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Dear Members and supporters,

**In this issue: Fairy Tern News, Red Beach; Iti – the book; Generous artists;
PPC 85; Muriwai; Notornis.**

Fairy Tern News

The season started late and has been a mixture of good news and bad. The good news being the successful fledging at Papakānui and the bad news the number of losses to predation at Mangawhai and Te Ārai. The very wet, wild weather on the east coast this summer has also caused its share of problems.

Papakānui: The first successful nests of the season here produced three live chicks, all of which fledged early in January. It's been a long time since this many fledged from Papakānui, so a great effort from all the team there. The chicks were banded YM-BL, KM-LR and WM-LB.

Key: B=blue, K=black, L=lime, M=metal, R=red, W=white, Y=yellow.

Waipū: After the very sad loss of two chicks here in December, the resident pairs remained on site, but no further nests were laid. The results of the autopsies showed no apparent reason for the chicks' deaths.

Mangawhai: The Mangawhai nests have been hard hit by predation this season, with a total of four nests predated mostly by rats. The eggs uplifted from Mangawhai after predation formed the

first and second captive rearing cohorts. The weather has been unsettled with a lot of rain and wind.



**New lakes on the dunes
after heavy rain in
January**

Photo: Gayle Forster

The birds have shown great stamina – one pair nesting three times and another (the Pākiri pair) nesting twice. Persistence paid off with both of these pairs raising a chick to fledging – a marathon effort!

A total of three chicks fledged from Mangawhai, the first chick to fledge, was banded BM-KB early January and was seen mid January on the estuary being taught to forage by its parents. In February the two later chicks were banded RL-M (the Pākiri pair's chick) and YK-RM, the youngest chick whose parents heroically laid three nests this season.



RM-RW feeding his fledgling RL-M.

Photo: Darren Markin

RM-RW became very interesting to the captive reared birds when they first saw the feeding!

Captive rearing:

Predation also hit the captive rearing programme at Te Ārai hard. Of the first cohort of six chicks, three were predated by rats and one died, leaving two from this cohort to survive to fledging: BM-LR and RM-YB. One of the second cohort of four was also predated, but three survived and have fledged: WY-KM, WL-RM and WR-YM.

Melanie Scott and Dawne Sanson have been among the volunteers helping DOC rangers at the aviary. Their report:

Despite the loss of a number of chicks, especially from the first cohort of six that arrived at the aviary in early January, it has been a fairly successful season so far for the captive reared chicks. No two seasons are the same and this latest season has presented challenges, successes and disappointments, but overall quite a lot of progress has been made. The pen, with its enlarged shell mound, has provided the chicks with a popular vantage point for roosting and launching themselves and they have all fulfilled their developmental goals fairly well within expected time

frames. One challenge they have had to face has been a rather territorial young adult male who seemed to think this shell mound was his personal domain and often chased off the chicks. The upside of this has been that the chicks have developed strong flying skills and, in some cases, possibly earlier than expected.



Blue, Orange and Red moving up the beach as the tide comes in *Photo: Darrin Markin*

All the surviving chicks are now very confident flyers and seem to really enjoy just chilling out on the beach most of the time, often with groups of white fronted terns and the two Pākiri adult Tara Iti and their recently fledged chick (RL-M). The aviary chicks spend a lot of time diving and swooping over the stream and popping back to the pen to catch a quick fish that has been put out for them by the Zoo staff. At least one chick, known as Red ((RM-YB), has caught a fish from the stream. They are beginning to explore their wider territory and the chick known as Purple (WY-KM) was recorded at Port Albert at about midnight a couple of nights ago. It also flew to Atiu Creek and Tauhoa on the Kaipara (the captive chicks are fitted with satellite trackers). There is so much we still don't know about these juvenile tara iti, e.g. did Purple fly with a wild adult tara iti or did it just decide to go exploring by itself, and then find its way back



to the pen and the other captive chicks at Te Ārai? Did it manage to catch a fish by itself on the Kaipara or was it just very hungry on arrival back at the pen?

Purple. Back safely after trip west
Photo: Darren Markin

Red Beach Surf Club

For a number of years in January Red Beach Surf Club has brought their Nippers to Mangawhai to practise and share their abilities. They usually range from 8 to 16 years old, both girls and boys. Heather Rogan and Jane Vaughan usually spend an hour with them at the camp ground to talk about the birds they will see on the Mangawhai spit and how to behave among the birds nesting there. This year Robin Tearle, DOC's roaming Ranger accompanied them to show the Nippers how traps work.

Part of their training is to swim out to the spit every day, sometimes on several occasions, and jog around the sand dunes then swim back. There were about 60 Nippers and 20 adults looking rather tired after a hard day!

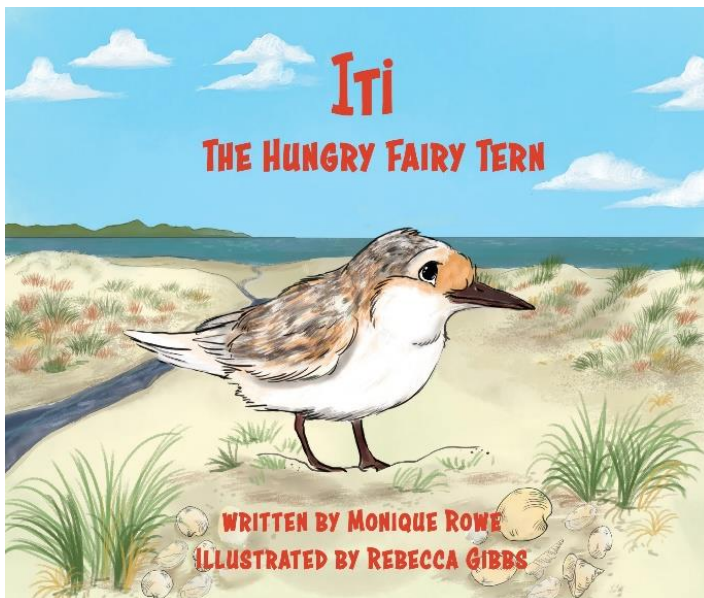
Accompanying Jane and Heather were the taxidermied predators owned by the Fairy Tern Charitable Trust which are kept at the Mangawhai Museum in a temperature controlled room. These are always received with interest, as it is not often people can see them close up.

We talked about watching where they walked and keeping well back from sitting birds and chicks on the spit, and Robin let off a DOC 200 trap which makes a loud bang. She showed them how it worked and they were told in no uncertain terms to keep away from any traps they saw and not ever to touch them.

These chats are always very well received and the kids ask a lot of questions!

Iti, the Hungry Fairy Tern

We still have copies of Iti the Hungry Fairy Tern, our beautiful children's book available.



It is available at bookshops around the country and at the Mangawhai museum.

It may also be ordered by post directly from the New Zealand Fairy Tern Charitable Trust.

Cost: \$25 plus \$10 postage for postage in New Zealand
TOTAL: \$35

Email your order to

info@fairytern.org.nz with **Iti Book** in the subject line.

Include your name and full postal address and the number of copies you require.

Pay by direct credit to:

A/c No: 12-3094-0197257-00

A/c Name: New Zealand Fairy Tern Charitable Trust.

Include your name and Iti book in the reference field.

We can fit up to three copies into one parcel, so you only need to pay one lot of postage.

One book in one parcel - \$25 + \$10 = \$35 Two books in one parcel - \$50 + \$10 = \$60

Three books in one parcel - \$75 + \$10 = \$85

Generous artists

Long time Fairy Tern Trust members, Bob and Carol Simpson have generously donated their beautiful artworks to the Trust for fund-raising. Thank you, Carol and Bob!



Bob and Carol with their art in front of the Kowhai Arts Centre in Warkworth.

Photo: Heather Rogan

PPC 85

Hearings about Private Plan Change 85 (PPC85) were held in Mangawhai last week before three commissioners. Developers Foundry Group (formerly Cabra) and Pro Land Matters have applied to rezone around 94 hectares of rural land adjoining Mangawhai Harbour to allow for urban development. The Trust was one of many groups and individuals who opposed the plan.

Our opposition was based on the potential for adverse effects on fairy tern, arising from disturbance to feeding and roosting, predation, and pollution. Ian Southey presented expert evidence on our behalf in which he pointed out that the pair of fairy terns whose feeding territory adjoined the PPC85 area had been particularly productive in recent years, providing six eggs for captive rearing as well as raising chicks. He also highlighted the threat to bittern, another critically endangered species known to inhabit the area. The submissions from DOC emphasised the importance of Mangawhai to the survival of tara iti and focussed on the problems posed by dogs.

The Trust joined forces with Tern Point (the subdivision next to the Refuge on the spit) and Mangawhai Matters, (a local ratepayers' group) to engage counsel, Bal Matheson KC to represent us. He said that the development posed an unnecessary and inappropriate risk to the fairy tern and believed the commissioners would have good legal grounds to refuse PPC85 on that point alone. Let's hope they see it that way!

Muriwai

On the rocky cliffs at the southern end of Muriwai Beach hundreds of gannets nest every year. Gayle Forster photographed the colony in January. The northern end of Muriwai Beach is a total contrast – flat and sandy - and is where fairy tern/tara iti nest at Papakānui.





Feeding 3 month old chick

Photos: Gayle Forster

Notornis

The special issue of *Notornis* (Journal of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand), devoted entirely to tara iti/ NZ fairy tern will be published in March 2026. The trust has been handling the orders for the limited edition printed version, orders for which have now closed, but the issue will be available online as a pdf.

Among the many papers and short notes is one outlining the contribution of volunteers and the NZ Fairy Tern Trust to tara iti conservation. Word limits mean that what is published is a very abbreviated version.

Below is the original, fuller version of the section about the history of volunteer involvement in tara it/NZ fairy tern conservation and how the Trust supports their work. Further sections will be added in future newsletters.

Volunteers

The work of volunteers over the years has made a huge contribution to the success of the fairy tern/tara iti recovery programme. It has been long lasting, wide-ranging in scope, flexible and responsive to need.

By the early 1980s DOC monitoring of tara iti indicated that humans, vehicles and dogs were the greatest threat to nesting birds. The then editor of the local *Mangawhai Memo*, Joanna Roberts, initiated the setting up of a volunteer group rostered to assist with education, advice, and to carry out summer patrols on the harbour shoreline and Mangawhai Spit (Joanna Roberts pers. comm.). Ornithological Society New Zealand (OSNZ) volunteers assisted DOC wardens at Waipū, Mangawhai and, later, Pākiri when tara iti began breeding there.

In time for the 2005/2006 breeding season, a small number of volunteers established the About Tern group, led by Jane Vaughan. They began regular trips across to the Mangawhai Sand Spit to support DOC staff monitoring tara iti during the breeding season. The volunteers were trained at Mangawhai by long-term OSNZ members Gwenda Pulham and Audrey Williams. A similar About Tern group was later formed at Waipū.

Over time the relationship with DOC was formalised with a written Community Agreement, a Community Group Work Plan, and a Health and Safety Plan.

About Tern volunteers are supported by the Trust with the purchase of a boat for transporting them across to the Spit, and by providing other essential equipment such as telescopes and binoculars, and subsidising volunteer travel expenses. At Waipū, the Trust has supplied traps and cameras for the volunteer trapping group.

Mangawhai About Tern volunteers have spent an annual average of 207 hours observing tara iti during each breeding season, a total of 3,716 hours over eighteen years from 2007 to 2025. (Data for the other volunteer groups is not available) During the years 2007 until 2019 volunteers spent longer hours monitoring chick pecking, laying pindone poison and monitoring the first nest at Te Ārai.

Besides monitoring tara iti during the breeding season, volunteer activities comprise the following tasks which are not included in the above totals:

- Putting up and removing fences around the breeding areas
- Monitoring and trapping at Te Arai when no DOC ranger was present
- Looking for nests on the Sand Spit when no DOC rangers were present
- Assisting with the fish study initiated by Ian Southey
- Weeding and helping plant on the sand spit
- Time spent by the Trust committee on administration and the work involved in public engagement, management of court actions and predator control

As DOC has increased the number of rangers working with tara iti, both on-site and with background logistical and scientific advice, volunteers are increasingly encouraged to work in areas of public engagement and to monitor and collect data about other shorebirds on the Spit.

More about the Trust's other conservation activities in future newsletters.

Best wishes, Heather Rogan and the Trust Committee