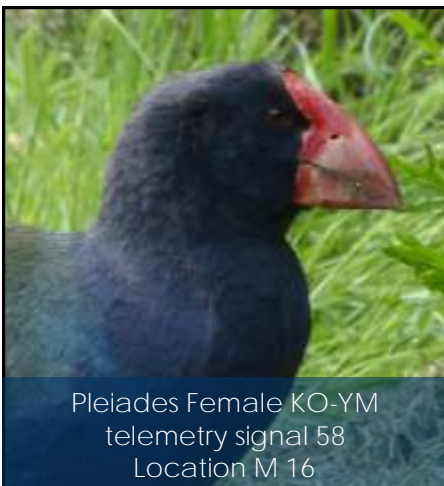




TAWHARANUI OPEN SANCTUARY SOCIETY INC.
Newsletter No. 52 March 2015



During summer months there are plenty of new fluffy chicks at Tawharanui.
This juvenile bellbird is starting to acquire some mature feathers.



Pleiades Female KO-YM
telemetry signal 58
Location M 16



Frana Female GR-RM
telemetry signal 70
Location Ecology bush



Dampier Female BK-OM
Telemetry signal 66
Location Mangatawhiri

Takahe are thriving at Tawharanui. They have settled into three groups of three, each group comprising of one male and two female. One regular escapee has been banished to Motutapu Island where she can socialise with other takahe. Three takahe arrive in March to add to the Tawharanui population.

Coming Events

Sun. 8 March. Seaweek. Come as a participant and enjoy a guided snorkel.

Helpers are required to assist with a barbecue as a fund raiser for TOSSI. Contact Ray Blackburn 425 4995

Thurs. 19 March. Three takahe arrive at Tawharanui. Date and time to be confirmed.

Sat 12 April Sunday in the Park. BBQ provided. Bring drinks, morning tea and good footwear.

The date has been shifted a week to avoid Easter.

Sun. 3 May 9.15 am. Sunday in the Park. BBQ provided. Bring drinks, morning tea and good footwear.

Sat. 30 and Sun 31 May 9.15 am. Queens Birthday Planting. BBQ provided.

Sun. 5 July 9.15 am. More planting. BBQ provided.

Chair's Report



What do TOSSI members do in the holidays, you might ask? It is something of a relief to be off-line for a couple of weeks, out of reach of emails and phone calls, text messages and voice mail. Time to read a good book or two, or, if you can, wander aimlessly about Tawharanui for no particular reason, just for a change.

The astonishingly good weather over the Christmas New Year period meant the car park was overflowing, and Anchor Bay full of families enjoying a day at the beach. Behind the scenes, however, it was business as usual for park staff and TOSSI volunteers – nursery work, checking the fence, bait lines, and takahe tracking.

We had a different purpose in mind this summer – a much-anticipated trip to the Hollyford Track, in the Fiordland National Park. Loaded up with brand new packs, we took to the Tawharanui trails to get in some practice.

The Hollyford Track is not categorised as one of the great walks because a particular section of the track is not up to the required standard, but it is without doubt a great walk. Light snowfall a few days before we started meant the mountains had just the right amount of snow to be a beautiful backdrop to our walk, while three perfect, cloudless sunny days kept us warm and dry.

While kereru are frequently seen, and fantails follow along the track, (including the black version which is a delight), the chorus of bird song that echoes through out Tawharanui Ecology Bush is just not there. According to our guides, the main problem is ferrets. Let us hope the recent 1080 drop makes a difference, but with over a million hectares of land to protect from invasive pests, they have a fight on their hands. There are plenty of traps, impossible to walk past without checking to see what is inside.

We did see two dead rats in traps on a short section of the Kepler track. Had we had the right tool we could have reset it for them. Old habits die hard on holiday.

We found ourselves with a spare day (today) in Te Anau and after a few phone calls headed out to Burwood, source of most of the takahe that are now distributed around New Zealand. We were made very welcome by Chris, who came to Tawharanui with 'our' birds and was a key member of the waiata team from the South on release day. They were pleased to receive a first-hand update on the Tawharanui flock. Burwood also had an escapee, called Pearl, who *climbed* out of a wooden enclosure, crossed the main highway a couple of times and is now swapping stories with Peti, our own escapee, on Motutapu Island.

We headed out to see some of the pens to replenish food and refresh water supplies. The chicks, born in about October, are now almost the same size as an adult bird, but have not yet got the distinctive red shields, and have soft blue-grey feathers. We were thrilled to see the birds in their natural environment, the beautiful red tussock that provides them with food and shelter from the snow.

It is only through the TOSSI network that we were able to get to Burwood and be greeted as old friends. Being part of the conservation network operating throughout New Zealand is without doubt hard work at times. Experiences like our visit today reinforces how satisfying it is to be part of this essential effort.

If TOSSI members have stories they would like to share that help us appreciate where we fit in the conservation of New Zealand wildlife or habitat we would love to hear from you.

Regards Ngair Wallen

Open Sanctuary Coordinator update



Many of you will have read the tales of Peti the wandering takahē in the papers in recent times. Since her arrival in October Peti has been 'the odd one out', wandering to all corners of the park and making one early dash for freedom beyond the fence in late October. Recaptured and bundled back inside the sanctuary we had high hopes she had settled down and she did seem very stable but aloof on the fringes of the M16 wetland group. But her a-wanderings began again in January. The automated e-sentries alerted me she was close to the fence one day and Ranger Jared was able to intercept her near the bach and shepherd her back into the Mangatawhiri wetland. A few nights later Ranger Maurice and family spotted her strolling across the Jones Bay lawn and again herded her back inside to the wetland. This time she lasted a whole hour and a half inside before my cell phone received another alert. A quick phone call and Maurice and team were on the chase again, this time catching her and holding her in a cage overnight.

In many ways the story of Peti shows the care taken in planning each translocation and subsequent management. Potential dispersal from the sanctuary was an acknowledged risk and steps were taken to prevent this as best we could, or at least to know if and when it occurred. Immediate intervention was an identified priority as takahē really don't stand much chance in the outside world amongst vehicles, cats, stoats and dogs. The DOC takahē team, Hauturu Rangers, TOSSI takahē monitor team and others have provided great support working through the options with the welfare of the birds as their highest priority. I am grateful for their support. I hope Peti enjoys her new life on Motutapu Island where she can wander as much as she likes.

Pateke continue to thrive. The annual census was undertaken on February 12th, same date as last year and coinciding with other pateke sites. A team of enthusiastic volunteers led by Sharon Kast tramped, waded, waddled and thrashed their way up or through all the waterways and wetlands on the park and adjacent areas outside. A total count of 103 birds was recorded, up from 68 last year. A couple of drought years in the two years prior had hit these waterfowl hard making it difficult to dabble and find food as water retreated in the streams. Despite the glorious summer weather of January our waterways have not retreated quite as much this year as it was quite wet up until just before Christmas.

A pleasing side note is that the Mangatawhiri wetland which was restored and enhanced for the arrival of pateke is now home to a wide range of bird species including takahē, bittern and kiwi. The short Thompson Loop is now a very rewarding short walk suitable for visitors of almost all abilities.

Elsewhere in this newsletter are updates on seabirds, where we see more ground-breaking firsts being achieved. This aspect of Tāwharanui's restoration is so important as seabirds really do drive the ecology of Aotearoa.

Celebrate Seaweek at Tāwharanui! With the fantastic water temperatures of late it has been mandatory to immerse myself in the briny most days. This summer I've enjoyed a great snorkel around the Comet Reef (only advisable in calm sea conditions) at Tāwharanui as well as a (rather murky) snorkel at Goat Island. A new experience for me was snorkel exploring the drowned forests of mangrove seedlings in the Puhoi and Whangateau estuaries, spotting the shoals of wee fish and the odd bigger specimen sheltering.

The Experiencing Marine Reserves team along with TOSSI, DOC and others will be hosting a day of Seaweek activities on Sunday 8 March, including guided snorkel tours and self guided forest walks. Bring your friends and family and enjoy the submerged parallel universe that is Tāwharanui Marine Reserve. All snorkelling equipment including wetsuits is provided free on the day.

With kind regards, Matt Maitland

I can be contacted at matt.maitland@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz or 09 426 1200

Predator Fence Team

The 24 strong dedicated predator fence checking team will be attending a refresher training with Matt Maitland to get the team back to base and to re-examine the Predator Fence Manual to update to today's conditions. A pair of checkers walk the fence each week looking for defects which may let a predator into the park, a report is then lodged with the rangers who take the appropriate action if required. Expressions of interest to join this team are always welcome. At the moment the team is on a ten week cycle so the duties are not too arduous and all enjoy being in the park and contributing the parks wellbeing.

Jenni McGlashan, roster monitor/coordinator would be glad to answer your enquiries. jim.jenni@xtra.co.nz

Fluffy chicks on parade this season at Tawharanui



A new fluffy morepork chick in Ecology bush is able to fly even though it is still fluffy.



A fluffy grey-faced petrel chick with mature chest feathers developing.



Oystercatcher chicks step out on Ocean Beach.



NZ dotterel chicks out exploring Tawharanui.



Just one pair of white-fronted tern nested on Phoenix Rock this season and here is their chick. Another thirty pairs nested on a rock east of Anchor Bay



One of many red billed gull chicks on Phoenix rock. The commotion made by these birds as they demanded food from their parents added to the ambience of the scene for beach visitors.

Nursery News



Thanks to a great effort from our team, the nursery is ticking along like a well oiled machine.

At this stage we have around 14,000 trees in bags and many more who have graduated from seed trays to tubes and are hanging out for the day when they go to the table and become big plants. We're well on track to reach or exceed our target of 20,000 plants.

Also on our agenda, is to grow several hundred plants such as muehlenbeckia, astelia and karo for projects led by Matt and James.

Several hundred more second growth trees like nikau, kahikatea, puriri and kohekohe are being grown and carried over as infill plantings for future years.

We've also started an experimental plot of specials like tanekaha, rewarewa and kauri. Well why not?

During January we had the added help of a number of campers, some of whom had previously helped out on planting days as well. Their assistance was greatly appreciated.

I recently paid a visit to last years planting site at M16. It's looking marvellous, especially the last session done in the pouring rain. The survival rate for that area must be 95%+. To top it off, three of our Takahe have taken up residence there. They're as fat as butter. As far as revegetation projects go, this is about as close to instant gratification as it gets.

Once again, thanks to the cheery band of nursery volunteers who regularly contribute their time, enthusiasm and baking skills. There's always room for one more.
Ray Blackburn.

Seabird chicks explore the seas



All of the seabird chicks that we have been monitoring this year at Tawharanui have fledged and left their burrows.

Our first Fluttering Shearwater chick, nick-named "FLaSH", has made the leap into the big world. We followed its progress through early January using a Game Camera. Each night it would stretch its wings and practice flapping. Then on 12th January, roughly 70 days after hatching, it flew away. Fluttering Shearwaters are often seen in large flocks feeding over schools of fish in the Hauraki Gulf, but FLaSH will also feed in coastal waters all around New Zealand and off the east coast of Australia.

Six Grey-faced Petrel chicks were measured, weighed and banded before they left in early January. All going well they will spend the next few years feeding far and wide in deep water off the continental shelf of New Zealand and the southern and eastern coasts of Australia. They will mostly eat squid but also fish and crustaceans. Hopefully, in several years time they will return to Tawharanui to breed.

In the coming year we will continue to monitor seabirds breeding at Tawharanui and we expect that their numbers will increase. We hope to add more artificial burrows for Grey-faced Petrel and conduct further surveys of all species including the Little Blue Penguins that nest on the south and north coasts of the peninsula.

James Ross Fauna coordinator

FLaSH stretches out in the game camera photo. The down feathers around it's neck can still be seen.



Unwanted Plants

The TOSSI vision is to create an open sanctuary where visitors can freely experience a representative range of natural communities that would have originally been present on the Tawharanui Peninsula. To achieve this goal unwanted plants that have been introduced to NZ generally as garden plants, especially those that are a threat to our biodiversity, have to be removed. The Council has a budget to remove the most invasive. Over the last three years TOSSI has assisted by matching the budget for removing bone seed with excellent results.



Moth Plant flowers in January and February so it is a good time to find it and deal to it. It is a serious climber strangler that grows up to fifteen metres. It has fruiting pods that ping seeds into the wind where they travel for miles. Volunteer Keith Edwards and Te Ngahere keep check on the nineteen sites at Tawharanui and have them recorded with GPS. Sites have to be checked for twenty years as that is how long the seeds last in the ground. Some seasons no seeds will germinate and then conditions change and a season will produce huge carpets of seedlings. For easy reference a new map system kept in the office providing records of when each site is checked.



Asparagus scandens smothers the understory nursery crop of the forest. Birds eat the sweet little orange red berries and carry the seeds into Tawharanui where it is removed by contractors Te Ngahere and volunteers. Above right volunteers have removed bags of this weed from Home Bush behind the Rangers house. Unfortunately asparagus scandens is rampant in the bush back down Tokatu road on the way into the park. This is slowly being addressed by a local land care group and the Auckland Council.



Woolley nightshade is a persistent shrub with orange fruit that birds love to eat and transfer the seed. TOSSI volunteers cut the trunks and paint the stumps with herbicide. Gullies and bush areas are progressively searched and treated by waves of volunteers and the date of checking are recorded on a map in the Vol Hole

Ragwort is an unwanted plant that spreads quickly by air born seeds. TOSSI volunteers remove the flowers and bag them for disposal and then pull out the roots.

Unwanted Plants that have been successfully reduced at Tawharanui

The weeds below have been reduced to manageable levels by dedicated volunteers, with perseverance and determination, who pull out, cut and paste stumps and spray the leaves. With removal of flowers and the seed source hopefully these weeds might one day disappear completely! Although invasive, these unwanted plants do not threaten native species so they are not on the council budget target list.



Sharp rush occurs in the wetlands. Seeds are carried by water and so they occur around the high water mark. Progress results of reduction since Alison Stanes first started working on sharp rush five years ago are excellent. The levels are low enough now to collect the seed. Removing the seed source has really reduced numbers although seeds still come in the lagoon from further along the coast.

Willow leaved Hakea grows at two sites on Tokatu Point. It is a tree shrub which grows in poor soils. Keith Edwards monitors hakea and keeps a GPS record. In the photo he removes a seedling from a site.



Purple Groundsel is an unwanted weed that grows in the dunes at Tawharanui. Each season there are less to remove. This weed is progressively invading all NZ dunes.

Lupin have been dramatically reduced in the dunes thanks to determined TOSSI volunteers. Lupin were planted by farmers to aid soil for grazing grasses.

Bone seed is an invasive shrub that is taking over pohutukawa habitat on coastal cliffs. With the help of TOSSI volunteers and contract abseillers numbers have been greatly reduced.



Marram grass was planted in the dunes as the long tap root was meant to stabilize the sand. A remnant patch was found that had gone to seed before it was treated. The site is fenced and seedling spears are constantly monitored and sprayed by volunteer TOSSI Alison Stanes. Unfortunately the tap roots are so long it is impossible to dig them out.

A big thank you to all TOSSI volunteers and Keith Edwards who help with removing weeds from the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary.

Weed alert for TOSSI

As you enjoy Auckland over summer, you can help keep our region beautiful by reporting some of the nasty plants hiding in our midst.

One of these is the Mexican daisy, which is on Takatu Road leading into Tawharanui Regional Park, and can be easily spread by vehicles picking up seeds or stem fragments. The plant might look pretty but it can form a dense carpet that suppresses native seedling growth. It has long, thin stems and small, daisy-like white flowers (sometimes pink-flushed) for much of the year.

If you see Mexican daisy in the park, please report it.

Auckland Council's biosecurity team is also always on the look out for our Total Control species. These are species that are low incidence in the region, and the aim is to eradicate them, meaning Auckland Council's biosecurity advisors will do the control work.

One of these plants is Asiatic knotweed, a shrub-like plant that grows rapidly and once established, forms dense stand that shade and crowd out all other vegetation.

What to look for? Leaves are 10-15cm long and triangular – oval shaped, pointed at the tip, with a flattened leaf base. A creamy white flower appears from December – March. It can grow up to 3m high.

It is also the season for Cathedral bells to flower, making them easier to spot. It is a vine that can smother large native plants and suppress seedlings.

What to look for? It has large, bell-shaped, greeny-white to purple flowers, light green, oval leaves, and tendrils.

Summer is also perfect for spotting and getting rid of some of the usual suspects that flower or produce berries in the warmer months. These include moth plant, climbing asparagus, bonseed and Japanese honeysuckle. Visit www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plantsearch for more control information.

If you think you see Asiatic knotweed or Cathedral bells, please take a note of the location and contact Auckland Council biosecurity on 09 301 0101 or biosecurity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz.

Holly Cox Auckland Council biosecurity.

Dear TOSSI Friends



Its now more than six months since Penny and I left the Rodney District and although we are beginning to settle in Nelson we continue to miss Tawharanui and the magnificent team of volunteers and rangers. Thankfully we have been receiving updates on the progress in the sanctuary and returning to see the takahe is on our list of things we must do. It is also gratifying to hear of new and old volunteers becoming more involved with the project. Hopefully as the success of the Sanctuary becomes more obvious there will be even more new volunteers looking to become involved.

We have not become too involved with any conservation projects in Nelson other than volunteering to help with a planting project at Cable Bay and joining the local Botanical Society. The later group is extremely tolerant of my ignorance. Nelson does have a wide range of different vegetation types adapted to different conditions such as the mineral and alpine regions. This month's trip is to the mineral belt near Nelson Lakes.

The major reason we have not become more involved in some of the volunteer groups is that we are fully occupied breaking in our new home and property. We have bought a half acre property in central Nelson but it has had years of neglect so we have been busy removing agapanthus, fan palms and privet. The house also need of some attention. We also have 44ha of "scrub" bordering Kahurangi National Park. To date our efforts have been restricted to planting 80 beech trees and some weed control. 50 such plantings might reach the level of one Tawharanui Planting day, a reflection of the effectiveness of your volunteer efforts.

Our best wishes to you all and to the Sanctuary .

Steve and Penny Palmer



Mexican daisy grows on the road side leading into Tawharanui. It is not wanted in the park.



Asiatic knotweed is another weed to watch out for because it also is not wanted at Tawharanui.



Cathedral bells is an unwanted climber.



Saddleback and juvenile photographed in Ecology Bush this summer. All saddleback released have colour bands on their legs. Therefore this juvenile is most likely second or even third generation of saddleback at Tawharanui. Note that the adult has a bigger wattle and a light strip across the top of the saddle.



A red-billed gull and chicks on Phoenix Rock at Anchor Bay this season.

White-fronted terns. Last year thirty pairs of white fronted terns nested on a rock stack east of Anchor Bay. At the end of the season at least a dozen white fronted terns nested on Phoenix rock after the red billed gulls had finished nesting.

This year again thirty pairs of white-fronted terns nested on the rock stack east of Anchor Bay. One pair only ventured to nest in among the thirty red-billed gulls on Phoenix Rock in the middle of Anchor Bay. The white fronted tern nest was so close to a red billed gull nest it seemed that it might be evicted by the gulls. But somehow it survived the incubation and the chick successfully fledged.



The red-billed gull on a nest right alongside the white fronted tern with chick on Phoenix Rock.

New Zealand dotterel. Last year from 13 pairs and 68 eggs only 4 chicks fledged. This season from 10 pairs and 44 eggs 13 chicks fledged. The improved results most likely can be attributed to some management of black backed gulls. It was a joy to see NZ dotterel chicks on the beaches feeding with parents who carefully protect them. Chick covers were deployed in nesting territories along with beach drift wood logs dragged into the temporary fenced nesting enclosures. Dotterel families were seen scampering back to the shelter of these enclosures when ever danger was imminent in the form of gulls and human traffic!

Thank you to TOSSI members who provided old hanging garden baskets that with some alterations converted into chick protection covers. Thanks also to the idle nursery team who were waiting for potting mix who sat and wove flax on more old hanging garden baskets to protect NZ dotterel chicks next season.

Pateke The annual pateke survey at Tawharanui organized by Sharon Kast took place on 12 February. Surveys were conducted on the park, as well as Omaha storm pond and Christian Bay wetlands. The combined total of birds counted were 103, with 41 pateke on park and 31 at each off park site making a net increase of 35 individual birds for the 2015 season. Well done!

Alison Stanes Editor

Long Tailed-cuckoo. I realised my sighting was a rare one, I didn't realise it was the only one. Checking my records, it was probably summer of 2012-2013, as I just had a brief walk after having a surf to see if I could spot any of the tieke we translocated. I observed a pair of whiteheads being harassed and feeding a noisy long-tail cuckoo fledgling in a large pohutukawa tree beside the road on the way into ecology bush, before the bridge. David Bryden Conservation Ecologist.

North Island Robin 2014-15 Season

The Tawharanui robin population is derived from releases during 2007 when 25 birds (15 males and 10 females) were introduced from Tiritiri Matangi and Puhoi (see Newsletter No. 43, December 2012 for further details). Since the 2007 release we have been monitoring the Tawharanui robin population to gather data on survival and breeding success to compare with populations elsewhere, and as a measure of the health of the open sanctuary.

2014-15 is the 8th breeding season for the robins at Tawharanui. At the start of the season we found at least 37 pairs inside the sanctuary. These included 4 pairs in Possum Gully, 27 pairs in Ecology Bush and 6 pairs in Takatu Bush. For the first time we found several birds outside the sanctuary, one at the edge of Hubbard's Bush and a possible pair near Christian Bay.

This season the 37 pairs inside the sanctuary fledged at least 139 young, of which 138 were colour banded. This year's cohort colour is yellow. The birds are all banded yellow over metal on the left or right leg, or have 3 colours on the right leg of which the top colour of the three is yellow.

With 139 young, 2014-2015 has been the most productive breeding season so far. In the 8 seasons since release in 2007, over 570 young have fledged (see summary of robin breeding at Tawharanui in Newsletter No. 48 March 2014). With these high numbers of young one might expect the population to be a lot bigger than it currently is. However, there is either very high attrition post-fledging or high dispersal out of the sanctuary. We assume it is the former, because apart from the few birds observed outside the sanctuary this season, we have no other reports of any robins elsewhere in the district.

It has been quite a long breeding season. We found the first nests in late August, and the last of the young fledged in mid-February. Many of the pairs had 3 broods during the season, and of these, the most productive pair produced 3 broods of 3 chicks each. Tim Lovegrove, Richard Chambers & Kevin Parker



While searching for what I thought was an NZ dotterel chick I was surprised to find a wrybill in the camera view finder. This is one of New Zealand's protected threatened endemic species. It made a drop in visit to Anchor Bay East on 21 January 2015. Wrybill nest on the braided river beds in the South Island and then head north to feed, in large tidal harbours, from November on. They start returning south in early August. The photos clearly show the last third of the bill that turns awry which gives the bird its name. Alison Stanes



NZ dotterel with colour bands YW-RB can be seen peeping out from her nest on Jones Bay. At night he will take a turn at incubating so that YW-RB can have a feed. 30 days is a long incubation period. It is said that dotterel see you well before you see them. You can see why.



NZ dotterel with colour bands BW-OR peeps out from her nest on the sand cliff on Ocean beach. In the heat of summer dotterels are naturally reluctant to leave nests to avoid their eggs cooking under the heat of the summer sun. Alison Stanes