



## End of Season Volunteer lunch



On a beautiful Sunday in November over 30 people came along to The Playhouse to celebrate another year of volunteering, working together to improve the estuarine environment for banded rail and other species. It was a wonderful occasion, with great camaraderie and a yummy lunch. Thanks to The Playhouse, TDC and DOC for their continued support.

## Banded Rail in Art

Hand coloured engravings by John Latham 1740-1837

John Latham was a British ornithologist and surgeon. He published several works on birds, including 'A General Synopsis of Birds' published in London in 1787. The book drew on new data from Captain Cook's second and third voyages. Copperplate engravings were created from bird skins taken back to England by Captain Cook.

Source: National Library of NZ website



For information about the Battle for the Banded Rail please contact Project Manager, Kathryn Brownlie on 544 4537 or [bandedrail@gmail.com](mailto:bandedrail@gmail.com)  
For trapping information or support contact Field Officer, Tracey Murray on 540 2227 or 027 286 5866 or [bandedrail@gmail.com](mailto:bandedrail@gmail.com)

## Trapping Results

The total catch for the December quarter was 450. Total catches since 2014 is now 16,152. There are 1,270 traps in the network.

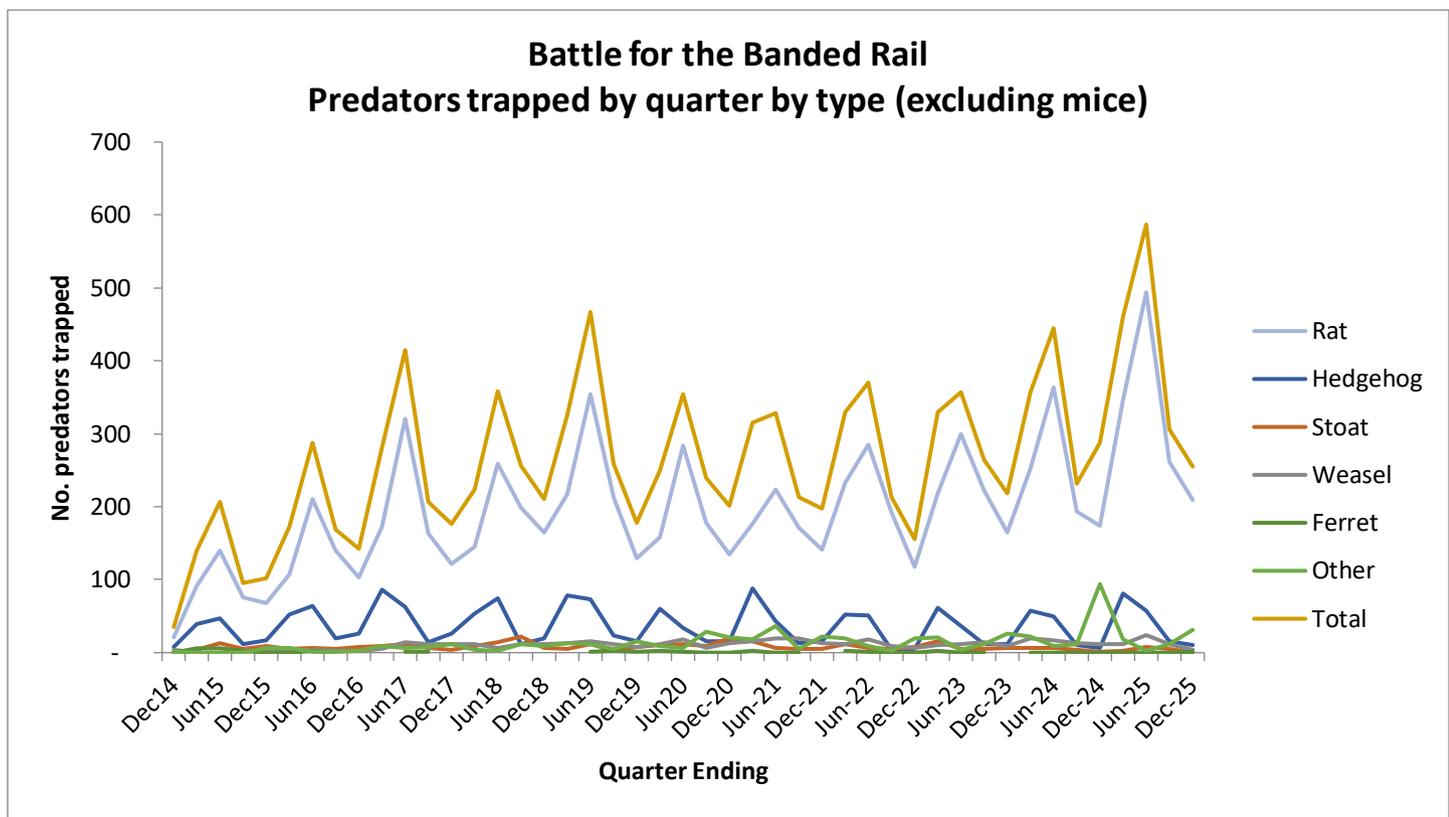
### Catches by Year by Pest Type

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	11 Year Total
<b>Rat</b>	396	560	778	768	915	754	710	827	905	984	1,310	<b>8,907</b>
<b>Hedgehog</b>	122	162	189	160	191	125	160	112	123	123	165	<b>1,632</b>
<b>Stoat</b>	32	25	31	51	28	49	32	30	31	17	16	<b>342</b>
<b>Weasel</b>	7	11	43	40	47	49	66	45	45	61	52	<b>466</b>
<b>Ferret</b>	14	3	2	2	5	3	2	3	2	-	1	<b>37</b>
<b>Mouse</b>	24	38	68	105	100	186	230	253	470	1,057	1,640	<b>4,171</b>
<b>Other*</b>	8	11	35	27	44	65	83	51	62	136	63	<b>586</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>1,146</b>	<b>1,153</b>	<b>1,330</b>	<b>1,231</b>	<b>1,283</b>	<b>1,321</b>	<b>1,638</b>	<b>2,378</b>	<b>3,247</b>	<b>16,141</b>

\* includes rabbits, birds and unspecified catches from Goodnature A24 traps where the species caught is unknown

This graph illustrates the annual pattern of catches since trapping began in late 2014.

We have excluded mice from the graph as they are not our target species, and the catches were skewing the graph results. We are still recording them in the table.



## Trapping & Monitoring News from Tracey Murray

### Arvida Trapping at Borck Creek

Tracey met with 6 people from the Arvida Waimea Plains Village who are keen to trap along Borck Creek. Contractors working on the bridge at Lower Queen St/Headingly Lane were reporting seeing hundreds of rats around. Along with support from Iona, Partnerships & Environmental Education Officer at TDC, 10 DOC200s and rat traps have been put in place adjacent to the village. We're looking forward to seeing the results.



### Five-Minute Bird Count

Five-minute bird count is a well-used method to monitor birds in New Zealand. It is a simple and effective way to count birds within a specific area and provides a snapshot of the species that are present.

To carry out the count, you stay still in one place for five minutes recording all the birds seen or heard. All you need is a pen or pencil, a notebook or record sheet, phone or watch to time 5 minutes and a pair of binoculars.

When the counts are completed at the same location over a period of time, the data can be used to gain a picture of changes occurring. For example, an increase in the number or types of native bird species might be seen as predator numbers decrease and native plants begin to grow.

A tip for avoiding double counting of birds is to record the maximum number of species that you saw at one time eg. if you saw two sparrows then shortly afterwards saw six, record six to avoid the possibility of counting the first two twice.

You may want to monitor birds in your own backyard, in a park or on the estuary. DOC has more information and resources on their website: [Five Minute Bird Count Method](#)



If you are keen to find out even more, NMIT runs courses locally with the next one in March 2026.

See [NMIT Five Minute Bird Count course](#)

# Bird Chirp

## Kōtuku White Heron

The Kōtuku is a New Zealand native, and its status is Nationally Critical. It is found in coastal freshwater wetlands, and estuaries throughout the country, such as the Waimea Inlet.



During the breeding season the birds grow a beautiful plumage of long feathers from their backs and wings, the beak turns darker, and the skin near the eye turns a bluish green.

Kōtuku wade in the shallows of the estuary and feed on small fish such as whitebait, eels, frogs and insects which they grab with their sharp dagger-like beaks. Because of its beautiful plumage, the bird was hunted almost to extinction by both Māori and European and by 1941 there were only 4 nests left.

The breeding site near Whataroa is now a reserve and there is only managed access to site to give the birds a chance to nest undisturbed. The population is now about 120 birds.



The main natural threats are storms, and the condition of the Ōkārito lagoon, which can at times get blocked, affecting the water levels and the ability to feed. Also, the nearby rookeries of shags and the spoonbill colony may affect the success of the Kōtuku.

The usual predators such as harrier hawks, stoats, and possums will impact on the breeding success and there are trapping projects in place.

## Habitat Restoration Update from Kathryn Brownlie

### *Atriplex cinerea* / Grey saltbush Survey

On 23 November an enthusiastic group of people including some *Battle for the Banded Rail* volunteers spent a morning surveying the margins of the Waimea Inlet and surrounding coastline for grey saltbush. Following a briefing at Rough Island by Laura Parks, DOC biodiversity ranger, groups of 3 or 4 participants headed to different survey sites.

The purpose of the survey was to gather data on the grey saltbush population, and to assess the sex ratio of female and male plants. Grey saltbush is currently classified as a critically threatened species and has been planted widely by councils, DOC and volunteer groups such as ours. If enough plants of both male and female sexes are found, there is a possibility that the threat status of the plant will be reviewed.

The survey was timed to coincide with flowering so that male and female plants could be more easily identified. Male flowers form a terminal spike of 30-140mm long. The female flowers are small and inconspicuous and can be solitary or in small clusters.

Examples of flowers

*Male*



*Female*



### Results

Over 1,100 grey saltbush plants were recorded during the survey. Unfortunately, only 43 of these were males in the survey area which is not an ideal ratio. However, it is great to now have this data for future surveys. It also guides us to plant more male plants in the hope we can make this species more resilient.

## Friday Morning Plant Maintenance

After a summer break, we are resuming the important work of plant maintenance. This involves hand clearing weeds from inside plant guards, straightening guards or removing them if the plant is big enough. We meet each Friday morning from 9 – 11am.

Friday 20 February	9-11am	Cotterell Road
Friday 27 February	9-11am	22/24 Bronte (access from 24 Bronte Road East)
Friday 6 March	9-11am	Stringer Creek, Westdale Rd
Friday 13 March	9-11am	62 Bronte Road East
Friday 20 March	9-11am	Mataahua (beginning of Dominion Road)
Friday 27 March	9-11am	Research Orchard Road
Friday 3 April Easter	No maintenance	
Friday 10 April	9-11am	8 Bronte Road East
Friday 17 April	9-11am	Rain date



## Kiwi Conservation Club

A couple of weeks before Christmas, the local Kiwi Conservation Club, Forest & Bird's club for kiwi kids aged 3-13, held their year end get together at Hoddy Estuary Park. As part of their activities, we got them involved in planting rushes in the saltmarsh and a close up look and demonstration of a DOC200 trap with Tracey.

The children were very engaged learning about the project and its habitat restoration and trapping work. Planting 300 wiwi (*juncus maritimus*) grown by Salisbury School at low tide was a great way for the children and families to get involved and support our work. Thank you all for getting stuck in and dirty!



*Learning about trapping*



*Planting 300 wiwi in the saltmarsh at Hoddy Estuary Park*

## Plant Patch

## Podocarps

Podocarps are the giants of NZ's forests. The best known of these are rimu, kahikatea, miro, matai and totara.

Podocarpus is a genus of conifers. They were endemic to the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana. Today the natural distribution of the genus consists of much of Africa, Asia, Australia, Central and South America and several South Pacific islands.

The name podocarp means "foot seed" (In Greek podos=foot, karpos=fruit) which refers to the way the seed is held at the foot of the fruit rather than being enclosed by it. These fruits are extremely modified cones and look more like berries. They are attractive to birds which help to spread the seeds. Because of this abundant range of fruits, podocarp forests also support larger communities of insects and birds.



*Totara fruit and seed*

In its natural state, a podocarp forest can be lush with a dense undergrowth of shrubs, ferns and tree-ferns. The few precious remnants of forest which survive often contain the highest diversity of plants and animals in the region. They are a left-over from an ancient forested time. Local examples of remnant native forests including podocarps include Eves Valley Scenic Reserve, Snowden's Bush (Brightwater), Faulkner's Bush, Baigent's Bush (Wakefield), Beuke's Bush (Upper Moutere) and Paremata Flats (Cable Bay).



*Kahikatea fruit and seed*

NZ has 15 podocarp tree species. Rimu is our most common podocarp and grows to 50m high. The kahikatea is the tallest of our native trees and grows up to 80m high and is usually found in wet areas. Totara, miro and matai grow to 25-30m.



*Kahikatea, matai and totara*

## Masting

A mast year occurs every 2-6 years when some of our native trees, particularly beech and rimu, experience heavy flowering, fruiting and seeding. These seeds provide a bounty of food for native birds and insects. However, they also feed rodents and in turn fuel an explosion of stoat numbers.

## Project Spotlight

*Battle for the Banded Rail* is just one of Tasman Environmental Trust's current projects. Here is another project working with its local community in our region.



Connected by Nature is a guide to community conservation in the Top of the South. While initiated by Tasman Environmental Trust, any conservation group in our region can add their project and let volunteers know what opportunities are available with their group. There are currently 32 projects listed with help required variously for pest control, planting, plant maintenance, weeding, plant propagation, species monitoring and track maintenance.

[Click here](#) to see the full list of projects