Teaming with wildlife

Guardians of the Bay of Islands Inc. Annual Report

Ngā Kaiawhi o Ngā Kaitiaki o Ipipiri

For the year ended 30 June 2026



GUARDIANS OF THE BAY OF ISLANDS INC

PROJECT ISLAND SONG

2050 Whāinga
2050 Goal
The ancient dawn chorus is restored

Mihi

Te Maunga ko Rākaumangamanga o te whare tapu o Ngāpuhi

Te Moana ko Ipipiri o Tokerau

Te Hapū ko Ngāti Kuta me Patukeha

Te Iwi ko Ngāpuhi

Te marae ko Te Rawhiti

The sacred mountain is Rākaumangamanga of the sacred house of Ngāpuhi

The ocean is Ipipiri o Tokerau

The sub tribes are Ngāti Kuta and Patukeha

The tribe is Ngāpuhi

The marae is Te Rawhiti

Tō mātou moemoeā
Our vision

The islands of Ipipiri are an archipelago of sanctuaries, alive with the dawn chorus, where both people and Aotearoa New Zealand's unique wildlife prosper in harmony.

What we do:

Pest Control & Biosecurity
Protecting the wildlife safe haven by stopping non-native predators and weeds from getting to the pest-free islands.

Forest Regeneration
Restoring native habitat so that the islands flourish.

Restoring Taonga Wildlife
Returning vulnerable native wildlife.

Inspiring Learning
Providing future generations of kiwis with inspiring learning.



Our Chair, William Fuller with one of our volunteers, Jacqui Madelin raising funds in the annual 12Ks of Christmas Challenge 2025.



The Governor-General of New Zealand, Dame Cindy Kiro, and her husband, Dr Richard Davies, meeting Miriam Ritchie, our conservation dog handler with two of her conservation dogs, Juno and Ahu.

Pānui mai i te Heamana
Message from the Chair

Kia ora e te whānau,

Over the past year, Project Island Song has continued to make meaningful progress in restoring the natural biodiversity of the eastern Bay of Islands. Through ongoing pest control, ecological monitoring, habitat restoration, and community engagement, we have seen encouraging signs of native bird populations thriving and expanding throughout the project area.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our incredible volunteers, who generously give their time, energy, and expertise. Whether assisting with bird monitoring, planting native species, supporting education programmes, or helping behind the scenes, every contribution has played a vital role in the project's success. I would also like to acknowledge our outstanding operations team, whose leadership, commitment, and passion continue to drive Project Island Song forward.

We extend our sincere thanks to all our volunteers, partner organisations, landowners, hapū, supporters, and funders. Your commitment to protecting and restoring our unique environment inspires us every day and strengthens the collective effort to create a safe haven for our native wildlife.

A special highlight for me this year was the visit by the Governor-General of New Zealand, Dame Cindy Kiro, and her husband, Dr Richard Davies, in February. Reflecting on the visit, the Governor-General said:

"It was a valuable opportunity to see firsthand the progress of Project Island Song. The work undertaken across Okahu, Waewaetorea, Motukiekie, Moturua, Urupukapuka, Motuarohia and Poroporo in maintaining their pest-free status is commendable, and it is encouraging to see the bush regenerating and native wildlife returning."

Her words are a powerful affirmation of what can be achieved through the collaboration of our partners, volunteers, hapū, landowners, and the wider community. Together, we are creating lasting, positive outcomes across these islands.

Another unforgettable highlight was spotting a wētāpunga during the day while hosting one of our Floating Classroom programmes. As I was talking with the students about the wētāpunga and its habitat near one of our release sites, a parent helper pointed to a punga tree beside the track and asked, "Is that one there?" Sure enough, an adult wētāpunga was resting in plain sight. It was an extraordinary moment for everyone involved. Seeing the students' excitement and fascination as they observed this remarkable insect up close is a memory I will always treasure. Experiences like this reinforce the importance of giving tamariki opportunities to connect with nature and learn firsthand about Aotearoa's unique flora and fauna.

Together, we are making a lasting difference. Every predator controlled, every tree planted, every species returned, and every young person inspired brings us closer to a future where the eastern Bay of Islands is once again alive with thriving native wildlife. Thank you for helping ensure that future generations can experience the rich biodiversity and healthy ecosystems that make this place so special.

Ngā mihi nui,



William Fuller
Chairperson
Guardians of the Bay of Islands Inc.

Pānui mai i te Kaiwhakahaere Matua *Message from the GM*



Abby O'Neill (left) and Laura Rumsey (right) with Melissa McLuskie of the New Zealand Penguin Initiative (NZPI).

Kia ora koutou katoa,

As we reflect on another remarkable year for the Guardians of the Bay of Islands/Project Island Song, I am incredibly proud of what has been achieved through the dedication of our contractors, volunteers, members, partners and supporters. Together, we continue to make meaningful progress in restoring biodiversity across Ipipiri.

This year marked another significant milestone in our conservation journey. The islands remained free from mammalian pest incursions for 12 consecutive months, from February 2025 to March 2026. This achievement reflects the vigilance, expertise, and commitment of our biosecurity contractors, volunteers, and the wider community who work tirelessly to protect this special environment. While this milestone was unfortunately interrupted in April 2026 by four consecutive incursions across four islands (three rats and one mouse), the rapid detection and incursion response demonstrated the strength and resilience of the biosecurity programme.

Our monitoring programmes continue to provide valuable insights into the native species and ecosystems that call the islands home, it was certainly exciting to discover fernbirds on Urupukapuka. Significant effort has also gone into monitoring wētāpunga, kororā, and the wider ecological health of the islands throughout the year. We were delighted to host our first BioBlitz, bringing together volunteers and students to document and celebrate the biodiversity of Ipipiri.

Participation in the Global Backyard Bird Count in February once again highlighted the growing appreciation for native birdlife on the islands and the impact this has globally. Citizen science initiatives such as this not only strengthen our understanding of local biodiversity but also foster meaningful connections between people and nature.

Education and community engagement remain at the heart of Project Island Song. Throughout the year, we continued working alongside schools, community groups, and visitors to inspire environmental stewardship and deepen understanding of conservation. Seeing the passion and curiosity of young people engaging with restoration work gives us great optimism for the future.

Financially, we were pleased to receive strong community support through our annual calendar sales, made possible by Darren Markin's exceptional photography and ongoing generosity. The calendar continues to raise valuable funds while showcasing the beauty of the Bay of Islands. We were also excited to launch our guided walks programme and a new online merchandise store, creating additional opportunities for people to experience, support, and connect with Project Island Song. The continued success of the 12ks of Christmas event also provided an important boost to both fundraising and community engagement.

One of the year's most significant achievements was the final release of over 1000 wētāpunga across three islands. This milestone represents years of collaboration, habitat restoration, species management, and unwavering support from Auckland Zoo, our partners, iwi, volunteers, and community. It is an accomplishment that belongs to everyone who has contributed to this journey.

We are deeply grateful to our volunteers, who contributed countless hours across every aspect of the project. From planting and weed control to biosecurity support, monitoring, and community events, your commitment has made a lasting difference. To our members, donors, iwi partners, schools, volunteers, and the wider community—thank you for sharing our vision and standing alongside us in the restoration of these remarkable islands.

Looking ahead, we are excited to build on this momentum while remaining mindful of emerging challenges. The arrival of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Aotearoa presents a significant potential threat to the wildlife that calls these islands home, reinforcing the importance of vigilance, preparedness, and strong partnerships.

Our priorities for the coming year include continuing species monitoring, strengthening biosecurity systems, expanding community engagement, and progressing work to protect and support the recovery of the Northland green gecko.

Every achievement this year reflects the power of collective action. Together, we are restoring ecosystems, reconnecting communities with nature, and creating a healthier, more resilient future for generations to come.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou i te tautoko i tēnei haerenga.



Laura Rumsey
General Manager,
Guardians of the Bay of Islands Inc.



Main: Kororā footprints found on the beach at Urupukapuka.
Inset: Two kororā in their burrow, Urupukapuka.

Kororā work

This year, we were proud to join the New Zealand Penguin Initiative (NZPI) whānau. Through conversations with the NZPI team, we learned that very little research has previously been undertaken to understand kororā / little blue penguin populations north of Auckland. We're excited to help change that by establishing monitoring programmes on the islands and engaging the wider community in this important work.

Locals, tourism operators, and boaties throughout the Bay of Islands regularly spot kororā in the water and their footprints along our beaches. It's fantastic to now have a way to channel these valuable observations into a broader citizen science programme, creating data that will help inform and protect these populations for years to come.

In October 2025, we were delighted to welcome Melissa McLuskie to Kororāreka/Russell. During her visit, she delivered an engaging workshop for 20 of our team, volunteers, and community members, building local knowledge about kororā, and the importance of monitoring and conservation.

We were also fortunate to continue our collaboration with NorthTec through our education programme. This year, student Jack Mitchell undertook a kororā monitoring project as part of his course, locating kororā habitat and monitoring burrows over a three-month period. His work has already provided valuable baseline information and is helping shape future discussions and monitoring efforts across the islands.

Jack noted:

"The biggest highlight has been working alongside Project Island Song to improve the understanding of kororā distribution and ecology around the Bay of Islands. This work supports meaningful future conservation, helps reduce the knowledge gap around Northland kororā and provides a foundation for future research to build on.

As a passionate conservationist it has been awesome spending my time on a predator free island where I'm constantly exposed to birds not often seen on the mainland. It has also been a lifelong goal of mine to see geckos in the wild and I have come across 2 (yay). This survey has also increased my interest in penguin conservation, an area that I now could see myself being involved with in the future."

Wētāpunga work

This year marked the final release of wētāpunga across Motuarohia, Moturua and Urupukapuka, bringing an important reintroduction programme to a close. The programme began in December 2020, making it particularly special to complete the final release almost exactly five years later.

Over the course of the project, a total of 1,811 adult and juvenile wētāpunga were released across the three islands. Regular monitoring has confirmed that the populations are establishing successfully, an encouraging milestone for the long-term restoration of these remarkable insects.

One of the highlights of the year came when a Floating Classroom group had the rare opportunity to see a wētāpunga during their island visit. As these giant wētā are nocturnal, such sightings are exceptionally uncommon, making it an unforgettable experience for the students and a wonderful reminder of the success of the programme.

We gratefully acknowledge the dedicated team at Auckland Zoo for their commitment to this breeding programme, and Ngāti Manuhiri, the gifting hapū of this incredible taonga species. Their partnership and support have been instrumental in making this restoration success possible.

One of the 1,022 juvenile wētāpunga is released on Urupukapuka.

Education work

Education remains a cornerstone of our work, connecting people of all ages with the islands and the taonga species that call them home. Throughout the year, our team worked alongside kura, secondary schools and tertiary institutions to deliver interactive, hands-on learning experiences that inspire curiosity, build knowledge and foster a lasting connection to conservation.

The 2025/26 Floating Classroom programme welcomed around 300 enthusiastic students from 10 schools across Te Tai Tokerau for 14 days of immersive learning on Moturua. Each visit combined exploration, discovery and practical conservation. Students ventured into the bush to identify native plants and birds, built rat traps, decoded animal tracks, and discovered just how competitive beach and bush bingo can become.

As memorable as these activities were, it was the unexpected wildlife encounters that made many of the days truly unforgettable. Some groups were lucky enough to see orca cruising past their boat, seals basking along the shoreline, kororā tracks on the beach, a rare daytime sighting of a wētāpunga, and even our shy pāteke gliding past to offer a quiet kia ora.

We were also delighted to continue our partnership with the R. Tucker Thompson Youth Voyages programme. Across 14 voyages, rangatahi explored the Bay of Islands, developed new skills, built lifelong friendships and joined us in hands-on island conservation. These experiences not only deepen their understanding of our natural environment but also open doors to future pathways in conservation and environmental stewardship.

This year also marked our first BioBlitz, held on the Akeake Peninsula on Urupukapuka. A BioBlitz is a community effort to record as many species as possible within a defined area over a set period of time. Using iNaturalist to document and identify their discoveries, our team of 16 participants recorded 282 observations, representing 62 different species of plants, animals and fungi.

The day was a wonderful reminder of the value of slowing down and paying close attention to the natural world. From towering native trees and tiny seedlings to fascinating fungi, insects, birds and even the inevitable weed species, every observation contributed to a richer understanding of the peninsula's biodiversity.



One of our floating classrooms, taking place on Moturua.



An adult wētāpunga spotted on Moturua.

Our BioBlitz coincided with the International Day for Biodiversity project on iNaturalist, a global initiative that ran throughout the second half of May to create a worldwide snapshot of life on Earth. By contributing our observations, we joined hundreds of thousands of participants around the world, helping add to a global dataset that exceeded half a million biodiversity records during the project.

We are incredibly grateful to the Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust for its continued support of our education programme. Their generosity ensures that students can continue to experience these inspiring island learning adventures free of charge, helping nurture the next generation of kaitiaki.

Tō mātou tau ki muri
Our year in review



6
Species monitoring trips



666
Trees planted



14
Floating Classrooms



4
Incursions



25
Other education activities



2660
Volunteers hours gifted



17
Business Members



89
Members



209
Volunteers



17
Pest-free years



8
Guided walks



1022
Wētāpunga released



14
Weeding trips



29
Days of island hardware surveillance



62
Days of dog checks, including rodent, skink, cat, ant and mustelid

You can protect the islands and their wildlife from invasive predators by making a donation.

Either scan the QR code or visit our website:

*projectislandsong.co.nz/**donate***

Ā tātou pūtea *Our finances*

While competition for grant funding continues to be competitive, the year-end total funds of $530,755 received was ahead of budget expectation due to the receipt of the full 3-year grant from NZ Lotteries Environment & Heritage.

Established grant funders Foundation North, NZ Lottery Grants Board, COGS, and Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust continue to support the delivery of pest-free management and educational programmes. Receipt of the final instalment from Department of Conservation for Rakaumangamanga pest management works undertaken by 3B2 Trust concludes that contract and acknowledges the work the Trust has achieved. Website sales of merchandise commenced in June while donations and calendar sales remain steady.

All the grant funding brought forward from FY24/25 was spent in delivery of education, volunteer, pest management, biosecurity, and ecological restoration. A total of $241,555 is to be carried over into FY26/27 to continue delivery of the educational, volunteering, and pest/biosecurity programmes, with NZ Lotteries Environment & Heritage Years 2 and 3 grants making up 90% of this total.

The current year deficit of $45,850 reflects the conclusion of the Rakaumangamanga pest control contract as well as writing off capitalised costs from previous years for translocation permit research and the Te Tangi o Te Ata website as signalled during the FY24/25 audit process.

Despite the operational deficit, the Guardians' financial position remains stable due to continued prudent financial management by both the Committee and the Operations team. Continued maintenance of a $100,000 Guardians' Reserve balance and the short-term investment of grant funds received in advance demonstrates the Committee's conservative approach in support of Project Island Song as a sound going concern entity.



Related to fundraising	$33,325	6.6%
Related to volunteers	$18,127	3.6%
Costs of providing commercial activities	$9,524	1.9%
Transportation	$31,625	6.3%
Related to service delivery	$411,202	81.6%



Grants	$356,396	77.8%
Donations, koha, bequests & fundraising	$55,655	12.2%
Fees and subscriptions from members	$6,535	1.4%
Revenue from commercial activities	$30,000	6.6%
Interest income	$9,366	2%

Deficit	**$45,851**
Assets	**$603,147**
Bank accounts and cash	$382,158
Other current assets	$40,029
Property, plant & equipment	$177,756
Other non-current assets	$3,204

Liabilities	**$317,175**
Unused tagged grants and donations	$241,555
Other liabilities	$75,620
Net Assets	**$285,972**

FY 24/25: 1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025 **FY 25/26:** 1 July 2025 – 30 June 2026 **FY 26/27:** 1 July 2026 – 30 June 2027 At the time of printing, the above figures are unaudited.

A mammoth haul of tobacco weed is removed from Urupukapuka by the team from Scenic Hotel Bay of Islands.



Tō tātou ekenga ki mua hāi
Our future

As we look ahead to the next financial year, we are excited by the opportunities that lie ahead. A key focus will be our upcoming strategic planning process, which will help translate our Ecological Restoration Plan into clear priorities and actions, while shaping our vision for the next three, five and ten years, and beyond.

Monitoring will continue to play an increasingly important role in our work, providing the information needed to evaluate progress and guide future restoration decisions. During 2026/27, this will include kororā scat collection as part of a nationwide research project, our annual bird and pāteke counts, and ongoing wētāpunga monitoring.

Building long-term financial sustainability also remains a priority. As reliable funding sources become increasingly competitive, we are committed to growing income streams that support our conservation work. Expanding our guided wildlife tours is an important part of this strategy, generating revenue while giving visitors a deeper appreciation of the remarkable wildlife and restoration story of the Bay of Islands.

Our new online shop is now live, and we look forward to expanding the range throughout the coming year. It offers another way for people to support the Project while sharing in the stories of the islands through a growing collection of locally inspired designs and merchandise.

Above all, we will remain committed to biosecurity across the islands. Ongoing vigilance for threats such as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and any mammalian pest incursions is essential to protecting the ecosystems we have worked so hard to restore. Strong biosecurity underpins every aspect of our conservation work—without it, our habitats and taonga species cannot flourish.

Book your wildlife experience now!
Scan the QR code or visit our website for more information:
projectislandsong.co.nz/visit-the-islands

Project Island Song merch is back!
Look good and support our mahi. Check out our merch store here!
projectislandsong.digitees.co.nz



Ngā mihi ki ngā Kaitautoko
Thanks & acknowledgements

We'd like to thank our generous members who, year after year, support the organisation through their annual membership.

We'd like to acknowledge our 2025-2026 Business Members:

Sustainable Travel Co. · Carino Wildlife Cruises · Russell Mini Tours · Scenic Hotel Bay of Islands · Silver Wave · Busby Manor Resort · Bay of Islands i-Site · Wilderness Travel · Russell - Orongo Bay Holiday Park · Top Holiday Parks Superior Russell · eighty. Studio Eighty Graphic Design · Design Print Kerikeri · Copthorne Bay of Islands · rockgas · Baylogics · RC Russell Contracting · Bay of Islands Lodge

Donors and funders

Project Island Song is reliant on funders and sponsors to keep us on the path to achieving our vision. Thank you to all those who have contributed towards Project Island Song in various ways, including the provision of transport for volunteers going to the Islands, funding project work, providing equipment for use on weeding and planting days and much more.

Lottery Grants Board – Te Puna Tahua – Lotto funds for your community · Raizor Insurance for Good · Foundation North – Pūtea Hāpai Oranga – Funding to Enhance Lives · Wilderness Travel · Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust · Northland Regional Council · Trees That Count – Te Rahi o Tāne · COGS Community Organisation Grants Scheme · George Hansen Estate

In-kind supporters

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Volunteer of the year

Introduced as part of National Volunteer Week 2026, this award recognises an outstanding individual contribution.

Kevin Philpott
Read all about Kevin's mahi on our website:
projectislandsong.co.nz/volunteer-story-kevin



Calendar vendors

That Coffee Bloke, Te Haumi · Russell Museum, Te Whare Taonga o Kororāreka · Long Beach Coffee Cart · Pipsqueak, Kerikeri · Toi Tū Art Exhibition · Russell Bookshop · Blue River Orchard · Scenic Hotel Bay of Islands · Pompallier Mission House & Printery · Russell 4Square · Jack's Veggies · Bay of Islands isite · Opua General Store · Russell Mini Tours · Unichem, Kerikeri · Redwoods Garden Centre

GUARDIANS
OF THE BAY OF ISLANDS INC



If you've seen a pest on the islands, please call **0800 362 468** immediately, and also email us at **pest@projectislandsong.co.nz**

Project Island Song is a unique partnership between community group the Guardians of the Bay of Islands, Te Rawhiti hapū (Ngāti Kuta and Patukeha) and the Department of Conservation.
5 Pitt Street, Russell 0202
P.O. Box 142, Russell 0242

To find out more about our work, volunteer with us, or be part of the project in another way, please visit our website:
projectislandsong.co.nz

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PROJECT ISLAND SONG

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