

*COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER - Mahi tahi!!*

## Rangers' Report – March 2018

### Operational Summary...

Giddy folks, sure loving this fine, calm autumn weather we are having! Nice that the real heat of summer has dropped a bit, makes walking around the hills more pleasurable. Well it has been a hectic month on the hill with the rodent spike continuing through March, contributing to an average of 80-90% toxin bait take in most areas. This has meant the ranger and volunteer toxin/trapper team have had to take extra loads of bait in on their line checks and clean out the powdered toxin left behind by the high mice predation in the bait stations.

The unseasonably wet end of summer has increased food availability and therefore caused a rodent 'mast' in our region (higher than normal birth rate). The wet weather forced this high rodent population to seek shelter from the previously dry grass areas, therefore translating into higher than usual numbers in the reserve. Hopefully with our dedicated control programme, the reduction in humidity and the cooling of the weather, we will see an improvement in the quality of the bait and a reduction in the rodent population (mainly mice). It will be interesting to see what results come from the May rodent tracking tunnel monitoring.



*Degradation and powdering of toxin from humid weather and high mice predation. New bait for comparison (top right).*

The month of March was not all doom and gloom however, quite the opposite. The reserve was alive with the sound and enthusiasm of school children visiting Bream Head for conservation/restoration outdoor environmental education. Excitingly it was the first time BHCT has hosted a secondary school group as part of a planned programme to engage students from all the age ranges of primary, secondary, tertiary, and even link them into the work sector. More about this later within the report. Another very cool observation I have been witnessing of late is the abundance of revegetation in the 20ha riparian block above the cattle yards at Urquharts Bay as well as the proliferation of native birds throughout the reserve, in particular the bellbird and tui, with an almost all-day chorus in some valleys. As well as all this we had a dedicated team from DOC get stuck into a few days of mothplant control clearing all visible mature mothplant weeds from the valley east of Peach Cove track and a DOC rope team also tackled a couple of infestations of this weed out on the eastern cliffs below the radar station. The BHCT rangers have now controlled all known mature Climbing Asparagus weed plants in the two sites on Bream Head and will be following up over the next few years controlling any seedling rejuvenation of this nasty invasive vine species. We have also been hard at it tackling more mothplant vine in the central northern and north-western end of the reserve with very good effect. Again, this is new work/outcomes not previously achieved and is the direct result of the ranger hours our awesome volunteers have freed up by doing more of the trapping and toxin checks! I was also very lucky to be involved in the wonderful kiwi release at Parua Bay on the 11th of March, handling one of the three kiwi being released at this strategically important location that will hopefully become the connection between Whanagrei Heads and sites further north as part of the Kiwi Coast

corridor. And if that wasn't enough, the volunteer team got together for a workshop in the McLeod Bay hall on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> March to socialise, receive an update on the outcomes of our project, revisit the important trapping and toxin standards and learn about what the bird monitoring team (led by Mike and Jenny Butcher) have been up to. Phew! Read on for more info about some of these awesome projects.

## Predator control and outcome monitoring data results:

Trap catches still show the influence the new boundary intensification is having on captures recorded. Rats and mice captures are far higher due to the great increase in the number of traps and bait stations available and it is fantastic to note no possums or stoats caught again too! The spike in rodent numbers will be playing a big part in these high numbers. We are managing to capture quite a few weasels on the 7.5km boundary with the newly introduced 123 snap traps, probably pests we were not cleaning up in previous years, and most importantly we are capturing them before they even enter the reserve!

### Monthly predator control results: March 2018

Pest	Total # caught this month	# of Total caught inside reserve (i.e. not on boundary/buffer zone).	# caught this month prev. yr.	# caught 2018 YTD	# caught 2017 YTD.
Rat	9	7 of 29	6	61	15
Possum	0	0	6	0	7
Stoat	0	0	2	3	6
Weasel	10	0	1	16	2
Ferret	0	0	0	0	0
Feral cat	0	0	0	0	0
Mouse	21	1 of 21	0	54	1
Hedgehog	0	0	4	3	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>35</b>

### Monthly Species monitoring results/updates: March 2018

Species	Method	#	ID	Sex	Location	Status/comment
Forest Birds	Summer 5mbc	n/a	-	n/a	All reserve	Monitored data added to E birds database online
	Acoustic recording	n/a		n/a	Central reserve	Data recorded to Hard Drive to be analysed as part of ongoing bird abundance surveying.
n/a						



*A carpet of new seedlings spreads from mature bush*

## Natural Restoration

**works wonders...** after only two years without the pressure from cattle stock the 20ha riparian area above the cattle yards at Urquharts Bay is revealing just how well natural restoration, with some weed control can work. I was so stoked to see a high number and variety of native tree and shrub species popping their heads up above the previously grazed Kikuyu throughout many parts of this awesome area. The remnant mature bush and scattered Manuka from the grazing days have spread seed out around themselves and in some places there is a complete corridor of

seedlings between each of the existing bush clusters. This natural restoration has been well enhanced also by the 2000 or so native seedlings planted in and around the lower area near the streams in recent years by Whangarei Heads school children. All in all, this area is fast becoming a great example of restoration, and its close proximity to the Urquhart Bay entrance means it will extend the reserves' habitat, cater well to environmental education opportunities and develop into more recreational forest area for reserve users too.



*Mingimingi, five finger, cabbage tree, coprosma sp. Manuka, etc naturally filling the site*

**Environmental education at all levels...** The Bream Head Conservation Trust has taken a new, bold, forward step in its delivery of environmental education for our tamariki, and a greater investment in our future. The Trust has developed a relationship with secondary school groups and established a programme for both primary and secondary school environmental educational visits and study. The strategic plan is for the Trust to provide environmental education opportunities at the New Zealand standards level, so students interested in this field can partake in courses that will gain them credits toward their overall NZCA certification. It is our dream to be able to then link these studies through to the tertiary sector and/or into real work place opportunities. A great example of the later has been the successful employment by DOC of BHCT volunteer Laurence Sullivan, who was a Northtec student volunteering during his time as a student. We also have another young high school student who is most likely to enter into professional conservation employment at the end of this year. What is really awesome about all this is that the students will develop real conservation/restoration skills at the same time as they help BHCT to design, plan implement and monitor new projects going forward...a win-win situation.

So, during the month of March BHCT enjoyed hosting several school groups to the reserve including the inaugural secondary school group of year nine, 12 and 13 students from Whangarei Girls High School (WGHS). The girls were treated to several key note speakers, all experts in their respective fields of geology, history and ecology. A couple of the speakers were Whangarei Heads locals including Jan Boyes and Tony Climie (long term BHCT Volunteer) who both did a splendid job painting the big picture of the Heads geology and local history. At this point the year 13 students went to our operational Head Quarters at Ocean Beach to look at the facility in its current capacity, with the idea to design their own concept plans for how the HQ facility might be expanded upon sustainably to cater for our growing needs in volunteers, education, research. The remaining year nine students were also presented to by NZ Historic Places Trust historian Bill Edwards and then taking for an ecological exploration of emergent forest at Home Bay by Northland Environmental coordinator Jacque Knight. Finally, I had the pleasure of playing the restoration/kaitiaki game I have developed with the year nines, a hands-on game that explains in very real terms how NZ biodiversity suffered immensely with human arrival and how DOC and community groups are now trying to help out with providing predator free 'islands' on the mainland. This programme is one we hope to use for the rest of this year for the two other scheduled visits to the reserve by WGHS.



*WGHS students listen to Tony Climie as Urquharts Bay.*



As well as the secondary students enjoying themselves we had an enjoyable visit from the little year one and twos from Whangarei Heads School. First off, I played a quick version of the restoration/kaitiaki game which went well and got the children all fired up about getting rid of invasive mammals. We then walked to Smugglers Beach on a stunning day and got stuck into exploring the foreshore and sand dune systems for 'mini beasts' which is the term one teaching theme for these children. Our main aim was to find the native shore skink, which we had great success in doing, especially due to the help of Jo Barr as parent and experienced ranger in her past life on Limestone/Matakohe Island. But as well as this discovery the children were very quick

to find other 'beasts' such as sand hoppers, millipedes, crickets, spiders, sand grubs and a dead penguin.

This multi-year level delivery programme is all part of our desire/plan to teach all school age levels the importance of conservation/restoration through hands on environmental educational experiences. Therefore, through the many dedicated hours the BHCT education committee are putting into this key future output of the Trust, I am sure we will see more and more student groups visiting and learning, designing, planning, exploring throughout the reserve, increasing youth knowledge and support for this vital part of our lives.

## Weed of the Month

### The time has come to purge your place of privet!



This months 'Weed of the Month' is the putrid **tree privet** (*Ligustrum lucidum*), sometimes known as Japanese privet or broadleaf privet. It is right up there on our dirty dozen priority target list because if we do nothing, over time it will spread more and more rapidly around the Heads and replace our native forest with a monoculture of privet trees, as it has already started to do in spots further up the peninsula. This is bad news for our native species and for us humans as the pollen triggers allergies and asthma. Weed Action is undertaking a strategic project on the peninsula targeting the outlying infestations to

contain the spread so now is a great time to take action and join the resistance!

Call Jo on 0220562277 or email [weedactionwh@gmail.com](mailto:weedactionwh@gmail.com)

## Coming up in April:

**Wild kiwi event...**the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of this great event is due to take place on the 14<sup>th</sup> April. Get involved and enjoy the beauty of our area whilst keeping fit and having fun.

**More mothplant control...**the BHCT and DOC rangers will be out in teams again trying to contain the spread of mothplant in the north side of Bream Head throughout April.

**Volunteers back into toxin control...** our dedicated volunteers will be back out on the reserve checking bait stations and traps to maintain our tight hold on pests and predators.

Okay my friends, take care out there and I hope to see you in and around the reserve or our beautiful region!

Nga mihi mahana

Adam

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