



No. 2: 2026
17th. June, 2026

P.O. Box 401072
Mangawhai Heads 0541

Our website: www.fairytern.org.nz
Email: info@fairytern.org.nz

Dear Members and supporters,

**In this issue: Links, Fairy Tern News, Manukapua, Thanks,
Plan Change 85, Sandmining, Summaries of Rangers' reports.**

First, welcome to new members: Sebastian van der Zwan and Gavin Lear of Auckland; Iris Hayes.

Links

To read previous newsletters, go to:

<https://www.fairytern.org.nz/newsletters/>

To order the fairy tern/tara iti book go to:

<https://www.fairytern.org.nz/iti-the-hungry-fairy-tern/>

Fairy Tern News

The great news is that recent fairy tern/tara iti sightings have confirmed the presence of
45 adults and 11 juveniles - 56 in total!

Hui for Fairy tern stakeholders

Breeding Summary: These numbers were confirmed at the recent hui in the presentation by DOC's Ayla Wiles, acting tara iti programme lead. Breeding data: 29 eggs were laid; 20 chicks hatched; 16 chicks fledged – 6 in the wild (5 male, 1 female) captive (5 male, 5 female)

This season's challenges were: the numbers lost to predation, the inconclusive autopsy results and the risks to captive reared chicks in the early fledging period. Successes: population increase, survival of 11 juveniles confirmed sighted in the Kaipara and LM-BW, the first surviving captive female, prospecting at Waipū with a male.



WL -RM (Orange) Captive reared 2025-26. Sighted after his transmitter stopped working
Photo: Darren Markin

Captive Rearing: Erin Grierson and Devon Nicholls from Auckland Zoo talked about incubation and chick rearing. Working in partnership with DOC, the Zoo have artificially incubated tara iti eggs since 1996 and they have been part of the captive rearing programme since 2021. The selected eggs are transported by DOC to the Zoo where they are incubated until they hatch, then reared until they are 2-3 weeks old. Once they can feed independently, but before they can fly they are transferred to the pen at Te Ārai where they are closely monitored until they are no longer reliant on fish provision.

Fish Provision: DOC's captive rearing Ranger, Dayne McKenzie outlined the season's fish provision. Fish and Game and Tongariro Trout Centre supplied rainbow trout and wild fish were also caught to ensure the chicks had a varied diet. King salmon which was very popular with the birds previously was not available this year. 29.6 kg of fish was used over 126 days!

Future plans are to trial frozen fish, to secure more fish suppliers and to investigate the feasibility of saltwater species.



At the Zoo - learning to feed

Photo: Richard Robinson NZ Geographic

Predator control: Georgia Pringle, DOC's new tara iti, predator control lead introduced herself and summarised the network of traps and the toxin operations at tara iti breeding sites. In the 2025-2026 season **rats** were the most caught predators at Waipū, Mangawhai and Te Ārai, while at Pākiri it was **weasels** and **possums** at Pāpakanui.

Click on this link to read more about Georgia:

[Master of Science grad thanks a chicken named Swordfish – University of Auckland](#)

Research Topics over the last year have included: Tara iti's ecological niche (Nicole Whitelock); Tracking captive reared juveniles (Surenya Hilton); Kahu diet (Cara Thompson); Nest protection options (Ellen Webb); Aspirations, challenges, opportunities for tara iti (Aisling Rayne); Genetics (Alex Verry); Climate change risk (Finnbar Lee et al). The 22 papers in the *Notornis Special Issue* synthesised the latest knowledge about tara iti.

Genetics: Canterbury University geneticists, Tammy Steeves and Ilina Cubrinovska described establishing tara iti's pedigree. They found that all the 56 birds alive today can trace their descent from nine birds which were banded in the 1990s. These birds are the **founders** and are denoted as F1 – F9 in the tara iti pedigree. A total of 86 birds were identified, of which 56 survive today. Two of the founders F2 and F5 are represented in all the current population.

Future directions: Kristina Hillock, DOC's chair of the Tara Iti Recovery Group reported on the discussions and decisions from the meetings held last year which will inform the new Tara Iti Recovery Plan. The main objective is to increase the viability of the wild population and to ensure the continued existence of tara iti into the future. This would be done by enhanced field management and flexible upscaling of captive rearing.

Manukapua

Tara iti/fairy tern have moved over to the Kaipara for the winter and in March a group of nine volunteers under the expert guidance of Tony Crocker ventured over to Manukapua, or Big Sand Island in the Kaipara to see if they could find them. The weather was fantastic and plenty of birds were observed including the golden Plover and of course little terns and fairy terns.



Setting up at Manukapua

Photo: Gayle Forster

Thanks to.....

.....**Bennetts of Mangawhai**, the Chocolate Factory that keeps on giving to the Fairy Tern Trust! Once again a huge donation from the sales of their fairy tern cards, as well as donations from their fountain and donations box at the shop.

See <https://bennettschocolate.co.nz>

.....**Melissa Boardman** also known as **Bird Plus Bird** – a wonderful artist who has donated to the Trust proceeds from the sales of her beautiful shorebird T shirts. The T- shirts are available at Pūkoro, the Shorebird Centre at Miranda.

Go to <https://shop.shorebirds.org.nz/product-category/gifts/clothing/>

Little tern attacking R-KM

Photo: Darren Markin

.....**Tumbleweed Tees** make very attractive T-shirts featuring tara iti/fairy tern and donate to the Trust from sales of these T-shirts.

Find them at

<https://tumbleweedtees.com>

.....**Wrybill Birding Tours** who as the name suggests take people on bird watching tours. They have made us a very generous donation. One of the founders, Brent Stephenson was joint author/photographer of the well-known book ***Birds of New Zealand – a Photographic Guide.***

<https://wrybill-tours.com>

.....And to all the generous individuals who have donated to us – we really appreciate your support.



Plan Change 85

We are pleased to report that the application to rezone a large area of land adjacent to Mangawhai Harbour from rural to urban has been declined by the Kaipara District Council's panel of commissioners. The decision may still be appealed to the Environment Court.

Sandmining

The closing date for comments on McCallum Brothers' sandmining application was on 26th May. The area proposed for sandmining is in Bream Bay, off the coast of Waipu and Ruakaka. Under the fast-track legislation, groups had to be invited to respond. The Trust was not one of the groups invited, but we were able to supply evidence of potential harm to tara it/fairy tern for groups such as Bream Bay Guardians to use in their submissions.

All comments made on the application are now available to view on the Fast-track website: <https://www.fasttrack.govt.nz/projects/bream-bay-sand-extraction-project/comments-from-invited-parties>.

Rangers' Reports - Summaries

Thanks to DOC and the Rangers for these reports.

If you would like any of the full reports, reply to this email with Ranger reports in the subject line and we will send them to you.

The captive rearing report will be available later.

Waipū

Ranger Caroline Tahon

During the 2025-2026 tara iti breeding season at Waipū, one nest was established by the pair pGM-YB(male) and WM-KW(female). (This pair had successfully fledged 2 chicks during previous season 2024-2025.) In 2025-2026 season, the pair laid a single egg, and an additional egg originating from Mangawhai was later transferred into their nest. Both eggs hatched. However, both chicks were found dead at four and five days of age respectively, from unknown causes.

Four other tara iti showed pair-like behaviours at Waipū during the season, Male pair LM-YK & R-YM, and a second pair RpG-YM (male previously partnered with R-YM) and LM-BW, a female fledged from the captive rearing program during 2023-2024 season.

Overall the ranger and volunteers observed or caught a low number of predators this season. Work included monitoring tara iti and other birds, erecting fences & signs, monitoring public compliance, trapping predators and advocacy.

Large numbers of fish were found dead in the estuary, but MPI were unable to identify a cause – likely to be toxins or pollution. Fish surveys have been carried out by volunteers Sept-Dec.



LM-BW at Waipū

Photo: Darren Markin

LM-BW is the first surviving captive reared female. It's hoped she may breed soon.

Since 2008 shell patches for breeding sites have been added and enhanced by DOC, Patuharakeke and volunteers along the 4.7 kms sandspit and 185.4 hectare Wildlife Refuge, so there are ample safe breeding grounds available at Waipū sandspit for our tara iti population to grow.

- Debbie Stone

Mangawhai

Mangawhai Spit – Rangers Lee Mead, Katie Gehrke, Jean Sharpe

For the 2025/26 breeding season there were a total of sixteen nests laid by eight pairs, producing twenty-four eggs. Twelve of the eggs went into the captive rearing program (in two separate cohorts). Of the remaining eggs, six were predated, one transferred to Waipū and five hatched on the Spit. Three of the hatchlings fledged, one disappeared three days after hatching and it's sibling died after three days from an unknown cause.

The first nest at Mangawhai was laid in the first week of November with the last laid on 31st December. Rangers were on site seven days a week from 22/9/25 to 24/2/26.

The nests were laid on seven shell patches at the two areas known as the Dredge (six shell patches) and Tangaroa. This was the first season Dredge 'Flats' and 'Outback' were used for

nesting. The high points used for nesting this year on these shell patches did not exist last season. Over the winter wind erosion of sand exposed these shell dense mounds.

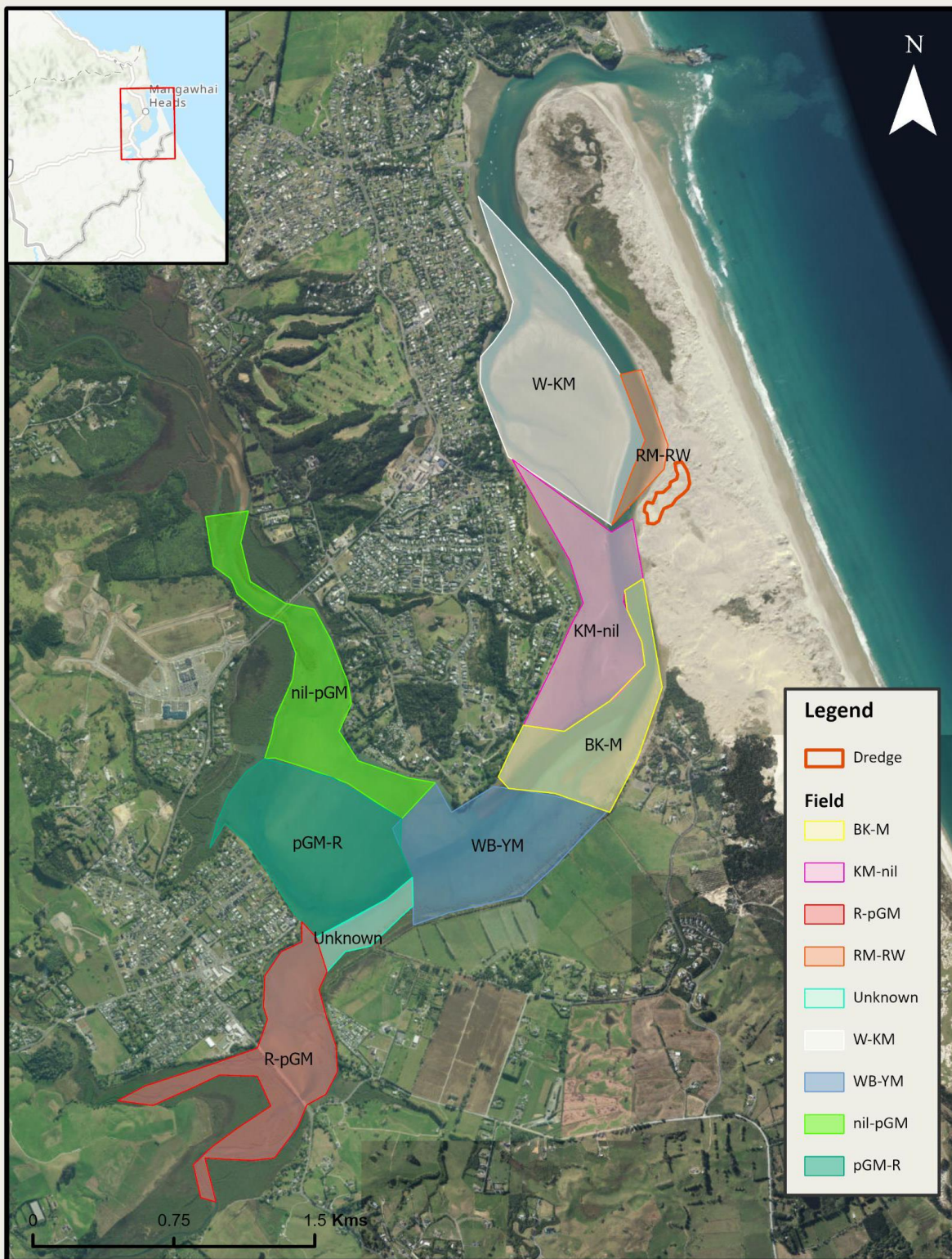
Suspected rat predations of eggs on more favoured shell patches, like the 'Bowl', plus the recovery of eggs and release of other nests in response to suspected predation, left little choice for tara iti of perceived safe nest sites. The natural coastal shell patch named 'Tangaroa' was used for nesting for the first time this season after previously only being used by wandering chicks from the nearby 'South Sea Valley' patch (now disabled). 'The Bowl', historically the most favoured shell patch at Dredge, was once again the centre of pre nesting activity at Mangawhai, closely followed by Dredge Rise.

After the first nest of the season was predated on 'Bowl', it became almost abandoned and attention turned to 'Rise'. Before any nest was put down, 'Rise' was suddenly abandoned and three nests were laid on 'The Flats' (for the first time ever), one at 'Tangaroa', two on the 'Alps', and surprisingly a nest on 'Bowl'. On 30/11/2025, nests 510 and 513 were lost to suspected predation. Rats were captured on a trail camera on one of these nests. Due to these suspected predations and impending bad weather, all eggs at Mangawhai were recovered. Due to continued rat activity at Dredge, only the 506 egg was returned.



YK-RM the last of the Mangawhai fledglings

Photo: Darren Markin



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Mangawhai Foraging Territories

2025-2026 Breeding Season



Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

After release of the remaining nests, ‘Rise’ became favoured once more, with four nests laid and another nest laid at ‘Tangaroa’. Soon after, one of the ‘Rise’ nests was predated, and once more the eggs in the surrounding nests were recovered. Once again rats were detected on nest cameras. Due to continued rat activity, it was deemed unsafe to return the eggs and the nests at Dredge were released. Subsequently, another nest was laid at ‘Tangaroa’ and a nest at a newly exposed shell patch dubbed ‘Outback’, the furthest North of all the patches at Dredge.

Although there were fewer dogs seen on the Spit this season, there were two cases of dogs within the fenced area!

Predators: There were 287 traps placed on the Spit which were made up of DOC 200s, DOC 250’s, SA2s, Victor snap traps, leg hold and cage traps. They were successful at removing 62 predators. Rat catches were high compared to previous seasons which was likely due to additional effort and traps placed in response to the detection of rats and the suspected rat predation of eggs.

- *Guy Folster*

Pākiri

Ranger Abby Parks

Pākiri Beach is the smallest breeding site with one pair present per season.

During the 2025-2026 season, R(B)-YM and RM-RW were the only prospective breeding pair at Pākiri. They displayed courtship behaviours and defended foraging territory against other tara iti but no eggs were laid at Pākiri and the pair moved to Mangawhai in late November.

Many tara iti visited Pākiri estuary, including groups of the 2024-2025 juveniles. On 30/09/2025, 9–10 tara iti were observed resting along the water’s edge before taking off north over the dunes at dusk. Over the following 2 weeks a regular pair —RM-RW and R(B)-YM —exhibited pair bonding behaviour, foraging, pair flights and roosting close together. However, they did not show interest in nesting on the shell patches they visited.

In late October and early November, natural events impacted the Pakiri estuary and the Pākiri river level rose with the water became murky for several days. From 5th to 10th October there were exceptionally high tides and the birds were often not seen until much later in the day.

Total pest animal and predator captures in the 2025-2026 season were comparable to the previous season. Between 5/10/2025 and 22/02/2026, there were 14 catches across the trapline at Pākiri. Six weasels was the highest caught species. Though cats were seen on the camera traps several times during the breeding season, none were caught in traps. However, seven cats were caught prior to the breeding season (March-September 2025).

An increase in human activity (camping) during the summer season in Pākiri observed may have led to an increase in rat and mice activity in the area, the camps providing a likely food source. Advocacy and education around responsible storage and disposal of food in camping areas may help mitigate rodent numbers.

Despite no successful nesting in recent years, Pākiri is still considered viable for tara iti nesting and may be used by breeding pairs in future seasons.

- *Melanie Scott*

Pāpakanui Tara Iti Rangers' Report

John Neilsen and Sofia Newman were the two DOC rangers working from 18.9.25 to 8.2.26 at Pāpakanui for this season. They have a large area to cover which includes Waller Island and the Spit accessed through a pine forest or over Kaipara Air Weapons Range. Apart from monitoring Tara Iti, they fenced and erected signage, carried out predator control, some weed eradication and advocacy & compliance work. They had little time to monitor other shorebirds, but did note how NZ Dotterel and Variable Oystercatchers fared.



YM-BR One of the Pāpakanui fledglings

Photo: Darren Markin

Predators did not cause any Tara Iti deaths this season, however, adverse weather created anxiety and after the second storm an egg was found to be missing. Habitat enhancement and uplifting incubating eggs while replacing them with dummies took quite some effort, but was rewarded with successfully saving 3 of the 4 eggs.

This has been the most successful season for the Tara Iti at Pāpakanui. Looking at the chick fledging rate since the 2012-13 season until this year, there have been 7 years when there have been no fledglings at all at Pāpakanui. This is despite the fact that in one of those years 10 eggs were laid. This year 4 eggs were laid and there were 3 successful fledglings. The two successful breeding pairs were both made up of the bonding between one experienced bird and one first time breeder. There was an increase in the number of other Tara Iti sighted at Pāpakanui with up to 12 of last year's fledglings amongst them.

Habitat enhancement has been central to management of Tara Iti at Pāpakanui since 2008 through adding shell deposits. Thirteen deposits have been created, including top-ups and a new patch made in 2025. These have involved the addition of huge amounts of shell matter, transported to sites by helicopter & unimogs belonging to the NZ Defence Force. Other agencies involved in these transfers and the spreading of the shell were DOC, Ngati Whatua o Kaipara and Auckland Council. Shell was provided by Biomarine with 40 tonnes of whole oyster shells and 7 tonnes of shell from the Whangarei Harbour. As these shells had to be free of invasive species those from the Marsden site in Whangarei, where plague skinks and Argentine ants were detected, had to be rejected and another source found. A very successful horseshoe shape of shells was created by the rangers to shore up the nest sites in the two storms, a technique they believe should be taught to rangers in the future.

- *Glenys Mather*

Nest 505 – example of horseshoe used to protect against weather.

***Photo: Sofia Newman
and John Nielsen***

