



Tāwharanui
Open Sanctuary
Society Inc

Newsletter 92 Winter 2025

In this issue

Fence checking	2
Gecko monitoring	3
In the Nursery	4
June Planting Day	5
Takahe update	6
Trapping team	7
Kiwi call monitoring	7
Odds and Ends	8

Mark the date:

July 6

Public Planting Day.

All welcome.

August 3

Public Planting Day.

All welcome.

September 7

*Sunday in the Park
Work Day and AGM.*

All welcome.



Kererū Photo: Alison Stanes

Support TOSSI

To volunteer, join and/or
make a donation, go to
<https://www.tossi.org.nz/>

From the Chair

As National Volunteer Week (15-21 June) approaches, I think it's a good time to reflect on the many things that volunteers do to support Tāwharanui Regional Park and its rangers.

When I think of the various tasks that we help Auckland Council with, I do wonder how the Park would look without us? Whether it's working on trap lines, fence checking, bird monitoring, committee work, weeding, general maintenance – the list goes on.

Central to our work is what happens in the Nursery: collecting and sowing seed, germinating, pricking out and potting seedlings, planning and managing the planting days and cleaning up afterwards. Nothing happens without collaboration. Each plant is accounted for and records are meticulously kept. It does my head in!

There's also form filling and grant applications, keeping the website up to date, social media, writing articles, networking with other organisations, writing permits for translocations, fund raising. And there's more: keeping track of TOSSI's money (mustn't forget that!), editing the newsletter, keeping membership records, education, talking to community groups, catering. Phew! I've probably missed a few tasks and for that I apologise but it makes me tired just thinking about it!

Why do we do it all? There's a lot of personal satisfaction in seeing a job done well, in contributing to something that's bigger than one's own sphere of influence, of knowing that you're giving back to something special. Plus a lot of socialising goes on – making new friends, fun and laughter along the way.

We are looking for at least two new committee members. We meet every second month so it's not too big a commitment. Please contact me via our secretary for more information: secretary@tossi.org.nz

Many thanks also to Lyn Hamilton-Hunter, who is returning to live in the UK. Her ability with technology and wonderful knowledge of freshwater creatures will be sadly missed. Lyn has written a great piece about Tāwharanui in the latest edition of a local lifestyle magazine *Junction*, and her many articles in Mahurangi Matters will be hard to follow.

Our congratulations to past TOSSI members Tony and Jenny Enderby (now in Cambridge but formerly from Leigh) who have both been awarded a King's Service Medal for service to the environment. Tony served on the TOSSI committee as well as being actively involved as a volunteer at Tāwharanui with Jenny. Much deserved recognition.

I think that's quite enough from me for now! Again, thank you to all our volunteers. You are very much appreciated. See you in the park.

Sally Richardson

Tāwharanui Open Sanctuary is a joint project with Auckland Council



Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

Fence Checking

Every week a member of the fence check team walks the 2.5-km long predator-proof fence extending from Jones Bay to the northern side of the peninsula. We look for anything that might affect the integrity of the fence, including holes in the mesh, faulty pedestrian or vehicle gates, deep cracks or rabbit burrows near the base, vegetation falling onto the fence, and issues with the many culverts beneath the fence. Problems are fixed on the spot if possible, otherwise the rangers are notified on the form filled out at the end of each check, or by phone if it's urgent. Each team has a one-week window to do their check so it can be done on any day of the week. If you take someone else along, the two of you can check both sides of the fence at the same time, then return to Jones Bay via the beach or farm track and road rather than having to go back over the hill. It's an easy walk with great views and plenty of wildlife to see. And of course it's essential to help keep predators out of the Sanctuary.

We could currently use more volunteers to either join the current 8-10 week roster, or be reserves. If you're interested please contact Richard Taylor: rb.taylor@auckland.ac.nz or 021 102 1065.



You never know when our taonga show themselves. This stunning forest gecko was spotted by Graeme Burt when checking the fence.

It's possible the gecko had lost and re-grown its tail, as it appears to be a different colour and pattern compared to the rest of its body.

The forest gecko (*Mokopirirakau granulatus*) is endemic to Aotearoa/New Zealand. Its Māori name is moko pirirākau, meaning "lizard that clings to trees". It is a protected species under the Wildlife Act 1953.

Thursday Volunteer Team

How is Tāwharanui Regional Park kept in tip-top condition? Rangers do many of the regular tasks but a small team of TOSSI volunteers goes out every Thursday morning for 3 – 4 hours to carry out tasks that are small but still important. We have built many of the tracks and boardwalks you use in the Park but more often it is fixing gates, building stiles, repairing fences including part of the main predator-proof fence. Sand ladders always need extra work. The team has put up all those rope fences at Anchor Bay.

The 'Fix It Volunteers' are men and women with a passion to do a good job and help to maintain the Park. The tasks are often too small to engage Auckland Council contractors. The brief is simply to just fix and/or improve things, as required. The team are practical problem-solvers with an ability to find smart solutions and just do it. Every Thursday is a new challenge and often a new skill learnt.



If you'd like to join the team, contact Roger Williams: ropeworth@gmail.com
Or Mark Atkinson: enhancelandscapes@gmail.com



Duvaucel's Gecko Monitoring

Duvaucel's geckos were released at Tāwharanui Open Sanctuary in 2016 as part of a biodiversity restoration initiative by TOSSI, Auckland Council and Massey University. A 10 year research programme continues to ascertain if these lizards can establish viable populations on a mainland site where mice are present but other exotic mammals are excluded or managed at low numbers.

As Aotearoa/New Zealand's largest gecko species, they can reach up to 30cm in length, may live at least 50 years and are highly susceptible to predation by the usual suspects – rats, stoats and cats. Duvaucel's geckos contribute to the wider ecosystem functioning as pollinators of native plants, e.g. pohutukawa and harakeke/flax. Like all our geckos, females give birth to up to two live young per year. Tāwharanui is home to the only mainland population of these at-risk reptiles.

Wildlife Biologist Dr Manu Barry continues to lead the monitoring programme at Tāwharanui, usually twice yearly. Volunteers help put out tracking cards at specific locations and these are collected a week later. Wherever the geckos have left footprints (as shown on a card, right) a special trap is set overnight with their all-time favourite food lure – banana! The traps are inspected early the next morning and if a gecko is in the trap, Manu is informed. She removes it and gives it a health check including weighing, and a photo is taken of it. These geckos have unique patterns along their backs so they can be checked against photos of the original release animals. Volunteers assist Manu by inspecting the traps daily for three consecutive days; recording each animal's statistics, and (if you're very lucky, under her supervision) carefully holding it before returning it close to where it was captured.

The monitoring work can be strenuous, especially when scaling steep cliffs and climbing through the undergrowth but I feel humble and very privileged to be part of this programme. It's like a treasure hunt finding these critters and to be present when a juvenile is found, it means they're successfully breeding. I love being part of the ongoing restoration of Tāwharanui for endangered endemic species that thrive when pests are controlled. May there be many more releases!

TOSSI members who wish to know more about the project or are interested in joining the monitoring programme, email: duvaucels.gecko@gmail.com

Karyn Hoksbergen



Above, an adult Duvaucel's gecko.

Right, volunteer monitor Karyn Hoksbergen enjoys the rare privilege of carefully holding a gecko.



Photos: Manu Barry

The Nursery

TOSSI's Nursery is a volunteer group responsible for growing trees that are mostly planted on the three public planting days at the beginning of June, July and August every year. The area to be planted is decided by Auckland Council and the types of trees required is discussed with the Nursery team. 3,000 to 5,000 trees are put in the ground each planting day. Since the Nursery's inception in 2005 over 315,000 trees have been grown and planted.

Initially the seed is collected from within the Park and that creates an opportunity for some to venture into parts of the Park they may not have seen before. The seed is then processed according to type, de-fleshing or sieving to separate finer seed, ready for sowing. As they grow, we prick out seedlings into tubes or pots to grow into bigger plants. This work is done outside, in the shade, on a trailer loaded with potting mix. Our often described 'well-oiled machine' ensures that trays of plants are catalogued, watered and moved to an area in the Nursery to grow on. Other important jobs are weeding, replacing plants which have died and keeping the Nursery tidy.

In the winter months, groups go out into different areas in the Park to plant more mature 'specimen' trees grown in the Nursery such as pohutukawa, kowhai, puriri, kahikatea, nīkau. Those vulnerable to pests, pukeko and rabbits, are caged with plastic netting which is removed when the trees are well established. In time, mature forests will be created.

The Nursery team comprises people from all walks of life, bringing enthusiasm, skills and experience. Some are retired nursery workers and botanists which is a bonus but not a requirement. The varied skills means there is rarely a problem that the group can't solve. Nursery volunteers enjoy the benefits of working with like-minded individuals. There is a lot of chatter and camaraderie amongst the team; the work often accompanied by wonderful birdsong.

It's a very satisfying way to spend a productive day in the beautiful environment of Tāwharanui, which includes a well-earned morning tea of mostly home-baked goodies. We meet weekly on Tuesdays starting at 9.00am. We are always pleased to welcome new folk. If you'd like to find out more, contact Ray: magsandray@gmail.com

Maggie Cornish and Mel Wilson.



Above, specimen trees being checked.

Below, trays of mānuka, kānuka, māhoe and pōhuehue (*Muehlenbeckia*) are ready to go out for the public planting days.

Photos: Maggie Cornish



First Public Planting Day

The first Sunday of June saw around one hundred enthusiastic volunteers plant 3,000 trees on a slope in the area known as Twin Hills at the western end of Tāwharanui.



Below, from the top of the slope looking east, the excellent growth of trees planted by volunteers in previous years can be seen in the background.



On the Friday before each public planting day, some staff from the roading company Fulton Hogan help for a few hours to set out the plants at the designated site (below), supervised by Nursery volunteers and Park rangers. TOSSI and Auckland Council are very grateful for their assistance.



Takahē Update

Fulton Hogan (FH) is the principal sponsor of the national Takahē Recovery Programme, for which Tāwharanui provides a safe breeding location. So after the set-out was completed, the FH crew were lead on a walk to see if any of our takahē could be spotted. Fortunately, one of the breeding pairs and their chick obliged and made an appearance at their feeding station near Ecology Bush. Below, the chick is on the left. Although it is almost as big as its parents, it can be easily identified due to still having a black face shield and beak, rather than red like an adult. Its feathers are as yet not as colourful and vibrant as those of its parents.

Photo: Viv from Fulton Hogan



The Tāwharanui takahē chick is now just over five months old and was named and banded in April. Local iwi, Ngāti Manuhiri has gifted us the name Tāwhara. This comes from the whakatauki which speaks of Tāwharanui as a place of abundance:

He whā tāwhara ki uta, he kiko tāmure ki tai.

The flowering bracts of the kiekie on the land; the flesh of the snapper in the sea.

Blood tests taken to determine sex have found that Tāwhara is female!

Like all our takahē offspring, this chick will ultimately be moved elsewhere, away from close relatives to make the best contribution to genetic diversity of the national flock. There is no timeframe or location for that shift yet.

Thank you to Auckland Zoo keepers Chris Steele and Devon Nicholls who supported and oversaw this work.

Right, Tāwhara gets her health check, leg bands... and a mug-shot.

Photo: Larissa Bickers-Cherrie

The Role of a Takahē Monitor

Once a fortnight Dorothy and I monitor or feed the takahē at Tāwharanui. We load the old green 'mule' (an ATV) with a clean feeder, a transmitter receiver, wet wipes and a container of pellets. These pellets look like chicken food pellets but are specially made of South Island tussock grass.

The birds are monitored every six days but are given a supplementary feed every three days. Our aim is to obtain a transmitter signal for each of the four adult takahē, but better still to see them. We check previous takahē reports to see if the birds have been found in different locations.

If we fail to get a signal near their feeder we have to try a number of different likely locations to track them down. When there were 17 takahē on the Park we could be searching from Tokatu Point to the predator-proof fence. Now that we only have two adult pairs, tracking them is much easier.

At each site we clean or replace the feeder, clean and fill a water container, clack the feeder lid a few times and wait. If we are lucky the takahē appear, ignore us and begin to eat their pellets. Hopefully this happens before the marauding pukeko can get a look in.

Last spring we were very excited to learn the Ecology Bush pair had hatched a chick but Dorothy and I were very disappointed not to catch sight of the offspring until April when the chick was three quarters of the size of its parents. Sometimes we will not see any takahē when we monitor or feed the birds but there is always a consolation prize – a toutouwai/robin may seek us out and sing, flocks of kererū fly over us or a cacophony of juvenile korimako/bellbirds doing singing practice all around us. We always look forward to our session with the birds in such a lovely setting!

If you'd like to join the takahē monitoring team, contact: justine.sanderson@gmail.com



Susan Gibbings

Volunteer Trapping at Tāwharanui

Animal pest control at Tāwharanui is a key function for the effective operation of the Sanctuary.

The predator-proof fence works, but it has beach ends which predators (rats, stoats, weasels, possums and feral cats) have a habit of finding. Over the years, 30 traplines have been established in the Park, covering all the diverse ecologies: coastal, dunes, regenerating bush and established forest. Trappers learn to manage a range of types of trap. Many of the lines also include bait stations and some also include trail cameras to be checked. A small section of the network is shown in the image below.

Currently TOSSI has 24 trappers who manage about half the trap lines. Those we can't manage are covered by rangers (whose skills are better used elsewhere) or commercial contractors (at a cost to Auckland Council). Some trappers enjoy working alone and taking responsibility for their own line, some operate in pairs and others share lines. The normal expectation is that a trapline will be checked every 2 weeks, but less vulnerable areas are monitored monthly.

Trappers make a significant contribution to the security of the Sanctuary for the at-risk endemic species of birds, lizards and insects that live there. For many trappers that is their motivation. For others it is the opportunity to be out in the fresh air in a beautiful environment, seeing and hearing the bird life, getting some exercise, enjoying the forest, having a picnic or swim afterwards.



If you'd like to join the trapping team, contact Jon Monk: jasmonk9@gmail.com

Jon Monk

Kiwi Call monitoring at Tāwharanui, 2025	Saturday 17 May	Wed. 21 May	Saturday 24 May	Tuesday 27 May	Site Totals
Ecology Bush	28	20	26	3	77
Twin Hills	33	33	46	49	161
South Water Tanks	44	55	29	43	171
Possum Gully	26	26	32	35	119
Marine Triangle	4	26	1	9	40
Trig	17	53	29	28	127
Session Totals	152	213	163	167	695

Kiwi Call Monitoring

Every year in May or June over four evenings, volunteers go out in pairs to six sites across the Park to record male and female kiwi calls for two hours. It's not an exact science, but the averages collected over several years help to estimate how many kiwi are in the Park. Average calls per hour from the six sites this year was over 14 calls. Five calls is regarded as indicating a healthy kiwi population.

If you'd like to join the kiwi call monitoring team, contact Sally: salizrich@gmail.com

Below left, in the session briefing, Roger Williams demonstrates how to fix a compass bearing on a kiwi call.

Below right, site call totals are reported in at the end of the monitoring. This part of the exercise can get quite competitive!



Odds and Ends



The extensive network of trail cameras across the Park is intended to capture predator incursions, movements and behaviours, to assist with locating and trapping them. However, they also capture an interesting variety of incidental activity of other animals. Above left, two kiwi fighting. And right, the takahē parents with their chick between them, having a 'midnight snack' from a feeder.

Images provided by ranger Ash.



One of the significant bonuses that volunteers all agree on is the opportunity to be in parts of the Park that most people never get to.

Recently, the Thursday work crew repaired an old fence above a cliff face at South Punch Bowl at the eastern tip of the Tāwharanui peninsula.

Left, this was the view from their 'office' that day.

Photo: Roger Williams



The 'fake' gannet colony on the north coast has been decommissioned. The real birds (far right above) that flew in were obviously not impressed with the larger versions of themselves and didn't settle in. The decoys and sound system will get a new life elsewhere.

A lot goes on behind the scenes before and after a public planting day. A large marquee gets erected at the planting site to provide cover for registration, equipment and people if the weather turns bad. Folding up the marquee is like wrangling a giant fitted bed sheet! Right, Karyn and Stu found that equally frustrating and amusing.

