



2022



Hūnua Project:

Gains and Successes

Te Ngaherehere o Kohukohunui (The Expansive Forests of Kohukohunui), Hūnua Ranges are the largest area of native forest in the Auckland region. Many threatened species are found in Hūnua, including kōkako, Hochstetter's frog, long-tailed bats, kākā, elegant gecko, forest geckos and kauri.

Auckland Council, Department of Conservation and iwi partners have strived to protect the unique flora and fauna of Hūnua for all Aucklanders. Many of these native species are national taonga (treasures) and are vulnerable to introduced pests and diseases. Significant gains and successes have been seen in Hūnua over the last 10 years with intensive pest control taking place within parkland and on surrounding private land.

Threatened species rewards

- Pest control greatly benefits our threatened species by reducing predators (rats, possums and mustelids) that kill our native birds, lizards and bats and impact the health of the forest and important ecosystems.
- Hūnua kōkako have bounced back from one breeding pair in 1994 to a healthy and expanding population of over 106 breeding pairs in 2018/19. The Hūnua kōkako population is the fourth largest population on mainland New Zealand and contributes to the National Kōkako and Recovery Programme.
- Annual bird counts in Hūnua have shown significant increases in endemic birds including kererū/NZ pigeon, kākā, tūī, korimako/bellbird and kōkako between the 2014-15 and 2021-22 counts. Interestingly, the trend for endemic species with a longer evolutionary history in New Zealand i.e. kererū, kākā, tūī,



korimako and kōkako, to increase following pest mammal control is also seen in other sanctuary projects where pest mammals have been eradicated or greatly reduced.

- Observations indicate that kākā are now nesting and breeding in Hūnua, previously young birds would visit Hūnua from populations in the Hauraki Gulf islands, returning to breed on these offshore islands. Kākā frequently accompany and are sighted by tamperers and visitors exploring Hūnua parkland.
- While annual bird counts do not specifically record nocturnal birds such as ruru, observations indicate ruru along with kahu (Australasian Harrier) are doing well in Hūnua.
- Hūnua forest provides important refuge and habitat for Auckland Green Gecko, Forest Gecko and Hochstetter's Frog, which now occur in a small number of locations. These species are particularly vulnerable to rat predation. Lizards and frogs tend to be cryptic and difficult to monitor due to the low number detected through traditional monitoring methods. Recovery even once introduced predators are removed is slow, as these species only have one to two young per season. Over the past year staff working within the park have been observing the presence of both forest gecko and Hochstetter's frogs while doing their day-to-day work, when previously they have only been observed on rare occasions.
- Hūnua is home, to one of Auckland's largest Long tailed bat/pekapeka-tou-ro populations. Population surveys are conducted every three years with population numbers being consistent for the last 10 years. Bats like lizards and frogs have low natural reproductive levels. Efforts to ensure bat breeding locations (roosts) are protected and have the best chance of breeding success includes monitoring of radio tagged adults to locate roost trees. This work has shown the roost trees in the park are situated within our Kōkako Management Area, which has received the greatest protection from introduced predators. Expanding pest control across the Hūnua Ranges will benefit the expansion of bat and other threatened species populations.



Connecting people to the land, kaitiakitanga

- Connecting local iwi and marae to Kohukohunui maunga and ngahere Kohukohunui is an important part of Hūnua Project. Council has supported and facilitated these connections by providing access to the maunga through Hikoi ki te tihi o Kohukohunui guided walks 2020, 2021 and 2022 with our local iwi and marae. In 2016 a Kaitiaki Ranger programme in Southern Regional Parks supported upskilling and employment for rangitahi. Council continues to involve and partner with iwi on pest control and environmental restoration opportunities for Hūnua.
- In 2020 the first guided kōkako walks were offered for Conservation Week, these proved very popular with the public and there is the intention to continue these in the future.
- Hūnua pest control projects benefit from over 4000 hours of volunteer time each year. Many volunteers have been coming for well over 10 years to these projects and are the true heroes of conservation.



Pest control successes

- The aerial 1080 operations in 2015 and 2018 were successful in achieving a reduction in possum and rat abundance for Hūnua. The 2018 project exceeded operational targets and reduced possums and rats to 0% RTC and 0% RTI respectively, achieving zero density is rarely achieved for such a large-scale project.
- Over 2000Ha of private land was treated as part of the 2018 operation. Support and participation of private landowners has contributed to the success of these projects and achieving a greater protected zone for threatened species.
- Possum reinvasion of the parkland has been slowed by the implementation of a buffer zone around the Hūnua parkland. This buffer zone has targeted possums on private land through ground-based control methods, covering over 40,000Ha.
- Rats are known to invade treated areas quickly; the 2018 operation kept some areas free of rats for up to 6 months over the key bird breeding season (Aug – Feb). In 2018 Hūnua kōkako had their most success breeding season, on record, with an average of 3 chicks per pair fledged.
- Aerial control reduces pests to levels that ground-based pest control programmes can then maintain, the Kōkako Management Area rat monitoring recorded at 0%, 4%, 0%, 0%, and 1% in June, August, and October 2020, and January, and March 2021 respectively.
- As well as possum and rat control Council has significantly invested in control of feral pigs, deer and goats for Hūnua. Feral pigs are at low densities and feral goats are considered at zero density within the parkland. Deer are known from the Hūnua buffer land and are occasional visitors to the parkland. Efforts are underway to reduce all these species to zero density for parkland.
- Since 2020 a targeted mustelid ground-based control project has been implemented across 4000Ha of Hūnua parkland. This project expands efforts to protect kōkako and long tailed bats from mustelid predation, as well as working towards future aspirations to reintroduce missing native species back to Hūnua such as North Island Brown Kiwi.



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