

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

December 2025

Remembering Heroes – Captain Val Sanderson

In 1973 when the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society considered how to celebrate its Golden Jubilee (50 years), its thoughts turned to the man who in essence started the organisation. Captain Val Sanderson lived in Paekākāriki for years when he was President of the Society, and his home had a view of Kāpiti Island. He had long been passionate about the island, which had been made a reserve in 1897 by the [Kapiti Island Public Reserve Act](#). This Act was a foundational piece of legislation for New Zealand's conservation efforts, to save the island *"for the purposes of conserving the natural scenery of the said island, and providing a preserve for the fauna and flora of New Zealand"*. However, since its enactment, nothing had been done to protect the native flora and fauna, and the island was overrun by pests. Sanderson wrote numerous letters urging restorative action, but World War I intervened, diverting everyone's priorities.

When he was away fighting, he saw how important New Zealand's native bush was to our soldiers and when he came home, he was appalled that the situation on Kāpiti had got worse. Determined to ensure change for the better, Sanderson pushed the government to act, and they finally installed a Ranger to undertake pest control on the island to honour the purpose for which it had been gazetted.

The process of fighting for Kāpiti Island taught Sanderson two lessons – first, that Kāpiti's native flora and fauna were not alone in facing threats. Habitat damage and loss were occurring throughout New Zealand. Second, while he had initially acted locally, he realised that a broader effort was needed to achieve meaningful change. In 1923, this realisation led to the creation of our organisation, now known as Forest & Bird. In his address at the opening meeting, Sanderson emphasised that the danger posed to New Zealand's bush treasures by *"the ignorant and the vandal... was equal to how it might have been destroyed by the enemy we fought so hard to exclude"*...(in World War I).



He called for a movement to defend these precious resources, and Forest & Bird still stands as that movement more than 100 years later.

The Captain (as he liked to be called) admired Māori – that they could live with nature and respect it, and he felt we should all live this way. He formed close bonds with the local iwi of Kāpiti, including the Barretts of Kāpiti Island. We still share his view of honouring nature, in living with nature and working with Māori to achieve this.

Since Sanderson was the President of Forest and Bird we have continued to fight for New Zealand's unique fauna, flora and landscapes, as well as for the oceans and the creatures in them that make Aotearoa unique.

I have been considering what the Captain would be focusing on, if he lived in Kāpiti today, and two issues spring to mind. The first is the loss of our wetlands, especially peat wetlands, because he would no doubt be very concerned about climate change and the extent of urban development; and the second is the loss of richness in the waters off Kāpiti. I think he would be fighting for an extended marine reserve, better regulation of fishing, and stopping seabed mining.

Forest & Bird commemorated him with a plaque in 1973. This has always been situated in Kāpiti, within sight of the island - originally it was almost opposite Forest & Bird's Field Reserve on Old SH1, then in Macleans Park at Paraparaumu. It had to move again because of earthworks, but has not shifted far within the park, and now it is very close to where the boats launch to visit Kāpiti Island.

We are very lucky to be able to claim Captain Val Sanderson as a local hero, and it is right that we celebrate him for his contribution. We feel it is important to ensure the plaque is retained and maintained, so it can inspire us and future generations to take a stand for what we believe in. The blessing ceremony for the reinstalled plaque also honoured the relationship he and our early organisation shared with Māori, and we want this to continue. We achieve more when we work together.



We all need heroes in our lives, and local heroes are even more powerful. They help us to rise above everyday matters and aspire to bring the change we want to see in the world. Captain Val Sanderson was such a hero, and I am pleased to see him remembered through this plaque for generations of Kāpiti locals to come. If you're nearby, why not visit to check it out – there's a playground, a skatepark, a beach and good cafés all within easy walking distance, and a beautiful island not far offshore.

You can learn more about the Captain and [his work with Forest & Bird here](#), and about [his life here](#), and more on him and our society in the centennial book on Forest & Bird's history: "[Force of Nature](#)".

Pene

New Zealand (Pouched) Lamprey / Piharau / *Geotria australis*

by Pene Burton Bell

When Greater Wellington's Fish Passage team recently restored fish passage to the main tributary of the Wharemauku Stream at the top of Kaitawa Reserve, they were amazed and delighted to find two Lamprey under a rock just below the obstruction. This suggests that they could not climb the obstruction and had gone upstream as far as they could go. Now they will be able to go further upstream and hopefully find suitable Lamprey spawning habitat.

These primitive eel-like fish are related to sharks and have been around for at least 360 million years, so they swam with dinosaurs. They spawn in fresh water and live as filter feeders, but once of age, spend most of their lives in the ocean, where they live a parasitic life latched onto other sea creatures, living on their victim's blood, often causing their deaths.

They use the sandpaper-like surface of their disc-sucking mouth to burrow or latch into the skin of their victim. They have no jaws or true bones (just cartilage), nor matched fins, so they are unlike other bony fish.

When ready to breed, the adults return to freshwater, travelling upstream usually at night and after flood events to finish maturing, find a mate, and the perfect boulder under which to spawn their eggs and care for them for about seven weeks.

Have Your Say

We'll remind you of these next month, but if you feel like it, there are two relevant topics to write submissions on due in February.

- Submissions on the Resource Management Act's replacement - the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill – **close on 13 February**

Find out more information on the [process on the Parliamentary website](#).

Earlier this week, the [Environmental Defence Society](#) hosted a webinar on the



Photo: [Peter Anderson \(1979\) @ Wikimedia Commons](#)

Finding a pair in 'lil ol' Wharemauku Stream is pretty amazing because they are classified as nationally vulnerable with populations declining. Sightings are rare. It, and the other varieties of native fish, indicate the stream is pretty healthy, despite flowing through Coastlands carparks and under SH1.

While not perhaps the fish one wants to meet on a dark night at sea, these amazing creatures were a valued mahinga kai (food source) and are an important taonga species for Māori. The major causes of their decline are hydroelectric schemes which block their passage up rivers and the loss of habitat that is suitable for spawning.

key features and risks of the bills, which is now available to [watch on the EDS website](#), and provides a good overview.

- ***In addition, the government is proposing to reform local government.*** Submissions on a discussion document outlining proposed major changes to local government **close on 20 February** with the Department of Internal Affairs. A link to the [discussion document is here](#).

Upcoming Forest & Bird Events

We will meet in Waikanae in early February 2026 for our first **public meeting** of the year, which is also our **AGM**, to elect a new committee for our branch.

After many years of wonderful service, Peter Kentish, our treasurer, is standing down. So, we are keen to find a new treasurer, as well as more committee members from the Mana end of the branch.

If you might be able to help, please get in touch to discuss.

Pāuatahanui Pinic – 22 February 2026

A get-together with the wider Wellington Forest & Bird family.

It seems a long way off, but please put the date in your diaries for next year:

- From 3.30pm on Sunday, 22 February 2026 at Pāuatahanui Wildlife Reserve
- A shared potluck/BBQ - BYO everything
- Enjoy the summer together with other Forest & Birders from around the region.

Notices

KCDC Environment & Ecological Services Newsletter

The biodiversity team has started up a periodic newsletter; you can sign up to receive it here:

<https://mailchi.mp/061eb2b5dff5/5193j2gifu>

Some highlights from the latest issue include:

More information on the Kaitawa Rock Ramp (to improve fish passage up Wharemauku Stream) and the exciting discovery of pirahau/lamprey in the process (see article in this issue), a report back on a Mangaone ramble, information about Te Horo Beach planting, and information about a new group - Kāpiti Kiwi - who are starting a major trapping initiative in the Maungakotukutuku area (you can get in touch with them via [Facebook](#) and instagram ([@kapiti.kiwi](#)) or email kapitikiwiinfo@gmail.com).

Coastal Restoration on the Kāpiti Coast

KCDC, the Coastcare community, and the Coastal Restoration Trust have created an informative video about our coast and dunes, and how to restore them.

It's 13 min, you can view it here:

www.coastalrestorationtrust.org.nz/resources/crt-resources/regional-coastal-restoration-videos/

Porirua City Council thanks environmental volunteers

In early December, PCC held a Thank You BBQ for those who have contributed to restoring the environment around Porirua. Project Manager, Brian Thomas, writes:

"Last Wednesday, we celebrated the incredible volunteers who give their time, energy and heart to healing Te Awarua-o-Porirua Harbour.

From planting and weeding, trapping across reserves and backyards, to cockle counts, and caring for our streams — their mahi is helping our land and harbour heal.

This winter alone, our staff, contractors, and volunteer community together planted over 200,000 native plants across stream corridors, erosion-prone land, the harbour edge, and more.

The majority of the 165,000 erosion and riparian plants were planted in high-risk erosion-prone areas of Te Awarua o Porirua catchment.

Volunteer turnout at Council-led community plantings has increased, showing that caring for nature is at the heart of thriving communities. This year, we had over 1,377 volunteer hours across three planting days at Cannons Creek, Pāpākōwhai and Bothamley Park.

Even more importantly, the community-led initiatives continue to grow in number and impact, a shout-out to Ngahere Korowai, Predator Free Porirua, Plimmerton Rotary, Kahotea Stream, Friends of Taupō Swamp, Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet, and all the other incredible volunteer initiatives that are supporting this collective transformation.

Our Rangatahi are taking up this mantle in a big way, with over two thousand hours of volunteer mahi from students connecting with nature.

Every seedling in the ground, every rubbish bag filled, every trap checked, every hour spent out in the wind and rain makes a difference. They are the tāngata taiao who keep our city's natural taonga flourishing.

Ngā mihi nui to all our volunteers — we couldn't do this without you.

Together, we're restoring the mauri of our harbour, for today and for future generations."

"Ko te wai te toto o te whenua, te whenua te toto on te tāngata"

Ngahere Korowai

One of the groups at the BBQ was [Ngahere Korowai](#), a group with an ambitious project to cloak the bare hills behind Porirua East in a ngahere (forest) of native trees.

Wesley House's Aotearoa Pasifika Mens Group from Cannons Creek works with Ngāti Toa Rangatira, [GW](#), PCC and others to achieve this aim. They started with weeding and planting, but have diversified into trapping too. Their outstanding work is getting noticed too – see this article by the [World Wildlife Fund](#), and they were recently interviewed by [Radio New Zealand](#) and [TVNZ Breakfast](#).

Pāuatahanui Inlet Cockle Count 2025

[GOPI](#) reports that on 2 November, 120 volunteers gathered at Pāuatahanui to count cockles in 30 teams. In total, 18,669 cockles were counted, a few more than last time. We'll report back when the scientific analysis by NIWA is complete.

Plimmerton Farm environmental pollution

[Friends of Taupō Swamp and Catchment](#)

(FOTSC) continue to receive concerns about the earthmoving work currently taking place on Plimmerton Farm. A number of locals have noted clouds of dust coming off the site on windy days, affecting residents in Mo Street and vehicles on SH59 (and potentially siltation of the wetlands).

They have followed up these issues with the Resource Advisor at GW, who has visited the earthmoving sites, talked to the contractor, and has assured us that these concerns are justified in terms of the consent conditions for Plimmerton Farm.

FOTSC are always open to hearing of any issues you have, and acting on them – photos, if you have them, are helpful.

Meanwhile, during the holiday season, we are assured that there is immediate response and a site visit if you notify the GW Environmental Pollution Hotline on **0800 496 734** if there is an active pollution incident occurring.

The Paraparaumu Trapping Champion?

We need one (or a few!) – Predator Free Kāpiti has been searching for someone to lead the Paraparaumu part of this initiative. Could it be you? Or someone you know?

Some people love to be shoulder-tapped, but it's hard if you don't know who they are.

Please get in touch to find out more, or talk it through: predatorfreekapiticoast@gmail.com

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

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