

COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER - Mahi tahi!!

Rangers' Report – March 2021

Operational Summary (and a bit of reflection) ...

Kia ora mai koutou

Near the end of March, I enjoyed a walk up to the peak of Te Whara, along the main track checking mustelid traps for any catches and just so happened to meet up with our very own 'lizard king', local herpetologist and all-round nice guy Ben Barr. During this walk Ben and I crossed each other's path and every time we did, we shared what we had just seen or heard in the last few minutes; four Toutouwai/North Island robins, multiple kaka, multiple kereru/kukupa, a rotting log loaded with mating giraffe weevil, flocks of touhou/silver eye, korimako/bellbirds at every bend in the track, hoheria in flower, Northern rata in flower, tui up the wazoo, a gecko skin, Bream Head/Te Whara skink, miromiro/North Island tomtit everywhere and a Popokatea/whitehead. Ben also saw a kakariki on his way to the summit a few days earlier, which was a real buzz! This experience was so awesome, it was the pick me up I really needed, it was good for motivation and it filled my wellbeing tank right up! It refreshed my belief that we are indeed making a huge difference to the ecological restoration of Bream Head/Te Whara. When you are so heavily immersed with your head down as project manager of a project like this you sometimes feel like things are a bit flat, are we achieving our vision, what else could we do – a lot of self-analysis. We have a way to go to eradicate the threat of the last predators in the reserve, but we have already come so very far, seven years ago when I started with this wonderful project I would not have seen or heard quite a few of those species or in such abundance and breeding at the reserve. If it were not for this project I would have not met and got to become friends with so many wonderful people involved too. The ultimate learning I took from all this is that nature is one of our greatest healers, motivator, provider of mauri ora/wellbeing, it also allows one to simplify things when times are perhaps stressful and see clearly that things are really going well - how lucky we are in Aotearoa to have these wild spaces for this solace.

So, you can see that the majority of our species outcomes are doing well at this time of year and with the ngahere/forest looking lush again there seems to be good life in the reserve. Predator trap catches are still extremely low, even in places where we have added extra traps and detection tools. Our switch out to the new rodent toxin known as double tap is going well and should all be in by the end of April. We are seeing a raised uptake with this change up in toxin, but then it settles down again quickly too, hopefully this all means we are removing rodents that were not attracted to our Pindone toxin. The other great thing about the double tap toxin is that it can quickly remove any possums, just 1.5 pellets required to kill a mature adult. In conjunction with this toxin switch out we are lowering our bait stations to just above ground level (they were at a raised height as best practice for 1080 delivery) in order to target any ground dwelling Norway rats who are not capable of climbing to a raised bait station.

The volunteer and ranger teams have been busy as usual in and around the reserve with plenty of weed control action, trap and bait station checks, kauri die back station refills, track and hut maintenance, school visits, poisoning wilding pines, installing electronic nodes and automated lure dispensers to traps as well as intensifying and adding more traps at strategic sites. The Trust was successful with a new habitat restoration fund and the Trustees have been super busy with strategic planning and fund applications to keep the project ticking. Read on for some of the key highlights of the month and kia pai to ra (have a great day)!



Beautiful northern rata in flower



One of Ben's favourite BH skinks, a gravid female with tail regrowth.

Monthly predator control results: March 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	11	11	5 ship/6 Norway	6 of 11	7 of 11	27	25
Possum	2	3	-	1 of 2	1 of 3	3	7
Stoat	1	0	-	1 of 1	0	5	2
Weasel	7	5	-	0 of 7	0 of 5	10	10
Ferret	0	0	-	0	0	0	0
Feral cat	0	0	-	0	0	0	1
Mouse	3	10	-	1 of 3	2 of 10	12	34
Hedgehog	5	2	-	2 of 5	2 of 2	8	3
Totals	29	31	-	11 of 29	12 of 31	65	82

Analysis:

- Total # of predators caught in March 2021 similar to March 2020
- Total catches YTD are fewer than by this time in 2020.
- All catches this month very similar to previous year except for mice which were down compared with March 2020.
- A very similar percentage of predators caught inside the reserve for March 2021 and 2020.
- Possum catches YTD are down by more than half on 2020, but stoat catches are up due to spike in January.

Communications committee report...

This is a note from the Communications and Events Committee. This committee meets about once a month and we work on keeping our website up to date, getting messages out about what's going on, we look after our Friends data-base and help organise events. On the committee we have Claire Pearson, Adam Willetts, Mick Buckley, Sally Prince, Corinne Scott, Dane Higgison and Annelies Struijcken.

Become a Friend of the Trust

Hours of work goes on behind the scenes at BHCT to raise money. This is used to pay our rangers' salaries and keep our operations running smoothly. We estimate that 96% of the funds we receive are used directly in the reserve. Many people are already contributing on a regular monthly basis, and we are very grateful for this. These "Friends" receive Adam's regular ranger reports and invitations to various events happening in and around the reserve.

However, we would love to have some more Friends and we are offering the following incentives – if you are able to commit to contribute between \$10.00 and \$20.00 per month you will receive one of our quirky bumper stickers, if you can contribute between \$21.00 and \$45.00 per month you will receive one of our stunning caps and if you can manage over \$46.00 per month you will receive one of our gorgeous t-shirts. Check out our website www.breamheadtrust.nz or contact Claire@breamheadtrust.nz

Thank you!

Rangers' reports...

Written by BHCT ranger Simon Braithwaite:

G'day Folks,

I have tried to spice up a pretty run of the mill month for me while servicing mustelid traps over the south side and Urquharts Bay. Stoat catch numbers have dropped off, so I have been trialling out a few ideas to increase interest in the Doc boxes for the wearier stoats. Nothing super exciting, just exposing a lot more dirt around the entrances for the scent it releases and putting freshly dug root fragments and sprinkling of dirt in the traps to mimic what the inside of a freshly burrow might smell like. I am trying to spend a bit more time at each trap instead of just doing the normal things in an attempt to spur the interest of a curious stoat. Things like restricting some of the visibility into the trap with some leaves in the baffle so the stoat has to go in to investigate the smells and with some camouflage to hide the unnatural square and straight exterior edges of the box. An idea I had for the grey faced petrel (GFP) site was to use chicken poo as a lure due to GFP guano being hard to get but Adam has suggested Shag guano from one of the colonies nearby. I am planning to trial some on my mustelid lines next week.

I have also been lowering bait stations on my lines and that increased accessibility has been the likely cause of higher than usual uptake in some areas. I have also been taking my handsaw out and doing a bit (heaps) of line maintenance, resulting in a mild case of tennis elbow so bring on the new battery powered lightweight pruning saw!

I am writing this from my office at home as it rains outside, I am hoping to get out later when it clears to finish the EcoNode and ALD install on NE boundary which will be great as it will complete the northside boundary and roadside Install.

Cheers, Simon

Written by BHCT ranger Claire Braithwaite:

Kia ora everyone,

March has felt like another busy month (and didn't it disappear quickly!?) out in the reserve. The introduction of new and exciting technologies (ALD's and EcoNodes), double tap installations and bait station alterations have been keeping us busy!

A great visit from Whangarei Girls High School took place mid-March, despite some last minute weather driven rearrangements. A talk from Adam about BHCT and the great work being done by all our amazing volunteers (and why they do it), really got the students engaged. Insights were also gained through (weather improvised) participation in The Predator Game, where the message

of predator impacts on our native species really hits home. Thanks to Lil Craig, chair of the Education Committee, for all of her behind the scenes coordination work in making these school visits happen!

Interesting to report has been the several weasels that were caught along the northern boundary, most likely becoming more active this time of year due to dwindling food sources at the tail end of Summer.

Moving into Autumn I have personally delighted in the subtle and refreshing changes the season brings. Weird and wonderful fungi have been capturing my attention lately as well as interesting invertebrate critters. There are so many wonderful details to absorb and admire when we choose to take notice.



It is beautiful, but it sure is steep walking too! A view of part of Simon's playground looking back to Busby Head.



BHCT goes virtual online learning with LEARNZ...

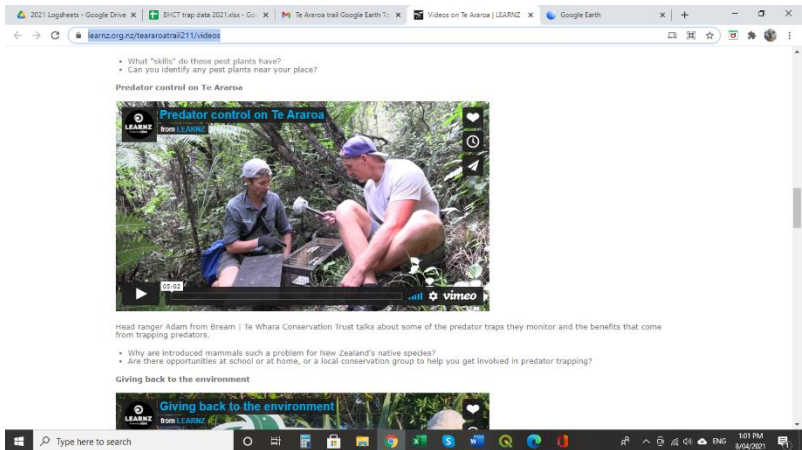
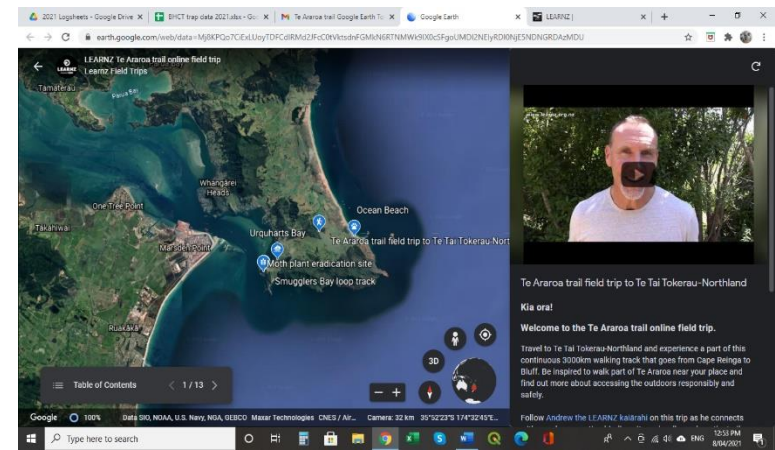
It has been a great privilege to be involved recently with LEARNZ, a programme of free virtual field trips, helping students access the inaccessible. There are now 7550 teachers registered with LEARNZ so it provides us with a much larger student audience to spread our story of community restoration in action. The Trust was featured as an example of a community driven biodiversity restoration project along the Te Araroa trail, and we made several videos about our predator control, weed control and habitat restoration (replanting). Throughout the videos four students from Whangarei Heads School joined me to demonstrate and talk about what we are doing to help restore the biodiversity of Bream Head Scenic Reserve and its surrounding lands and water. The other really great feature LEARNZ have developed is a Google Earth interactive map with pins of the locations we visited and talked about with more information and the videos one click away.

In early April I will be of a panel of experts for two web conferences, which form part of the post learning opportunities for schools who are interested in the virtual field trip we made. Students will develop questions for the panel which they have about the mahi we do and how it may relate to them in their schools/area. Below is a screenshot of some of the video and articles from the LEARNZ website about the field trip. If you are keen to see more jump on the LEARNZ website and have a look at the Te Araroa Trail field trip section, where you can see the videos, link to the interactive google maps, see how the students can connect with the experts of each particular area.

I cannot thank Andrew Penny and the team from LEARNZ enough, and the support they get from Core Education. This is the most important part of our mission, to connect our children with the value of the environment for their wellbeing, and Andrew and the team are providing another platform to deliver that understanding in a way that today's students are comfortable with.



Whangarei Heads School students being interviewed by Andrew



Meet a volunteer...

Written by Jenny Lawrence:

This month, we wanted to introduce to you Roger Clarke - a very important although rarely seen BHCT volunteer.

Roger moved to New Zealand's beautiful Whangarei Heads - Parua Bay in 2015 and met up with Melissa Arsenault (BHCT volunteer coordinator at this time) who "gently persuaded" Roger to volunteer with the Smuggler's Track maintenance crew led by Colin Edwards.

Subsequently, BHCT was looking for a volunteer to help with portioning our toxin and Roger put his hand up.

Roger now works with Adam to ensure that toxin is ordered, portioned and ready for the trapping volunteers to use in the 1200 toxin stations located throughout the reserve.

Roger does most of this work in his home garage which he sets up for the purpose and delivers the portions of toxin to the HQ on a regular schedule.

Last month, Roger put in more than 27 hours due to the changeover of toxin being used and he also is one of Kelly Maxwell's Weed Action volunteers. Because of his help and dedication, the rangers and volunteers can pick up their toxin and head straight out into the reserve without having to spend time bagging up their own bait, maximising efficiency and allowing more work hours on the reserve. Thanks Roger...you are one of our legends!



May the FoRT be with you...

Report on the Bream Head- Te Whara FoRT (Forest Restoration Team). 7th Working bee, 14th March 2021.

Written by BHCT ranger Keith Townsend:

Kia ora all, Sundays working bee was a hoot! Six of us including two visiting weeders from Tawharanui worked on a new site along the reserve boundary. A swag of weeds were tagged and bagged, mothplant, climbing asparagus, passion fruit, queen of the night to name a few.

The prize for the greatest number of different weed species went to Jenny Lawrence who received a jar of homemade kasundi. Well done Jenny! 🍌🍌. Collectively we controlled over 1500 moth plant seedlings and 2 large mature vines (pods are getting very large now), 25 mature Queen of the night trees, 1 passion fruit seedling, and 4 climbing asparagus seedlings. We will be back at this site for our next working bee so come and take the challenge. There will be more kasundi up for grabs and maybe some homebrew too!

Ma te wa, Keith Townsend, BHCT Ranger

Editor's note, wow that is a massive number of weeds controlled, that must be hugely satisfying! I believe the homebrew will be for after works are completed lol.

This fun group could always do with more participants, Keith's youthful enthusiasm is infectious, and it is becoming a really good social monthly event as well as a vital environmental action group! Contact Keith Townsend if you are keen to join this team once per month for a couple of hours in the morning – 0273221357 keithh.townsend@gmail.com

Bream Head
CONSERVATION TRUST



Weed of the Month

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

Wild ginger *Hedychium gardnerianum*



Non-woody perennial with soft erect stems, growing up to 2m tall, with a short pinkish 'collar' at the base. Forms deep beds of dense, many-branched taro-like rhizomes (rhizome beds can be up to 1m deep). Large wax-covered, lance-shaped leaves arise direct from the unbranched stems, alternate arrangement. Produces flower spikes (25cm – 45cm) with fragrant lemon-yellow flowers (Feb-Apr) with conspicuous red stamens, which develop into a fruiting spikes with fleshy orange fruits (15-20 mm long), containing many bright scarlet seeds. Under full light conditions up to 100 seeds produced per flowerhead.

Wild ginger is shade tolerant, long-lived, and fast growing. Eventually replaces all other species as nothing can grow up through the dense mats of tubers it creates, and the dense leaves block light and smother native plants preventing regeneration. The rhizome beds, while they can be deep themselves, are shallow rooted, so when they become heavy with rain they can slip on steep sites and stream banks, causing erosion. Spread easily from birds eating the seeds, and by fragments of rhizome which can survive immersion in the sea, crushing, and years away from soil.

Sets more seed in open light-filled areas, but also readily grows under forest canopy, where it expands outward, eventually opening up the canopy above it. Large risk in lowland broadleaf & kauri forest.

Seeds are spread by birds and possibly possums. Rhizomes spread slowly outward from clumps, and new plants are established from rhizome fragments spread in dumped vegetation and fill, and by soil movement, flooding, and contaminated machinery.

Wild ginger is increasingly common in Whangarei Heads. The area around Taurikura ridge, Mt Manaia and Mt Aubrey are a particular hotspot, but it is a problem all over the Heads. However, for the most part we do not yet have the extensive fields of wild ginger seen further north but will do if we don't act to control wild ginger now.

Fortunately, it is reasonably straight forward to control, and it can be done very successfully with minimal herbicide use. The initial priority would usually be to control the sites in the open to reduce seeding, and then tackle sites in the bush. The higher volume of seed from sites in the open and its dispersal by birds means that controlling that piece in your own backyard is more important than you think.

Special disposal notes: Rhizomes extremely hardy. For manual control methods dispose of rhizomes in landfill, or by drying out and burning. Stems can be composted.

- Slash stems. Remove any seed heads and destroy. Dig out all rhizomes and take to land fill. It is also possible to mulch with a lawnmower (not a mulcher) and compost. Young seedlings can be hand pulled and crushed, taking care to remove any strings of rhizomes.
- Cut above the pink "collar" at the base of the stems & immediately treat stump with (1g metsulfuron/1L water). Picloram gel can be used on smaller plants but is less effective than metsulfuron.
- Spray dense patches away from roots of vulnerable species, spring – late autumn (5g metsulfuron + 10ml penetrant/10L water). Do not replant sprayed sites for 6 months/until seedlings appear naturally.

Seeds are relatively short lived – approximately 6 years, meaning it is possible to eliminate this plant from a site relatively quickly; Maintain a rolling front. Check and treat area every two years before seed set (May). Don't replant sprayed sites for 6 months/ until seedlings appear naturally.

CAUTION: when using any herbicide or pesticide PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

30x Pied shag/karuhiruhi (phalacrocorax varius varius) on the beach at Dead Horse Bay - the most I have seen there at one time!

Coming up in April:

Five minute Bird Counts...BHCT volunteers will hit the reserve in the very early hours to record bird calls they here at 50+ set listening stations along the main tracks as part of our ongoing monitoring of bird detection and abundance.

Trap technology online...BHCT will finish the install of the remote sensing trap node and automated lure dispensers and set them to live mode where we will respond to tripped trap notifications.

Predator Free Whangarei...community information session to be held at the McLeod Bay Hall on Wednesday 21st April 5.30pm – 7.30pm. Aim: to provide landowners and residents of Whangarei Heads to learn more about (a) the proposed eradication methods and delivery (b) what can be expected by way of engagement.

Keep well my friends!

Adam Willetts
(Head Ranger/Project Manager)
M: 021 155 7380
e: bhctrangers@gmail.com

