

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

November 2024

Editorial: This editorial, set in 2030 is what I would like to report

In 2024, KCDC supported many dune restoration volunteer groups by supplying them with plants and labour.

It was GW's climate change mapping online tool <https://mapping1.gw.govt.nz/GW/SLR/> that changed public perception. It showed that a large storm within the next ten years would cause significant erosion of the foreshore that would put some houses, local roads and infrastructure, at risk. Voting on foreshore restoration definitely influenced the makeup of the new Council of September 2025 and the Mayor and the majority of councillors decided to make foredunes resilient and support foreshore restoration.

Having the beach bylaw already in place helped speed the implementation of the work. It said "... *KCDC long term plan ... aims to ensure ... a high-quality natural environment enjoyed by all...*

And further on "*No person is permitted to cultivate or tend any plants on the beach other than those naturally occurring within the Foxton Ecological district...*"

The Long Term Plan was also supportive "*Dune reshaping and planting help restore damaged ecosystems to a more natural state as well as protecting the boundary between coastal and terrestrial land that can be threatened by coastal erosion.*"

These gave Council the mandate to remove the lawns and exotic plantings of the many significant encroachments into the foredunes by seaward facing properties. Many flattened dunes were reshaped before being planted in natives. Some residents were upset about losing their views of Kapiti Island, but as Council argued, these actions were to safeguard houses and infrastructure both on the foredunes and the many other households in low lying areas behind the dunes. The loss of views for a few were a minor consideration in the face of climate damage for the many and the Council said,

the encroachments of the complainers did not help their case.

A councillor from the previous election received far fewer votes and was defeated. His post on social media seemed to side with those with Island views and encroachers. He criticised a volunteer planting group saying that they had no access rights, that it was not public space and encroachments were common. Concerned groups responded saying that the only possible interpretation of this post was that "people don't have the right to access areas of the foreshore where residents have encroached". Of course, this was simply not true.

Council received advice that native plants were adapted to local conditions and planting them, especially pingao, spinifex on the front dunes, flax and muehlenbeckia just behind and kānuka and ngaio on the higher areas, would give the greatest protection, was the cheapest option and would within a few years, achieve a robust and self-repairing sand dune system. Given the enormity of the job, cost was critical. Volunteers groups were encouraged to help the process and significantly lowered the overall cost. "*The number of volunteers was significant. Many were motivated by the damage from the July 2026 storm that affected the Taranaki bight but many also said that they liked giving their time working to restore the dunes*", reported the Kapiti News.

In early 2027, Council received government assistance from the newly elected green coalition government because it claimed it was mitigating climate disruption at the same time adapting to it.

The brochure that Council had published in 2023 called "*Caring for Sand Dunes in Kapiti*" was still relevant according to Council advising "*Resist the urge to garden or landscape the dunes.*" and plant local native dune plants such as kānuka, taupata, harakeke, ngaio, māhoe, tauhinu,

muehlenbeckia complexa, wiwi, spinifex, pīngao, and rauparaha.

The storms of 2028 were very destructive but they could have been worse if the dunes had not been planted. Many of the dunes eroded back quite a long way. There was damage to Marine Parade and parts of Manly Street and some houses had water through them. Pīngao was one of the first plants to recolonise the beach followed closely by spinifex. These rebuilt the dunes. The native plants, planted in the mid 20s, seeded onto growing dunes and by 2030 the dunes had rebuilt to their original size and extent, and were well on their way to being once again an attractive protective barrier to future storms.

"We could not have imagined that the process we ramped up in 2025 could have been so successful and saved so much property and infrastructure" said the Mayor during a recent interview.

But unfortunately, that is not the current situation...

Some 18 months ago a group of volunteer residents started to clear the weeds, blackberry, boxthorn and others from the dunes in the vicinity of Arthur Street, Paraparaumu. They did this in accordance with documents published by Council.

The KCDC Beach Bylaw Section 3.1 says *"...the purpose of this bylaw is to manage human activities on the beach in order to protect, promote and maintain health and safety and the beach environment in accordance with KCDC long term plan which aims to ensure a) a high-quality natural environment enjoyed by all and b) a resilient community that has support for basic needs and feels safe and connected."*

The referred to Long Term Plan (2021-24 LTP – Coastal Management) says *"Dune reshaping and planting help restore damaged ecosystems to a more natural state as well as protecting the boundary between coastal and terrestrial land that can be threatened by coastal erosion."*

Clearly planting appropriate native species in the dunes is promoted by these documents.

The brochure produced by Council called *"Caring for Sand Dunes in Kapiti"* says *"Resist the urge to garden or landscape the dunes"* and lists the local native dune plants that should be used instead, Taupata Harakeke etc., so it is quite clear what should be planted and the group followed that advice.

Nasty weeds were removed over an area of about 1ha. This was no mean feat. Boxthorn is not easy to cut down having thorns as its name suggests and large patches of blackberry are not easy to eradicate. Everything was going well. Council supplied some labour and some even helped with the planting.

Section 20 of the Beach bylaw says *"No person is permitted to cultivate or tend any plants on the beach other than those naturally occurring within the Foxton Ecological district, unless with the prior approval of the Council."* Exotic garden plants such as agapanthus and watsonias would not be permitted because they survive in the dunes and their seed will spread, so the volunteers de-headed them where they occurred to prevent their spread. Those plants were closer to properties but on public land.

This is where it gets interesting.

Some residents complained to the volunteers and presumably to council. There was a post on social media from one KCDC councillor that said in part: *"Might I remind this group that they don't have "rights " here with regards to access to this dune area, it is not a public space. Encroachment happens all over this district along the coastline and in other areas"*.

It seems to me that what is being said in this post is that people don't have the right to access areas of the foreshore where residents have encroached.

The councillor was right saying that *"Encroachment happens all over this district along the coastline and in other areas"*. A quick look using Google Earth testifies to that and from what I can see some of those encroachments are very significant and include flattened dunes, extensive lawns and

exotic plantings. This is not something that should be defended by the councillor, rather the reverse. The post has since been taken down.

The foreshore, beyond where residential properties end, is accessible to the public even where there is an encroachment. The written and published intent of Council is quite clear. They want the foreshore revegetated in appropriate native plants that would have been there. They do not want lawns and exotics of any description. Native plants naturally occurring within the Foxton Ecological district are the best defence against sea level rise, storm surge damage, foreshore erosion, and of course native insects and birds that use the sand dunes fare better in their native habitat rather than in an exotic one. In fact, pīngao and spinifex are the best possible plants to hold the dunes together and rebuild them after erosion. If Council can get this work done by assisting volunteers and providing some resources, it must surely be by far the cheapest method of improving the environment, biodiversity and dune resilience.

For some strange reason, Council, without any consultation with the volunteers, removed most (650) plants in front of a few properties. Those plants are those recommended for dune planting in Council publications, and many were Council supplied and planted by Council staff and volunteers.

Some of the plants removed were about 40 metres seaward from the residents' properties. So was this action to preserve the residents' view? I can find no bylaw protecting residents' views. Some of the plants removed were flaxes and because of their distance from houses would not block anyone's view. If plants are not put back,

Have your Say

Help shape Aotearoa New Zealand's 2035 international climate change target

Our current target to try and keep global warming below 1.5 degrees C was set following the Paris Agreement. By 10 February 2025 the government must define its second Nationally Determined

and volunteers don't continue to weed the area, blackberry and boxthorn will regrow.

The council's public response in the Kapiti News headed "Planting relocated" said "*A misunderstanding had seen hundreds of plants to help with dune stabilization and more, removed from an area in Paraparaumu Beach*" and the misunderstanding is "*about what native species would be planted*"... . The species removed included flax and ngaio (both recommended) and others. So does that mean that the Council brochure is recommending the wrong plants. Are flax and ngaio not now recommended. The removed plants were used on another dune site where houses were absent, so does that mean that only plants that are shorter than flax will be recommended where residents can view the sea. Will that be sufficient to protect the residents who cannot see the sea yet will be damaged by it in future storms. The volunteer group is confused, disheartened and have formally disbanded due to the Council's actions. We are shocked.

Forest and Bird believes the dunes are for the public, not private interests. The dunes are an important environment and habitat. The dunes, properly planted, will help absorb carbon and protect property and infrastructure. They are our cheapest and best defence against sea level rise and storm surges especially where there is room to plant the various layers of protection.

We hope that KCDC will ignore the NIMBY concerns and take a longer term view, that they will be bold and support all public efforts to mitigate the threats of climate change and the biodiversity crisis. Otherwise there will be increased damage and probably more expensive sea walls to build.

Russell

Contribution (the next phase of its commitments) based on assessment of a range of factors. This will define our objectives until 2035. Consultation closes midday on 8 December 2024.

<https://consult.environment.govt.nz/climate/second-nationally-determined-contribution/>

Consultations on Modernising the Conservation system

DOC has released two discussion documents

1. **Charging for Access to Some Conservation Land.** This document considers whether this is a good idea, and if so, where, who, and how much to charge for access.

2. **Streamline the processes for concessionaries and businesses using conservation land** to make it more efficient, less constraining and better economically. It also mentions clarifying conservation objectives and Treaty commitments.

(comments close on 28 February 2025)

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/have-your-say/all-consultations/2024->

Dealing well with Birds (and preparing for Bird Flu)

We have fortunately not yet had bird flu identified in New Zealand. Correctly known as highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1, or HPAI, this disease could have significant impacts for us as the 'land of birds'. It's important to try and keep ourselves and our feathered friends safe and DOC has released good guidelines to follow. You can read these here: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/avian-influenza>

Five quick guidelines to follow (and share widely with others please):-

1. If you see three or more sick or dead wild birds in a group, you must report it immediately to Biosecurity New Zealand's Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline on 0800 80 99 66 as it is a notifiable disease. Provide as much detail to Biosecurity New Zealand as you can, including:
 - a GPS reading or other precise location information
 - photographs and/or videos of sick and dead

Beach Litter Surveys

Sustainable Coastlines is again requesting assistance to audit the litter on our beaches. Surveys involve removing all surface litter larger than 5mm from a measured area of beach and then categorising, counting, and weighing the items. This will give us good data to help inform our litter and waste management work.

The project's aim is to reduce the plastic on beaches by 60%. Not only will this make our environment look better, it will also remove many toxins and these filter down into the food chain.

There are sites surveyed in Kāpiti and Porirua (and all around the country). Help is always

[consultations/proposals-to-modernise-the-conservation-system/](#)

Wilding Conifers survey

Scion and Manaaki Whenua-Landcare Research are conducting a survey to understand how perceptions of wilding conifers differ, across regions of Aotearoa New Zealand; between professions and stakeholders; and how these perceptions compare to how other biosecurity threats are perceived. All views are useful, but you can only complete the survey once, here:

https://scionresearchgroup.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cv7oeXYAcXMQ9ym

(closes 20 December 2024)

birds.

- species identity and estimate of numbers affected.
 - note how many are sick or freshly dead, and the total number present
2. Don't touch sick or dead birds (if you absolutely have to, wear gloves and protective clothing, and wash immediately afterwards)
 3. Keep your clothes and footwear clean especially if in rural or wild areas, and when away from home to stop the risk of spread.
 4. Keep your pets away from birds (always a good idea) to avoid contamination and to protect them.
 5. Symptoms in birds can include tremors, coughing, swelling, odd posture, or sudden death.

I was pleased to read that DOC is trialling a vaccine for our most threatened bird species, and this looks promising but we can't possibly vaccinate every bird so the best thing is to try and keep the disease out, or eliminate it quickly if it arrives.

welcome at these events, so register your interest if you'd like to help. You can just help collect the litter, or you can also help audit it (this involves some training). Sign up on their website:

<https://sustainablecoastlines.org/events/>



Plimmerton Meet and Greet

On Sunday 3 November we held an afternoon tea in Plimmerton as a thank you to all the local environmental volunteers, and to meet up with members.

It was a very enjoyable and collegial events where lots of connections were made. We had representatives of over 20 organisations attend. We were also using this as a test case for holding regular public meetings in future, and it looks positive so look out for next year's calendar.

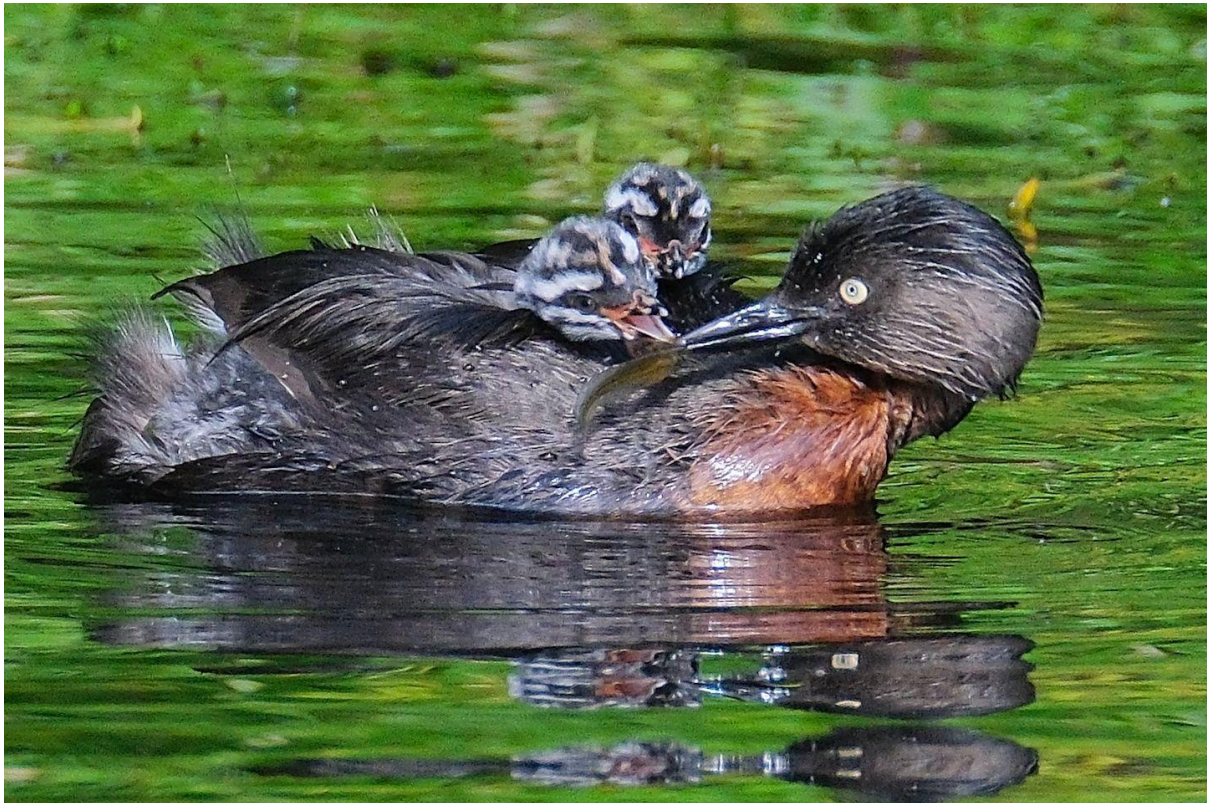
Speaking of which, if there is a topic/speaker you'd like to suggest, now is a great time to let us know.

Our next meeting will be in February 2025, and it will be our AGM. Nominations welcomed.

New Zealand dabchick/Weweia

Poliiocephalus rufopectus

While they haven't received the worldwide fame of the pūteketeke (also known as the Australasian crested grebe, the 2023 winner of Bird of the Year), our endemic New Zealand dabchick is a sweet little diving bird of the grebe family. They operate in pairs, weigh about 250g and are 20-24cm long. In terms of water stability, they remind me of those almost unsinkable boats, yet they have an amazing ability to turn into submarines – diving for up to 30 seconds at a time to catch molluscs, invertebrates, fish and the like, in fresh water lakes and ponds in the North Island. Evidently they do this by changing the angle of their waterproof feathers when they dive.



Until 1941 weweia were also found in the South Island, but were probably predated out of that range, however they are not considered endangered, as since the mid-1990s their population has bounced back (probably thanks to trappers efforts).

It is a seasonal delight to watch the dabchicks in Queen Elizabeth Park raise their tiny fluff-balls of chicks into adulthood. They breed year round, but our local pair appear to prefer spring.

As we have some amazing photographers in our branch I am sharing two images, the above one is of the two tiny babies riding high on the mother's back, while the father fishes and brings food to her to share out between them.

In the following photo Joy suggests the mother is clearly saying to her annoying toddler fledgling 'No, you may not ride on my back!' - otherwise she can't fish (she lost that time).

No surprise really, in the cuteness stakes, these tiny babies feature near the top of my list and I'm not their mother!



Pic © Joy Glasson

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Your feedback on this newsletter would be most welcome as would contributions to future newsletter.