road as part of 'load the road', an intensified primary boundary predator control and monitoring line.

**Rodent Tracking Tunnel survey** (delayed from August due to Covid)...BHCT rangers and volunteers will once again install and retrieve 150 tracking tunnel cards throughout the reserve for a 1 night survey. Some of the team will climb close to the height of Te Whara 6 times over two days!!

Mauri ora - Keep well my friends!

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