

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

September 2025

Editorial: NZ Trophic Cascades

Last month I talked about voting in local body elections and my belief that if politicians and us don't correct climate change, it will destroy the economy. To make the connection to Forest and Bird, I showed that climate change and biodiversity are very much linked so if we want to save our natural world, we must fight climate change, and if we restore a natural ecosystem, we will sequester carbon. One solution to climate change is called trophic cascades. The word "trophic" is related to eating and the word "cascade" identifies the effect through the food chain from a predator to prey to plants and the environment. Evolution arranges trophic cascades. Exploitation and introduced animals can destroy trophic cascades.

A straightforward New Zealand example of exploitation on a trophic cascade is this: Kina (sea urchins) are herbivores and feed on seaweed. Their favourite dish is kelp. The apex predators of kina are crayfish and snapper. There is a balance between crayfish and snapper, eating kina, eating kelp. Healthy kelp beds are ecosystems where many varieties of fish flourish. Kelp is also one of the fastest growing plants, so it absorbs lots of carbon dioxide from the sea to fuel its growth. As older kelp plants die, they settle on the ocean floor taking their carbon content into the sediment where it will stay for hundreds or thousands of years. This short balanced cascade is good for all species and good for the climate.

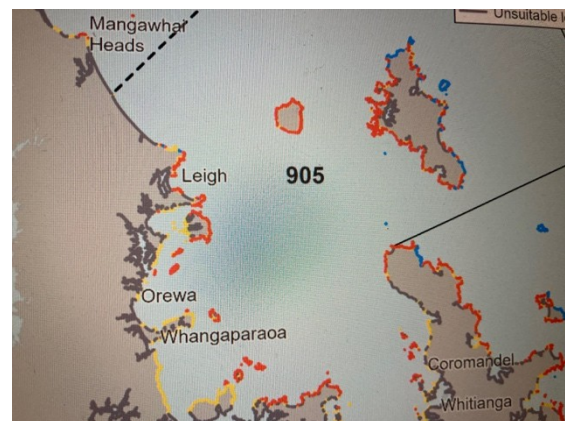
We like to eat crayfish and snapper and in areas of NZ, this balance is upset by over-exploitation of apex predators, particularly crayfish. Consequently we have kina barrens around the coast where there are very few kina predators, thousands of kina, almost no kelp, poor biodiversity and little sequestration of carbon.

In earlier times using less efficient fishing methods, or perhaps supplying only the NZ

market, crayfish and snapper could be harvested and balance maintained.

This is an example of a trophic cascade that sequesters carbon and has a flourishing environment when in balance and does not sequester carbon and is barren when out of balance. This map of just north of Auckland shows kina barrens in red. MPI and the minister are considering methods of decreasing crayfish catch in one area but a report just received reveals *"Shocking Kelp Forest Loss" in northeastern New Zealand, Marlborough Sounds, Tasman Bay, Fiordland, and Stewart Island.*

<https://www.carbonnews.co.nz/news/35541/new-report-reveals-shocking-kelp-forest-loss>



The general rule is when an ecosystem is in balance, biodiversity and climate benefit. When out of balance, biodiversity and environment suffer.

There are many trophic cascades.

The reintroduction of wolves (apex predator) to Yellowstone NP changed the behaviour of moose and elk. They learnt to avoid open grass meadows and this gave tree seeds a chance to establish and grow into trees.

Sharks, large bony fish (e.g. jacks, barracudas), dolphins, seals, and whales are the apex predators of herbivorous fish. Sharks eat fish which would overgraze seagrass meadows. These meadows are

rich habitats and are particularly effective at capturing and storing carbon.

Carp are introduced herbivores in our lakes and waterways with no apex predator.

For wetlands, bittern are considered to be the apex predator. They keep a healthy balance by eating fish including eels, insects molluscs, worms, freshwater crayfish and frogs. They keep these species in balance and are a sign of a healthy, diverse and resilient ecosystem.



New Zealand has introduced many herbivores into the wild which have no apex predator to keep them in check. Examples are wallabies, possums, deer, pigs, goats, thar and rabbits. Their numbers swell, our forests and herb fields get eaten out, become biologically poorer, and don't sequester as much carbon. We need to be the apex predator of our introduced herbivores. We need to hunt and eat all the herbivores in the wild. Without us as a strong and persistent apex predator, they will

remain out of control, our natural landscapes will be eaten out, and sequestration of carbon will be low.

The current government is progressing a bill to protect *Herds of Special Interest* on conservation land:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/biodiversity/wild-animals-management/herds-of-special-interest>

It is designed so interest groups can "manage" herds for better meat or trophies and to stop DOC from trying to reduce and eliminate introduced herbivores from conservation land. This bill will allow parts of our protected natural estate to become exotic animal game parks and heads in the wrong direction for biodiversity and climate.

All natural ecosystems need an apex predator. Without them, biodiversity and the natural sequestering value of forests, rivers, seas, wetlands and grasslands decrease.

Russell

Beautiful Calendars and Diaries selling now

2026 Conservation Calendars (\$18) and Diaries (\$25) will be for sale at our Plimmerton meeting, or you can still order directly through Peter Kentish 021 027 70520 or pk2003_595@hotmail.com (note the underscore between 3 and 5 in the email address), and pay online by depositing the money into our branch bank account. Our bank details are:

Account name: Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society Kapiti Mana Branch

Account number: 38-9020-0171967-00

Please include what you ordered (e.g. 2C1D - 2 calendars & 1 diary)

Upcoming meetings

We'd love you to join us **this Sunday** at Plimmerton: Wendy Ambury of the *Love Bittern Project* will be speaking to Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird on Sunday 28 September at 2.30pm (2.15pm for a cuppa beforehand) at St Andrews church hall, 11 Steyne Avenue, Plimmerton. Bring a friend.

Our next Waikanae public meeting on 22 October will be about Argentine Ants, an invasive pest that is in our district. Bring your neighbours and friends to Waikanae Community Centre, 28 Utauta Street at 7.15pm for a cuppa before our 7.30 start.

9 November 2025 (2.15pm) is the date of our next Meet and Greet in Plimmerton - come and meet like-minded people doing great things for our environment.

Bird of the month: Paradise Shelduck / pūtangitangi / *Tadorna variegata*

Pene Burton Bell

These distinctive birds - usually in pairs with black and white heads - are one of the first species I learned when I moved to New Zealand. Originally identified for the European record by Captain James Cook in 1773 in Dusky Sound, he called them 'painted ducks'.

Unlike most bird species Parries, as they're often called, have benefitted from European settlement with increased pasture areas, however they can occur in many different habitats from alpine tarns to wetlands and tussock country. They are New Zealand's largest, most widespread and most numerous native duck species.

Why are they called shelducks?

Shelducks are larger than ducks but smaller than geese, and are defined by the number of neck vertebrae.

Which is which?



The males have black heads (think boys in black) and a deeper bark or honk, while the female has the flashier white head and the wailing cry (which may be why Māori named them pūtangitangi (tangi means to mourn the dead)).

They usually come together in flocks for moulting in January and it was at this time (being unable to fly) they used to be gathered for kai in earlier times.

The ducklings only show their gender after their first moult in May when their heads become white.



Female with ducklings

The females choose the site and the male - depending on how he defends his territory. Clutches of up to 15 eggs are laid in nest holes, or under trunks or under grass clumps but can be up in trees from August on and take about a month to hatch and will be reared by their parents until they can fly (55-65 days).



While not endangered, I think Paradise Shelducks could be considered as iconic to New Zealand as kōkako and kakapō, though probably less than kiwi.

Spotlight on local conservation group – Friends of the Waikanae River

The Friends of the Waikanae River is a small group whose sole focus is the health and wellbeing of the river and its corridor. We co-operate with Greater Wellington and KCDC, both of whom own parts of the riparian strip alongside the river and have activities which affect the river.

Greater Wellington's prime responsibility is flood control which requires the building and maintenance of stop banks, the removal of gravel build up, clearance of vegetation from the path of the river, maintenance of rock groynes, etc. They also complete work on access, parking and revegetation.

KCDC has two key activities related to the river – domestic water and wastewater. Domestic water is taken from the river and processed for our use. In summer, there are occasions when the river would have a flow of less than 750 litres per second (l/s) after the extraction of our domestic requirements and this would affect its health. When this happens, water is extracted from bores and added to the river immediately downstream of the extraction point. This means we can have more river water than the minimum flow would allow and the downstream flow is supplemented by bore water. Wastewater is treated at Otaihangā and discharged into the Mazengarb Stream which flows into the estuary of the Waikanae River. KCDC also is involved in the restoration of the riparian strips of the river and in maintaining access.

The Friends support and monitor all these activities because any failure could damage the river and its environs or damage property. We or the relevant authority report on their performance each year at our AGM.

The Friends also run a nursery which is financially supported by both councils. We produce about 4000-5000 plants each year and they are given to any group or individuals who plant in the river corridor. We also plant a portion of our plants. This is to improve the river as an ecological and a recreational asset.

Our logo includes a representation of the Te Arawai walking bridge which the Friends of the Waikanae River initiated.



We meet at our nursery on the river access track from Nimmo Avenue East every Monday 9-12am.

New volunteers are always welcome.

Have Your Say

Kapiti Reserve Management Plan

<https://haveyoursay.kapiticoast.govt.nz/rmp>
closes 6 October 2025

The result of this plan will govern how Kapiti's parks and reserves are managed for the next decade or more, so it's key to push biodiversity values and appropriate funding - please write a submission.

Vote25 - Our local body elections.
Votes need to be posted by Monday
6 October 2025

Voting has always been important, but in our current political environment and the impact that's having on our natural world, it is crucial to make wise choices that will protect and enhance our natural world and respond appropriately to climate change. There are some truly scary candidates out there, so please take the time to cast your vote carefully. Te Taiao is our taonga too precious to lose.

Upcoming Forest & Bird Events

| Date | Title | Where |
|--------------|--|------------|
| 28 September | Public meeting – speaker Wendy Ambury re Australasian Bitterns | Plimmerton |
| 22 October | Public meeting – speaker Bruce Brewer re Argentine Ants | Waikanae |
| 9 November | Public meeting – Meet and Greet | Plimmerton |

Notices

Bird of the year (voting closes *this Sunday* 29 September 2025)

<https://www.birdoftheyear.org.nz/>

There's still time to make your vote and it helps our birds thrive.

Have you tried Birdle-ing yet? It's a fun (and challenging) BOTY version of Wordle. Have a go at <https://birdle.nz/>

Matuku Muster/Bittern Count

Will you be listening out for this cryptic endangered bird?

The next listening dates are October 3/4/5 and November 7/8/9.

We need more listeners out there to help assess the state of these birds so that we can save them. Find out more here:

<https://www.lovebittern.com>

Think like a forest

You can now view this short movie on TVNZ+ and there are Extras for Experts videos here:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCeRD3L1BLGBesQk77X2MsDwF-aTCeysG>

Explore your Coast

Explore your coast has released a movie about the Kapiti Marine Reserve and has some exciting upcoming events, including a day of exploration for all ages at Zealandia on Saturday 27 September 10am-12pm. Find out more at

<https://exploreyourcoast.co.nz/events/>

Pauatahanui Triennial Cockle Count

2 November 2025 1-4pm

Cockles are an important indicator of the health of the inlet, please help GOPI count them.

It's an easy and fun way to spend a Sunday afternoon and starts from Stout Cottage in Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve.

More details here:

<https://gopi.org.nz/cockle-surveys/>

Friends of Mana Island

Short notice helpers

Sometimes FOMI organise small work parties for volunteers to do specific tasks for 3-4 days at a time.

Does that sound like you? Get in touch:

fomi@manaisland.org.nz

FOMI is also trying to find out who designed their beautiful logo.

If you have any clues, please let them know.

The impact of Predator Free Wellington

Members might be interested to read this:

Beyond the numbers: the hidden impact of Predator Free Wellington

https://reports.pfw.org.nz/site/assets/files/2522/msc_report_august_2025.pdf

Predator Free Porirua Newsletter

Predator Free Porirua now have an e-newsletter you can subscribe to, containing news, conservation events, and progress from across Porirua:

<https://www.predatorfreeporirua.org/newsletter-sign-up>

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

Russell and Pene