

# BUSH TELEGRAPH



December  
2023

News from September-November & key events coming up in December-February  
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## Welcome, Adrian!

Adrian has joined the Rotokare whānau as our new General Manager. He has worked in multiple fields, including sports science and as a fisheries officer, but his passion has always revolved around manu. Being an avid bird photographer, Adrian has had a connection with Rotokare long before he began working here, but has since bloomed with the opportunity to work to support the recovery of this site and the endangered species present here. His passion doesn't stop at work, however. Adrian

has a small sanctuary of his own, which he has been revegetating and eliminating pests from for the last 6 years. We look forward to the time ahead with Adrian.



## A Day in the Life of...

“Education is my passion! I feel that it is the reason I'm in this world, to help nurture and inspire the next generation of environmental conservationists. After all, this world will be theirs to support one day!”

Penelope is the environmental educator at Rotokare, having recently moved here from Australia. Her working week will vary from school visits (which include a guided walk, an education session, and fun hands-on activities), to networking, to programme design, to report writing! But her absolute favourite part of her job is working with the Rotokare Youth Ambassadors.



BUSH CLASSROOM

**THANK YOU!**

Baker Tilly Staples Rodway for preparing our annual financial performance report and the audit examination!

Kareen McLeod from the Department of Medicine Charitable Trust for not only donating an AED to our site, but for coming out and running the staff through a training session!

Miranda & Daryl from 800 Trust for donating meat for the BBQ

Julian & Mike at Bees and Trees for their continued support, producing the 2024 batch of Rotokare honey, and providing the labels!

For the many donations of raw sugar people have made to bolster our stock for Hihi feeding!

Thanks to Aviagen New Zealand for their generous ongoing donations!

Carol Digby for selling honey on our behalf at her stall!

# Biodiversity & Sanctuary

## Hihi



A minimum of 84 banded hihi were found during our pre-breeding surveys at the start of September. A fair few unbanded birds were also sighted so it's likely our true population is even higher!

Breeding season is well underway with seven females already busy with nests in nest boxes around the sanctuary and the first chicks of the season starting to hatch. At least one active natural nest has also been found! An exciting discovery! At least 60% of Rotokare hihi females choose to nest naturally which is a great indication that they like it here.

This season we are rolling out some new tech to help boost our monitoring efforts with all hihi now being fitted with unique a colour

band containing a microchip. The hihi feeders are having readers installed which will record every time a microchipped hihi visits! Most male hihi have these fancy new bands already, with Hihi Conservation Officer Mhairi McCready coming to catch and reband some of our existing population recently. She will be back in March to replace bands on the hihi females, and to catch and band any young from natural nests.

## Biodiversity Monitoring

Coming into summer is an important time of year for us to check the status of some of the native wildlife that lives at Rotokare. The changeable weather has made it a bit tricky for the team to undertake some of our monitoring with the wind picking up during a recent wetland bird survey making it too hard to detect the birds. We are planning to repeat this soon on a calmer day. While we're still crunching the results from our recent repeat of our Sanctuary 5 minute bird counts, the results are looking good with increases in many of our vulnerable native species being detected!

The team has also just finished our early summer lizard monitoring session. We were fortunate to find good numbers of ornate skink, goldstripe gecko and a few of forest geckoes! We are delighted to see the recovery of these special lizards within the Sanctuary.



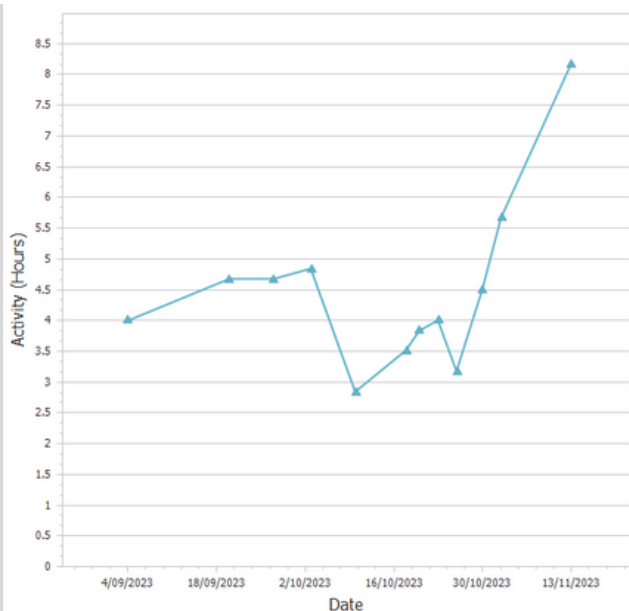
## Full Sanctuary Tracking Card Run

The results of our tracking card run are in! No evidence of introduced mammals was found within the sanctuary. A great result! The team did have some other interesting finds, however. These 3 tracking cards show footprints of some of the other creatures living here at Rotokare (amongst the 100's of insect footprints!). Evidence of lizards, birds, and frogs!

Tracking cards are one of the key monitoring tools the team use to check for pests both within the sanctuary and in the Rotokare halo trapping area. There are 1600 tunnels placed in a 50m-by-50m grid across the sanctuary. Cards are placed five times a year at known high-risk times when pests are on the move, to check for any mammalian pests who may have snuck in, and to swiftly find and remove any we detect.



# Taranaki Kōhonga Kiwi at Rotokare (TKKR)



Kiwi breeding season at Rotokare has been off to a great start, with 7 of our 11 monitored males having started incubating since September. So far, 5 of these nests have been completed, with the 2 remaining due to have chicks hatch around Christmas. While it can be difficult to judge exactly how many eggs have hatched without checking the nest directly, the transmitters attached to the kiwi send out a set of codes which tell us how active the kiwi has been at night. Essentially acting as Kiwi morse code! When that activity drops very low, we can assume he spent the night in the burrow with a hatching chick. This graph shows an example for 'Windsor' who we think hatched two eggs. You can see the low points on the 10th and 26th of October, followed by an increase in activity as he no longer needs to sit on his eggs.

## Biosecurity & Halo

### Welcome to our summer ranger

Thom has joined the team at Rotokare on a 12-week work placement! Originally from Patea, Thom is currently completing the NMIT Kaitiaki Whenua Trainee Ranger Programme in Nelson, developing essential skills for a career in conservation. Thom has already proven to be a hard worker, and fits in well with the team. He is hoping to gain a wide variety of hands on experiences and has so far participated in fence checks, trap checks, bird and lizard monitoring, Hihi feeding, and captive lizard care just to name a few! His favourite manu is Pōpokatea, or Whitehead. In his spare time, Thom works as a comedian! So if you see him around, make sure you ask him to crack a joke.



### Halo Updates

Over lambing season parts of the Halo are temporarily closed to reduce stress to the ewes. But it's ramping back up again! Thanks to the generous support of the TOI foundation the Trust will be taking on a new Halo Ranger to increase our ability to service the traps in the halo project area. Our traps have been getting a makeover and will continue getting refurbishments over the coming months. A special thanks to Keiran Godfrey for providing us with 100

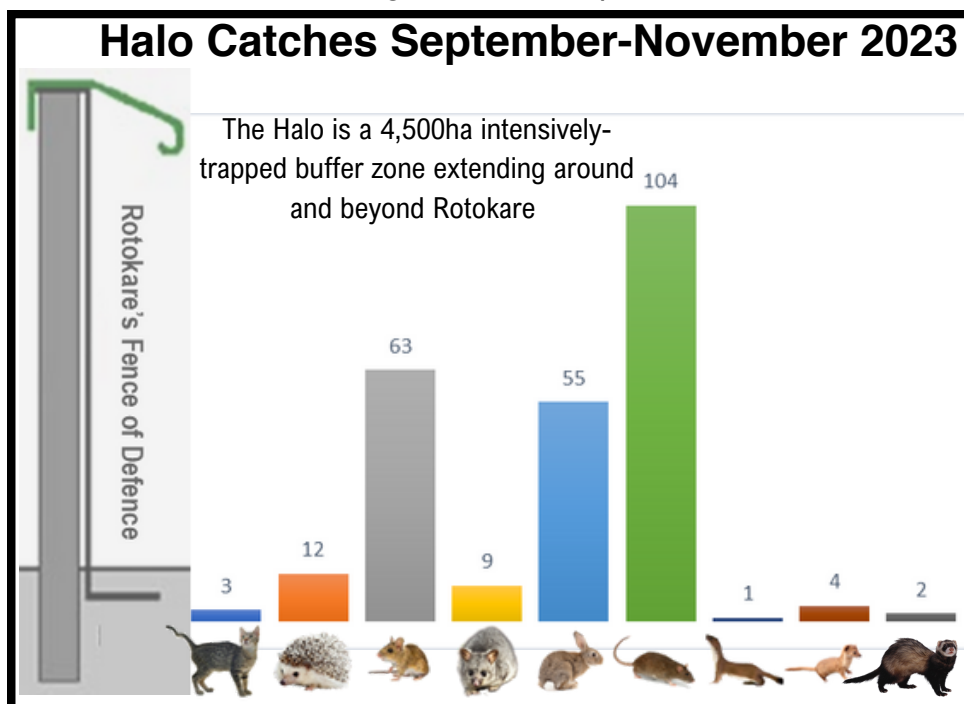
Wheronet sensors which allow us to remotely check the status of our traps! This is especially helpful for live capture traps which normally require daily inspections.

For this new technology to function, volunteer John Cooper has also installed two gateways to relay data from these sensors using solar powered modems.

These sensors not only save lots of time, but also increase our ability to catch, allowing the team to clear traps soon after they are triggered.

So far, the sensors have worked a dream!

### Halo Catches September-November 2023



# Education

## Congratulations to Amber!

Amber graduated as a Rotokare Ambassador in 2021 and continued her conservation journey. This year she was awarded a joint award from Taranaki Regional Council Environmental Awards as a Youth Environment Leader. At 16, Amber has already achieved some impressive conservation feats. She is the lead committee-kaitiaki member at her school, which she and a few fellow students co-founded. This committee has subcommittees for water, the school garden, and pest trapping. As part of this, Amber began water testing the river beside her school as it was highly polluted. She then worked to clear the water, and continued testing to find that the quality had improved.

Her goal is to extend this project to other local waterways, as well as to revegetate the system. Amber has also run community planting days for the native garden at her school. But it hasn't stopped there!

Amber has also been involved with Blake Inspire, an environmental leadership programme, where she delved into Mātauranga Māori and extended her knowledge of waterways. She also participated in Girl Boss NZ, which is an online leadership programme, and won her year! Her project focused on climate change. All of these projects and programmes she has been involved with have allowed her to complete her Duke of Edinburgh Bronze, and she is currently working on her silver.

Amber is still a regular at Rotokare, and comes along to working bees and tracking card runs. We are excited for what the future has to hold for her!



## Schools Update

Throughout 2023, Rotokare had 30 different schools from across Taranaki visit as part of our education programme, with more than 1500 ākonga learning from our Educator and education volunteers! Our programmes cover a range of topics about the environment, from insects to birds, from water to forests.

We had some visits to schools as part of 'Sparky the Kiwi' event, as well as school camps at the sanctuary which included dusk/night walks! This year has been a blast, and we're excited for another fruitful year in 2024.



## Latest News

Congratulations to volunteer Graham Wells who was recognised as one of 100 finalists for the Kiwi Bank New Zealander of the Year!

Graham is an integral part of the Rotokare Sanctuary project. His positive attitude, skills, reliability and team-player approach are what make him a brilliant volunteer and a key part of the success of Rotokare. Graham has been an invaluable volunteer for the Rotokare project since May 2018. Graham first joined the team at Rotokare after moving to the area from Auckland, joining his brother in law Litchy who is also a regular volunteer. Graham's diligence makes him a perfect fit for the fence and trap check team. This involves walking around the sanctuary perimeter fence line every week and monitoring for signs of deterioration, invasion, and erosion. During his time in the team, Graham has completed over 230 fence checks!



# Latest News



In November, two of our dedicated volunteers were recognised for their efforts, receiving awards at the 2023 South Taranaki Community Awards. Congratulations Andrea Shepherd and Paul Mackle.

Andrea is a human dynamo. What she lacks in size, she makes up for in energy, perseverance and tenacity. She has made a huge personal commitment to restoring the sound and movement of our Taranaki wildlife and our region is all the better for her huge contribution.

She joined the Rotokare whānau in 2016 when she moved to the region and has been a weekly regular ever since!



Paul is very much an “in the background” achiever. He started volunteering at Rotokare Scenic Reserve in 2016, in response to a call for help in the local paper. Paul has been an integral member of the volunteer team ever since! He is at Rotokare Scenic Reserve every week, when his full-time shift work allows it. He is often found doing the tasks others can't or won't do. This is usually hard physical grafting work attending to the infrastructure in the reserve.

## Land Title for Rannoch Bush

The Rannoch Bush project site (30ha) has been purchased by the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust with the goal of undertaking a whole-of-ecosystem restoration project. The Rannoch Bush site directly links the Rotokare Scenic Reserve as well as a privately-owned native forest. The ultimate aim of the project is to create high-quality native forest habitat corridors and linkages that directly connect Rotokare to other large native forest blocks in the area. This will allow numerous indigenous bird species to safely disperse out of the pest-proof fenced Rotokare Sanctuary and into the wider surrounding landscape. Long-term, the Trust has aspirations of connecting enough high-quality, pest-controlled habitat to facilitate

future reintroductions of other native species. The restoration of the Rannoch Bush project area will result in several measurable long-term benefits not only increasing available habitat native species which are currently found with the Rotokare Sanctuary, but will also improve the extent, quality, and ecological functioning of the natural area remnants that currently persist in this space.

## New Home for Peppa, the Duvaucels Gecko

Peppa, a 19-year-old Duvaucels Gecko has called Rotokare home for the last 9 years. As the largest gecko species within New Zealand, Peppa was in need of a home refurbishment! Some of our wonderful volunteers, Wietze and Rae, worked hard to create a mansion for Peppa. She's given notice for her home relocation, with her move in date being the 21st of December! But first we'll have to pick the best furniture to compliment the feng shui of her new space. Thanks so much guys!



# Coming Up @ Rotokare

## Youth Ambassador Graduation

Another year has flown by, and our cohort of 16 ambassadors will be graduating. Some will continue on with Rotokare, others are ready to spread their wings!



Our ambassador programme has seen over 50 dedicated ākonga graduate since its inception in 2016!



This year, for their conservation project, our senior ambassadors held a stall at the Taranaki Garden Festival, and raised over \$300! This helps to fund the field trips both within and outside of the region that the ambassadors go on each year.

### Rotokare Wish List

The items on this list will help staff and volunteers with their tasks—we welcome donations and contributions towards sourcing:

- Garden hose with nozzle
- Folding tables
- Electric fence reel
- RAW Sugar for Hihi

Rotokare works hard to deliver significant conservation and community outcomes. If you'd like to help us please lend us a hand by:

- Contributing wish list items
- Donating towards current projects
- Volunteering at our Sunday working bees (9am—12pm, with free lunch!)
- Becoming "Friends of the Lake" (FOL) with a \$30-\$50 annual donation

Members of



**WILD FOR TARANAKI**  
To Tātou Taiāo – Maranga Papatōhūku



Sanctuaries of New Zealand



Hihi Recovery Group



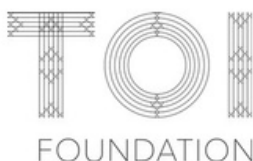
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