

# Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

## July 2025

### Editorial: Denniston Plateau – Too unique to lose

The Denniston plateau is unique and beautiful. Its uniqueness comes from its geology.



Forty-five million years ago the land was a swamp at sea level. The partly decayed plant material laid down at that time became peat. That was covered over by sand and mud, and compressed below the sea. The peat turned to high quality bituminous coal of between 1-30 metres thick and the overlaying mud and sand to sandstone (a non-porous cemented layer like concrete) sitting over the coal and up to 50 metres thick. This sandwich of coal covered by sandstone rose from the sea over the last two million years.

Because of its non-porous nature, rain collects in small pools and crevices, flows in small streams and cascades off the plateau. The often atrocious weather adds to the harsh environmental conditions and while plants still find a way to survive in this environment by building up peat in the crevices and basins, the soils are acidic and infertile and the vegetation is altered by them.

While most species are the same as those found on nearby mountainsides, the saturated acidic soils and weather conditions bonsai the plants. The resultant vegetation is about 500mm high. You can walk on the

sandstone pavement stepping around the plants in cracks and peat patches. The plants hug the rocks and fill the crevices. Manuka and other species that are hundreds of years old grow to about 500mm high. Rata are about 2 metres high. In the valleys, trees were larger. There are some rare plants here such as North Westland snow tussock (*Chionochloa juncea*), found only on the Denniston-Stockton Plateau.



The conditions and the vegetation create conditions where unique creatures have evolved - the powelliphanta carnivorous land snails, the day-flying Avatar moth, a new genus of cave weta, a beetle, another moth, a wingless wasp and three spiders. These snails, spiders and insects cannot move from the plateau down to a stream hundreds of metres below and then on to another land form, so the plateau is like an isolated island. The great spotted kiwi also lives on the plateau because many predators cannot survive there.

Geology created the plateau, plate tectonics lifted it from beneath the sea to 600-800 metres ASL, the chemical and weather conditions bonsai the plants and the isolation allowed endemic creatures to evolve. The plateau is a unique ecological system that has evolved from its local geology.

The plateau is about 16km long by about 2km wide, so it's quite a small area and this is the only exposed sandstone concreted surface in NZ. Its exposure to West Coast weather adds to its uniqueness. The loss of this small unique landscape and ecosystem cannot be justified. We must protect it.

The threat comes from Bathurst Mining, the current government and fast track legislation. Bathurst does not want just part of the sandstone escarpment, they want most of it to take coal for the next 25 years.

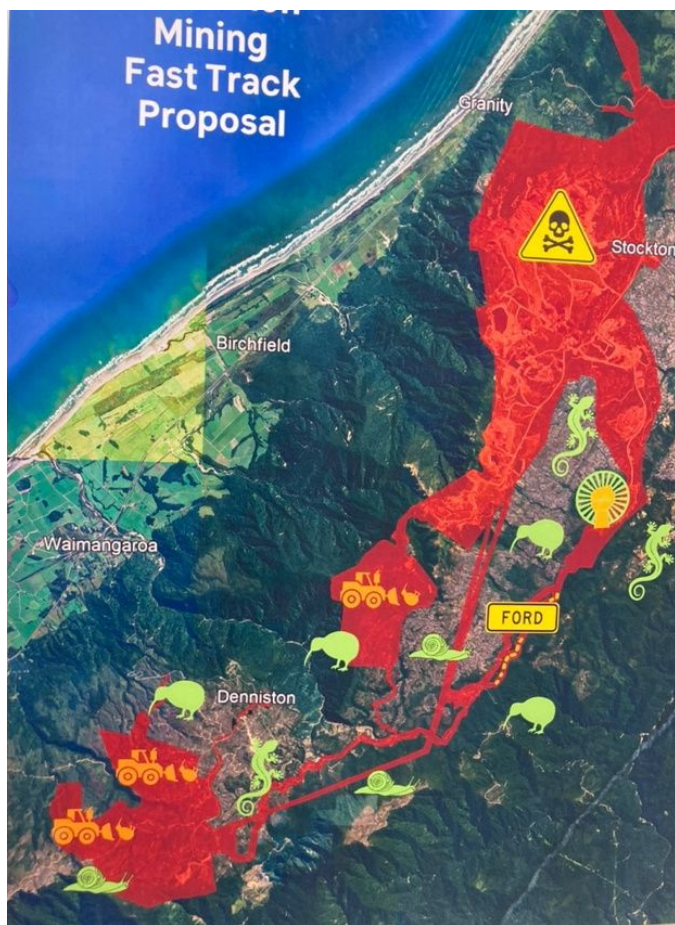


Image: from Bathurst Resources' Fast Track application.

The sandstone will be broken up, removed and stored, the coal will be taken and the sandstone put back. Bathurst have tried to convince people that they can restore the environment, but the smashed sandstone is now very porous. The concrete paving that make the plateau unique is gone, the streams, crevices and tiny rock pools will not reform, the bonsai vegetation cannot re-emerge, and the altered conditions will not be suitable for the rare and endemic species that existed.

And that is not the only damage. When the sandstone is smashed, sulphides, present in sandstone, are oxidized by oxygen and water, releasing sulfuric acid making any rainwater from the mine very acidic. In 2023, 5.3 million cubic metres of sandstone was removed. Imagine the acidic water this would create. Lakes are created to store the acidic water. and lime is added to neutralize it before it is released to local streams and rivers. Rainfall is high on the plateau and with each rain event a new dose of acid water needs to be stored and more lime added.

I was told that this process has to continue for 100 years after the mining has finished. But remediation is not perfect and acidic water and dissolved heavy metals flow into the Nakawa River decimating organic communities. Groundwater will also be contaminated. It is the most common water quality issue on the West Coast.

An eDNA "sample recorded not a single species of freshwater insect, an absence that freshwater ecologist Dr Mike Joy said was "pretty strong evidence of a massive impact...".

As for royalties, a [Newsroom article](#) in December 2024 said "New Treasury figures show last year the Government spent more than \$3 million treating damage caused by coal mining at a single site on the West Coast – more than it collected in royalties for all coal mining nationwide the same year."

The coal mine was Stockton. The same treatment will be required of Denniston.

My guess is that when coal becomes unusable due to climate change, Bathurst NZ will be declared bankrupt and the costs, dealing with the acidic water will be socialized – we will pay, the Denniston Plateau will be no more and the diverse ecosystem will have gone, and some species will be extinct. That is a very high price for Bathurst's export of the nearly 20 million tonnes of coal mainly to Japan, India and China for steel-making.



And finally there are the climate costs.

One million tonnes of coal when burnt produces 2.42 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and that is 65% of all the emissions from the Greater Wellington Region. Twenty million tonnes of coal when burnt produces 48 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and that similar to one year of NZ's net emissions.

Is the government not watching the floods and heatwaves on the news almost every night?



View across [mānuka](#) scrub to Mt William

*Russell*

### What can you do to save Denniston Now?

At our meeting on 13 July, we learned about the amazing Denniston Plateau from Richard Capie, Forest & Bird's Group Manager, Conservation Advocacy and Policy, about how we can defend the plateaux from mining. It was an interesting and well attended talk. If you missed it or want to learn more, watch the F&B zoom webinar on 30 July: 7-8pm, register here: [https://forestandbird-org-nz.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_5GZs5My3SaynLZ2KLmgFog](https://forestandbird-org-nz.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_5GZs5My3SaynLZ2KLmgFog)

View the five F&B videoclips at <https://www.youtube.com/@forestandbird> and tell your friends and family what's happening and why it's a bad thing.

Some members are closing their accounts with ANZ, as it is the only bank which will currently lend to Bathurst Resources, and they make sure their reason is noted when they do it.

## Public meetings

### June Public meeting in Plimmerton - Wooden artwork gifted

At our Plimmerton meeting about the Denniston Plateau, member and woodworker Roy Slack chose to gift one of his amazing wooden boards to Forest and Bird. Our guest speaker, Richard Capie was kind enough to take this into our National Office, and it now hangs proudly in the office of the Chief Executive, Nicola Toki, who was blown away by the gift.



The board contains examples of 176 different types of native timbers (with a listing of what they are on the back). You're a treasure Roy Slack!

### A Kāpiti Island Family

Our next public meeting will be on 20 August at Waikanae Community Centre, 28-32 Utauta Street, Waikanae at 7.15pm.

Come and hear Manaaki Barrett talk about the relationship between his whanau, Kāpiti Island and their relationship with DOC and its predecessors. Manaaki is also a great photographer. This one's not to be missed.

## Animal of the month: Kina Papa / Cake urchin / Snapper Biscuit / Sand dollar

*Pene Burton Bell*

After the right sea conditions the remains of these arachnoididae can be found around the low tide marks of shallow seas in many parts of the world.

Our New Zealand species (*Fellaster zelandiae*) is endemic (only found here) and I found these while walking on the beach north of Waikanae. They grow to 100mm in diameter and are filter feeders, sucking invertebrates from the sand/mud.





## Obituary – Ben Knight

Anyone who has seen David Attenborough's latest film *Oceans* will know it has a message of both hope and despair. The despair was highlighted by scenes of ocean floor and sea life destruction as large ships trawled the bottom of the sea. The hope was focussed on how quickly ocean ecosystems can bounce back, if protected. A key message was that we need to protect thirty percent of oceans by 2030.

A funeral is always a sad event, especially when someone passes before their time. But on a beautiful calm winter's day, the funeral of Benjamin Joshua Knight, held at the Kāpiti Boating Club, with the Kāpiti Marine Reserve in the background, was full of hope. As the numerous tributes flowed in, it was clear Ben was many things: a wonderful father; a skilled fisherperson, boatie and diver; a campaigner for social justice; and a loyal friend to many. But perhaps his most enduring legacy will be his work to protect oceans and, through that work, to make the world a better place.



Ben's early formative years were in the seaside village of Eastbourne. He learnt to fish off the wharf, he surfed along the rocky coast, and he discovered diving. His primary school, San Antonio, was so close to the sea that waves

could often be heard as the background to lessons. He had salt in his blood from these early days. As Jacques Yves Cousteau once said "The sea, once it casts its spell, has one in its net of wonder forever."

Ben was acknowledged as an inspiration and fountain of knowledge to many. For example, as a volunteer he worked with the Eco Action Group at Kāpiti College, supporting their experiments with the stormwater litter traps, citizen science surveys, beach clean-ups, and marine reserve snorkelling trips.

He had many professional roles, including running his own business as a dive instructor and, more recently, working at Sustainable Coastlines and Mountains To Sea Wellington.

But it was his support for the ongoing protection of the Kāpiti Marine Reserve which will probably have the largest long-term impact. The reserve had its gestation in an informal reserve being established by the local Kāpiti Boating Club in 1987. It was formally gazetted as a reserve in May 1992 and provides wonderful education, scientific and recreational opportunities for thousands of people every year.

At the time of his passing, Ben was one of the Guardians of Kāpiti Marine Reserve Trust. This was formed in September 2017 following a well-attended public meeting in 2016 to provide the local community with an opportunity to discuss their concerns regarding the management of Kāpiti Marine Reserve. The Trust's purpose is to advance and promote the conservation and protection of the Kāpiti Marine Reserve and surrounding marine environment for the benefit of the local community now and for future generations.

If we are to take seriously David Attenborough's call to better protect the oceans, we need many more people like Ben. He will be missed.

## Local planting events <sup>\*)</sup> <sup>\*\*)</sup>

It's great to see local volunteers of all ages (you rock!) have been out there planting on dunes, in inlets and wetlands, beside streams, and more; here are some upcoming opportunities:

*Double Congratulations* to Whitireia Park Restoration Group! At their July planting the group celebrated 20 years of restoring their whenua, planting 1200 natives with the help of over 100 volunteers at Onehunga Bay.



They also won the Environment and Heritage category for Porirua in the Wellington Airport Regional Community Awards for 2025.

Well done to you all!

## Have Your Say

### Upcoming Local Body Elections

Please vote – if you haven't enrolled, you can do so at <https://www.vote.nz/> by 1 August.

Encourage under 25s to enrol, and to vote (this demographic is poorly represented) If you're thinking of standing for council, you also have to register by 1 August.

Each of the councils has produced a pre-election report which covers what they've achieved, priorities and challenges.

You can read these here:

Greater Wellington:

<https://www.gw.govt.nz/your-region/plans-policies-and-bylaws/plans-and-reports/pre-election-reports/>

Porirua:

<https://storage.googleapis.com/pcc-wagtail-media/documents/porirua-city-council-pre-election-report-2025.pdf>

Kāpiti:

<https://www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/council/about-council/local-elections/local-elections-2025/pre-election-report-2025/>

Whareroa Farm: Sundays 3 August & 17 Aug.: 9am til noon at Whareroa Farm, [whareroa.guardians@gmail.com](mailto:whareroa.guardians@gmail.com)

Motukaraka Point with Plimmerton Rotary Club Wednesday, 6 August from noon, and Saturday, 6 September from noon, contact [brettjones55@gmail.com](mailto:brettjones55@gmail.com) for both.



Over 70 people planted around 1000 plants in less than two hours at their previous planting day.

*\*) If you need more details on the above, contact the group using the list provided with this newsletter.*

*\*\*) If we missed your group's event please email future details to [kapitimana.branch@forestandbird.org.nz](mailto:kapitimana.branch@forestandbird.org.nz)*

Do the reports match what you want? How you vote can affect this.

### Kāpiti Coast District Council Heritage Fund (closes 4 August 2025)

This fund supports landowners in preserving heritage features like historic buildings, ecological sites, significant trees, or wāhi tapu. It is open for applications until 4 August. Find out more and whether your project is eligible here:

<https://www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/services/grants-and-funding/heritage-fund/>

### Is that a Wasp?

The Moths and Butterflies of NZ Trust is looking to gauge knowledge and views on introduced wasps, and what should be done about them (if anything). Test your knowledge of wasps and add your comments by completing the survey by 14 August 2025.

<https://www.nzbutterflies.org.nz/project/pest-wasps-survey/>

## Upcoming Forest & Bird Events

Date	Title	Where
20 August	Public meeting – speaker Manaaki Barrett re Kapiti Island	Waikanae
28 September	Public meeting – speaker Wendy Ambury re Australasian Bitterns	Plimmerton
22 October	Public meeting – speaker Bruce Brewer re Argentine Ant	Waikanae

## Other Items

### Council Newsletters

For some time now, Kāpiti Coast District Council has had a weekly email newsletter which contains useful content, you can subscribe to it here:

<https://mailchi.mp/kapiticoast/everything-kapiti-sign-up>

In a recent issue they reminded dog owners to take special care in areas where penguins are (Raumati Beach south to Fishermans Table).

Porirua City Council has recently launched a similar email newsletter called “What’s Happening?”

You can subscribe here:

<https://porirua.govt.nz/your-council/news/whats-happening-e-news/>

We picked up a useful youtube clip on the PCC newsletter, PCC Nurseryman, Andrew Jinks, recommends five natives that are great for encouraging birds into your garden, watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4T3n6xPPCfA>

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

*Russell and Pene*