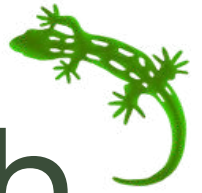


Friends of Okura Bush



ANNUAL REPORT 2026



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Above: Collaboration and team work are key to progress

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Cover page (clockwise from top left): Community effort during FoOB's annual planting day; Kuaka / Bar-tailed godwits; Cheniers (shell barriers) of the Weiti River, Hundreds of plants being moved to site ready for planting.

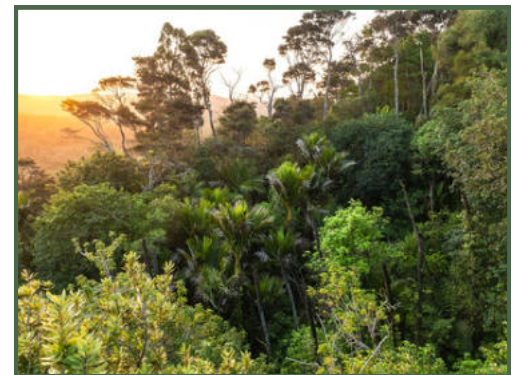
Report designed by Anwen Robinson.

1. INTRODUCTION

Friends of Okura Bush (FoOB) was established in 2013 to protect and restore the biodiversity of the rare and valuable ecosystems within the Okura – Weiti – Stillwater area. Working in partnership with the community and key partners, it leads an environmental restoration programme that spans from the coastline inland to East Coast Road, and includes both public and privately owned land. Initiatives include predator control, weed eradication, education and advocacy.

FoOB's environmental catchment includes a rare diversity of ecosystems in close proximity, including the twin estuaries of the Okura and Weiti rivers, a marine reserve, Karepiro Beach, the cheniers (shell barriers) of the Weiti River, the Okura Bush and Karepiro forest, and freshwater / wetland habitats. Most of the area has been given a Biodiversity Focus Area (BFA) status.

- **Karepiro Beach** is a regionally important wader roost and breeding site for New Zealand dotterel, Variable oystercatcher and Pied stilt.
- **The Okura Bush Reserve**, which spans an area of 116ha, holds outstanding conservation value, and offers a unique remnant of Auckland's natural heritage. It is one of the last large stands of coastal broadleaf and kauri forests between the Coromandel and Whangarei, showcasing pre-European trees.
- **The cheniers (shell barriers) of the Weiti River** are classified as a critically endangered ecosystem in New Zealand, and regarded as an internationally significant landform.



2. MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

Kia ora tatou

This year marks our thirteenth year of dedicated efforts in preserving the environment around us, including the land, streams, and marine reserve. Many individuals have contributed to our success.

With my son, Geoff, I was a founding member of FOOB and feel so proud of all we have achieved together over those years.

Predator control

For many years, Jo Crawford led our predator control programme, implementing new traplines, establishing the backyard trapping projects, supporting a team of volunteers as well as the maintenance of traps, education open days and so many other things. So you can imagine how devastated we were when she resigned from the position to take up full time work elsewhere. We have slowly been picking up the threads, and have engaged a new part-time co-ordinator, Maria Riegel.

While we have lost some volunteers through moving away or other commitments, we have also welcomed new one. Lynne Beneka and Linda Gates have been managing the Okura and Stillwater backyard trapping programs, extending predator control into residents' backyards. Linda resigned that position during the year and Maria is currently filling this role. A big thank you to all participants in these project.

Weed control and planting

We completed our five-year weed management plans for the Okura Walkway, Deborah Reserve, and Okura Esplanade. Through funding from Pub Charity and the Local Board we were able to engage Richard Webster of Remnant Restoration to new five-year plans for each of these areas. People have noticed a significant transformation in these areas over the past five to ten years, but the work is ongoing. With funding from Lottery Environment, we have been able to complete a large chunk of the first year of the plans.

Our work with private landowners on developing property pest plans has been put on hold until we can find funding for this much appreciated service. However, we continue to provide advice when requested.



FRIENDS OF OKURA BUSH

Our community planting day a year ago was a great success with almost 100 volunteers planting out about 2000 plants on the Okura Walkway. Many said how they so enjoyed the day and the refreshments that they wish to come again. With funding from the Hibiscus and Bays Local Board and Pub Charity, we engaged Anwen Robinson to develop a plan for key stakeholders such as Council, DOC and community groups to work collaboratively to eliminate the priority pest plants which most threaten the natural ecosystems in our area. So far, we have had little buy-in from Council and DOC but we continue to promote this. We were very pleased to receive a grant from the Stout Trust to conduct a weed survey in the Okura Bush.

Bird monitoring

We have always appreciated the wonderful reports Bernaard Michaux has done of his regular observation and monitoring of shore and wetland birds on the coast between Stillwater and Karepiro Bay. Bernard has had to reduce his time going out so regularly, but we thank him for the invaluable knowledge he shared with us.

We were keen to resume an annual bird count in the Okura Bush in early summer last year, but unfortunately were a bit late in finding a team of experienced people who could recognise the various birds and bird calls. We aim to run the count this summer. If you know of any who do have this knowledge and may be interested in participating in the count, can you please contact us.

Funding and support

We were disappointed to miss out on Council funding for running our programs, including coordination and facilitation for a second year in a row. We met with a senior Council officer for advice on this year's application, and although our application targeted as advised, we were not successful.

However, we were very grateful for Hibiscus and Bays Local Board who, through support of our park ranger, Dan Marrow, gave us a grant to keep us viable.

Many have supported us throughout the year. Much of our work has been funded by Lottery – Lottery Environment and Heritage for weed control and Lottery Community for predator control. We are especially grateful for this funding.

We have had quarterly meetings with the Department of Conservation who have supported us with some trapping equipment, including some AT220 self-setting traps.



FRIENDS OF OKURA BUSH

This will make trapping in the rugged areas of the Okura Bush much easier. You will be very pleased to know that DOC has the go-ahead for opening at least part of the Okura Bush Walk to the public once again. Planning for this is now underway, and they have assured us that they will keep us involved.

One of the highlights of the year was our guest speaker at our last AGM, Batman Ben Paris, who spoke of his involvement in raising awareness of the presence of bats in the Auckland area. Following his talk, we were very enthusiastic about doing a bat survey in our area. However, our focus became in recruiting new predator control volunteers, who then would be able to assist in the survey.

We give special thanks to Te Kawerau a Maki and Ngati Manuhiri who have given us guidance and support to work in collaboration with conservation values significant to both these iwi. We have appreciated their willingness to provide training for our staff and committee in Maori cultural values.

We are proud to be associated with Restore Hibiscus and Bays and congratulate them on their visionary work. We also thank Dan Marrow of Auckland Council and Sol Cranna-Smith of DOC for their support.

Our achievements this year would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of our Coordinator, Chris Bettany. Chris has tirelessly applied for all available funding and grants, leveraging an extensive network of sponsors and key individuals to secure the necessary resources. Without Chris's dedicated actions, many of our accomplishments would not have been realised.

Regardless of funding, it is the people who enable us to realise our vision of flourishing and protected ecosystems. We thank everyone who has supported our programs, especially our dedicated volunteers and diligent committee. We look forward to another successful year with your continued support.

With warm regards
Lezette Reid - Chairperson

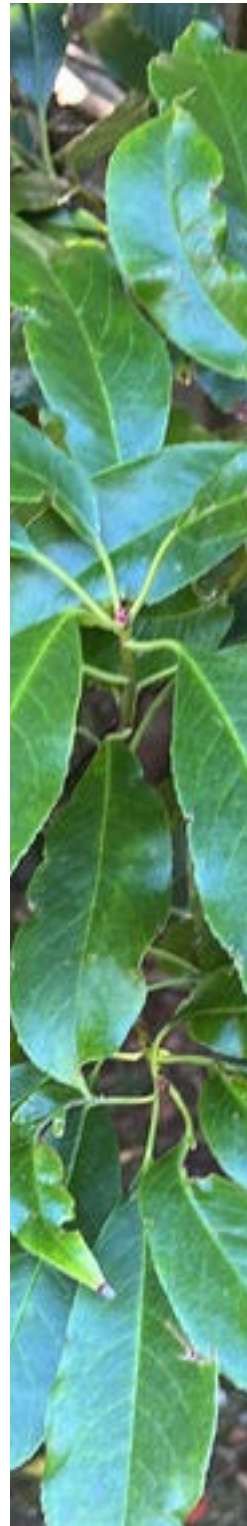




Photo credit: Frits Beneka

3. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

1. With help from DOC, Auckland Council and our volunteers we have been able to clear some of the tracks in the Okura Bush which had been made difficult to access following storm damage. This is an important step forward for our predator control programme.
2. We received engagement from Auckland Council once again this year to undertake live cat trapping - which importantly started ahead of the breeding season.
3. 'Facing the weed tsunami' - a report has been developed and shared with Te Kāwarau a Maki, DOC, and Auckland Council, with further follow-up to be had. Funding was secured from Stout Trust to progress one of the report's recommendations - to conduct a weed survey of the Okura Bush.
4. The continued work and dedication of our volunteers, who are essential to the success of our environmental programmes is always a highlight, and helps us to achieve so much more.

4. COMMUNITY PLANTING & WEEDING



Photo: Charles West

4.1 PLANTING DAY

What a day! Almost 100 people, including families with younger children, turned up at the Stillwater end of the Okura Walkway for our annual planting day. About half were from the Sri Mihindu Dhamma School who had travelled across Auckland for the occasion. Together, about 2000 plants were planted. What a legacy for the future.

We had set the date of the planting day in consultation with Ngati Manuhiri for a day in line with the maramataka planting calendar. The plants we planted appear to be thriving.

Thank you to park Ranger, Dan Marrow, for all his assistance with the planting day, including providing a barbeque! Thank you to Marty Jack who transported the plants out on his quad bike and trailer. Thank you to the team who managed the refreshments including hot soup, chocolate brownie, fruit and drinks. Thank you to photographer Charles West who took a wonderful gallery of pictures. And a big thank you to all who turned up on the day. There was overwhelming feedback that all had enjoyed the day.

A second planting day was held at Deborah Reserve, supported by a small team of local volunteers, with around a further 100 natives planted.



**2000
natives
planted!**

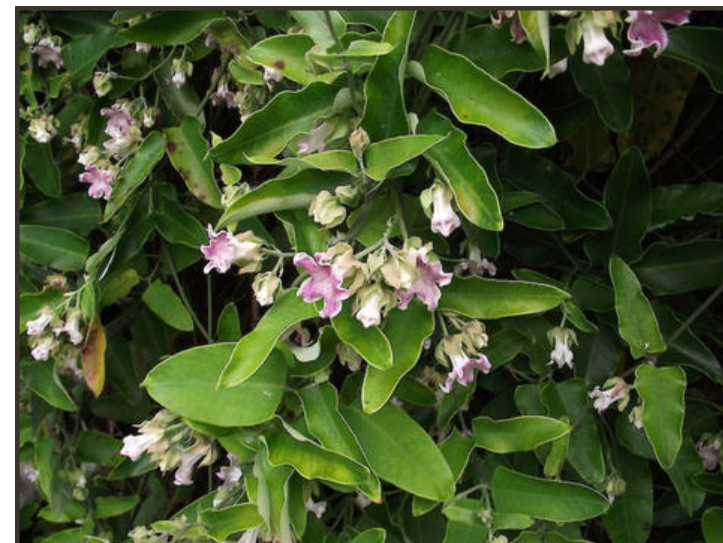
Above left: Young girl planting at Stillwater (photo credit: Charles West); **Above centre:** Hundreds of plants escorted to site; **Above right:** Team effort at work (photo: Charles West).

4.2 WEED CONTROL

Okura Walkway, Okura Esplanade and Deborah Reserve

With thanks to funding from Pub Charity Ltd and the Hibiscus and Bays Local Board, we were able to contract Richard Webster of Remnant Restoration to develop new five-year weeding plans for the Council section of the Okura Walkway, Okura Esplanade and Deborah Reserve in Okura. This was the third five-year plan for the Okura Walkway, and second for the Okura Esplanade and Deborah Reserve.

With funding from Lottery Environment and Heritage, we were able to engage Island Solutions to make considerable weed control in-roads into the first year of the plan for the Okura Walkway. A summary of the impressive work done is provided on the following pages.



Above: Moth plant – one of several pest plants destructing our local environment

Okura Bush Scenic Reserve

We have been saddened to see weeds such as climbing asparagus, bangalow palm, pampas and other nasties making their appearance in the Okura Bush. With a grant from the Stout Trust, we have been able to engage Remnant Restoration to conduct a weed survey through the Okura Bush which will inform us in making a plan to control these unwelcome pest plants.

Monthly weeding bee

Our volunteer Sunday weeding days (9.30 – 11.30 am) on the Okura Walkway had dwindled both in numbers of times and numbers of participants. However a small group of enthusiastic volunteers have discovered how enjoyable and rewarding it is to get out from the city to a more wilderland area and wish to continue. Auckland is one of the weediest cities in the world and the Okura Walkway is no exception. We warmly welcome more people to share in looking after the exceptional natural, and sometimes rare, ecosystems that form part of the Walkway.



Above: Climbing asparagus.

Below: Wild ginger. Both pest plants are commonly spotted within our catchment.



We warmly welcome more people to share in looking after the exceptional natural, and sometimes rare, ecosystems that form part of the Okura Walkway.

Island Solutions – making progress into the first year of the weed control plan for the Okura Walkway

Between November and December 2025, Island Solutions completed approximately 180 hours of weed control across six Okura management units. The cheniers received full surveys, with all primary weeds—climbing asparagus, smilax, honeysuckle, periwinkle—controlled. Other units were strategically sampled, revealing new weed incursions linked to nearby gardens, forestry disturbance, and private land. Key issues include steep-slope access, re-invasion pressure, and misidentification risks (stinking iris vs. native tuhara). Priority actions include earlier boneseed/smilax control, addressing major infestations such as the “Pine Apocalypse,” (the collapsed area within the pine plantation which is rapidly becoming a major seed source for multiple invasive species), and engaging adjacent landowners to reduce seed sources.

A full summary can be found on the Friends of Okura Bush website, where you can also download the full report: [Weeding Report January 2026 Island Solutions](https://okurabush.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Weeding-Report-January-2026-Island-Solutions.pdf) (<https://okurabush.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Weeding-Report-January-2026-Island-Solutions.pdf>)



Left Images: Island Solutions team at work



Above: Control of Periwinkle at Dacre Cottage

5. PREDATOR CONTROL

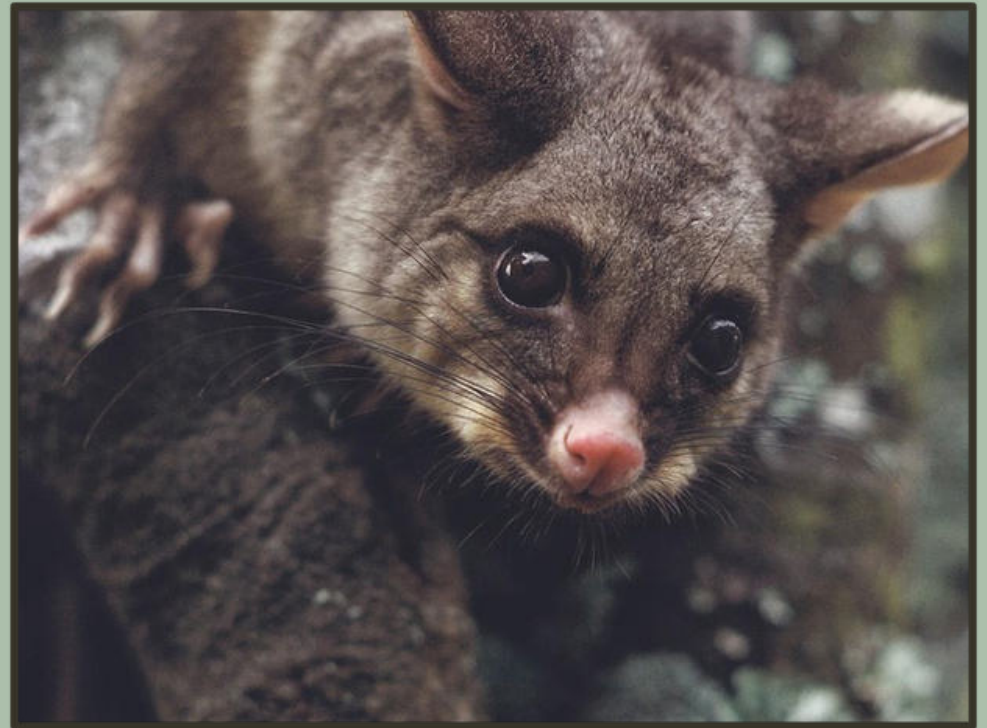


Photo: Frits Beneka

5.1 TRAP LINES

Summary of achievements with our predator control:

We had a few challenges this year in maintaining the momentum of predator control compared with previous years. Jo's leaving left quite a hole, and some experienced trappers left for various reasons, such as shifting away or having other commitments. One of the difficulties we had was accessing the trapline tracks in the Okura Bush. Violent storms such as Cyclone Gabrielle and other consequent storms caused much damage to the tracks, and had become quite overgrown. We were very grateful to our council park ranger, Dan Marrow, for organising the clearing of one of the main Okura Bush tracks on council land, and to the Department of Conservation for clearing another. Yet another track was cleared by one of our volunteers, John Potter, with others now offering to take the slasher to further tracks.

Jo had been our 'go-to' for managing all our predator control programme. She was very familiar with the traps, including the new AT220 self-setting trap, but most of our trapping team had very little experience with them. A big thank you goes out to Julia Woodley from Restore Hibiscus and Bays who went with a small team of our volunteers into the Okura Bush to show them the intricacies of the traps (which were not as intimidating once familiar with them).

Extending our trapline network is a slow but dedicated process – and has involved cutting through tracks that were damaged by storms, and respecting the space needed to protect our Kauri trees

Summary of achievements with our predator control (continued):

Six of our new trappers attended a kauri hygiene training session in preparation for trapping in the Okura Bush where kauri dieback disease is a risk of spread if special care is not taken. Three more trappers are waiting to do the kauri hygiene training.

We had a most successful trappers' evening get-together which included several new trappers. Rishika Chopara from the Auckland University based CatchIT database recording our catch statistics and other information came and did a most informative presentation on the programme. It was interesting to learn that this programme is associated with the Statistics Department. Julia Woodley also joined us, sharing tips from her long experience in trapping.

With all this renewed energy, we anticipate that our catch numbers will be greater than ever!

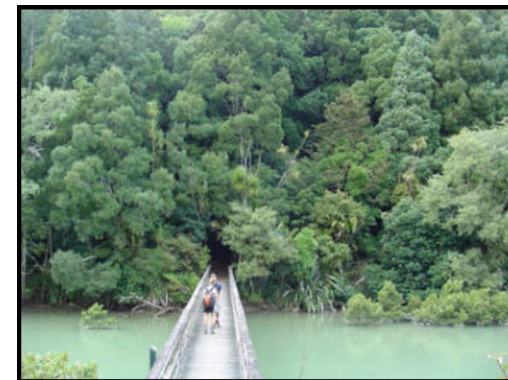
A new team of volunteers, with training and support from our network, is driving forward our predator control programme.



PREDATORS REMOVED:

In addition to rodent bait stations along Dacre Historic and Esplanade Reserve our dedicated volunteers have caught the following predators in our local public reserves this past AGM year.

Predator	01/07/25 - 30/06/26	01/07/24 - 30/06/25	All-time CatchIT Tally
Mice	216	412	7661
Ship rats	163	220	3665
Norway rats	11	17	184
Rodent-AT220	36	141	177
Hedgehogs	36	29	299
Weasels	17	25	318
Stoats	8	6	166
Ferrets	0	0	1
Possums	78	164	1540
Feral cats	1	19	20



Above: Bridge access to the Okura Bush

NOTE: Numbers do not include our residential backyard trapping projects in Okura and Stillwater. If you are interested in specific lines or species please visit: catchit.co.nz/apps/summaryportfolio/?Area=OkuraBushWalkway

5.2 BACKYARD TRAPPING - OKURA

By Lynne Beneka - Okura Village Backyard Trapping Co-ordinator

We continue to be steady with about 65 properties with traps. We have had some new members who are enthusiastic and doing a great job. A few more families in Okura are slowly joining our trapping community. Word of mouth and chatting when out walking or trapping helps to spread the enthusiasm. As usual, there are only a small core group of regular trappers who respond to my monthly emails and keep track of their catches - probably between 10-20. I am sure there are more catches than are reported.

The trap line along the waterline on the Deborah Reserve has continued to be checked weekly by four enthusiastic but dwindling rostered volunteers. All catches are available on CatchIT. We are still unable to access traps 1, 2, 3 and 5 due to the slips.

The figures for the past two years are included for comparison.

Species	AGM Year (July 2025 - June 2026)	July 2024 - June 2025	All time total (since 2018)
Rats 	98	46	341
Mice 	44	65	399
Possums 	12	14	73
Hedgehogs 	11	4	25
Stoats 	2	1	10
Weasels 	1	2	3

851

**total reported catches by
the Okura backyard
trappers.**

Well done team!

5.3 BACKYARD TRAPPING - STILLWATER

After a wonderful start to this project with 38 residents enthusiastic to become part of the backyard trapping project, it unfortunately faltered over the past year. Our co-ordinator for the project, Linda Gates, was unable to continue in the role, and after a six month hiatus, we have a new co-ordinator, Maria Riegel. It's great to have Maria on board, and we'd like to thank Linda for all her work in the trapping team over the past 10 or so years.

Maria has been getting in touch with those who were originally participating, finding that some have moved away while some do not want to continue with the project. However there is a steady core group of eight, and Maria has recruited three more participants in the last month.

Some in the area are under the misunderstanding that there is not a rodent or possum problem in the Stillwater area, but others have found that there is quite an invasion of predators from the adjacent wilding pine forest, and particularly noticeable since the start of the development of the Penlink project. Maria is going all out to correct the misunderstanding and encouraging many more Stillwater residents to reap the rewards of backyard trapping.



Above: Rats do much damage to our native wildlife. This predator is being controlled with help from volunteers who are managing our trap lines and engaged in our backyard trapping programme.

**Do you live in Stillwater or Okura? We'd love to have you on board with our backyard trapping programme.
Please get in touch!**

6. BIRD REPORT

By Bernard Michaux

Summer, what summer you may ask? It was a fairly wild and wet time but the late spell of calmer and dry weather allowed me to get out and walk through from Stillwater to Okura along the coast. I was surprised that the track from Stillwater to the Weiti chénier was more-or-less mud-free, given the wetness of the summer. Kererū were flying around and tui and riroriro were vocal, but overall there were few birds about. I guess that many are still moulting/chilling out after the breeding season.

There must have been over a hundred kuaka (Bar-tailed godwits) roosting on the chénier, some of which were colouring up nicely in preparation for breeding. It won't be long now before they start their return journey to Alaska via the Yellow Sea. The torea flock is building and numbered around two hundred. The poaka (Pied oystercatchers) have long finished breeding and the adults and this year's young are also starting to form winter flocks.



Left: Kuaka / Bar-tailed godwit. These migratory birds fly non-stop to our shores from Alaska – one of the longest migrations of any animal. The bird on the right is starting to moult into breeding plumage. Photo credit: Bernard Michaux

Above left: Tūturiwhatu / NZ dotterel. Photo credit: RobynRoper / Getty Images

Above centre: Poaka / pied oystercatchers. Juveniles are easily identified by the smudgy black around the eye – as shown by the bird in the background. Photo credit: Bernard Michaux

Breeding

On the breeding front, the flagged female tūturiwhatu (CXE) has produced two fledged young this year, and a tōrea pango (variable oystercatcher) pair have raised a single chick. Added to this, the Karepiro pair of tōrea pango also raised a chick and one of the two pairs of tūturiwhatu nesting in the housing development also successfully raised a chick this year, which was quite an exciting development given that the beach nests were once again washed away this year. So, a total of three tūturiwhatu and two tōrea pango chicks raised in the 2025/6 season, which is about average.

Brown Quail (kuera)

One of the birds I love to see is the Brown Quail (kuera), which can often be found around Dacre's Cottage. These small brown birds were introduced from Australia between 1866 and 1880 and have established themselves in the North Island. They were very similar to a native quail that became extinct in the 1870s. They are much smaller and lack the little topknot of the commoner Californian Quail. These birds are surprisingly pretty with their palette of browns and greys, and I'm always amused by the way they skitter about in front of you before diving off into the cover of long grass or undergrowth.

The summary of the past five years' results can be found at: https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Shortnote_Michaux_722_125-127.pdf



Above: Brown quail
Photo credit: Bernard Michaux.

Roosting

Weiti chénier, Karepiro Beach, and the Okura shell bank are important roost sites for shorebirds. Many of the local shorebirds form post-breeding flocks when they gather together over the winter. Most of these are normally very territorial and won't put up with any other member of their species nearby, so the formation of these winter flocks requires a complete change in behaviour, probably brought about by lowering of post-breeding testosterone levels. As the days start to lengthen and testosterone levels rise, these flocks break up as pairs disperse to their breeding territories. Although they often share the same roost sites, individual species tend to keep to themselves. Even the two oystercatcher species, which tend to flock together, occupy different parts of the flock.



Above: Weiti chénier

Right: Karepiro Beach

Photo credits: Bernard Michaux



Our thanks to Bernie the Bird Man

Bernard Michaux started walking the Okura Bush Walk about 25 years ago, and became fascinated with the shore bird life on the coast. He began going out regularly observing the numbers and nesting habits particularly of the oyster catchers and dotterel. He met up with Pete Townend who takes a kaitiaki role in the in the area around Dacre Cottage, and together they organised areas on the dunes to be roped off to both protect the birds and the dunes themselves.

His knowledge of shore birdlife between Stillwater and the Okura Spit grew to such an extent he gave critical evidence in the Environment Court case that successfully prevented a large urban development at Okura, and his relationship with Friends of Okura Bush began.

Bernard continued to regularly visit the area fortnightly during the breeding season and monthly outside of this period, observing the birds, and providing reports, not only on our FOOB website, but to eBird and the Notornis journal.

We have very much appreciated Bernard's fascinating reports with the wonderful photos accompanying them – thank you Bernard for sharing your bird stories with us.

Bernard has now slowed down his visits going out less frequently, but we still look forward to occasional updates from him.



7. FINANCIAL UPDATE

<u>Income</u>	
Donations	305.00
Grants Income – Current Year	70,879.88
Interest Income	133.16
Memberships	450.00
Grants received – previous period	4,636.00
Total Income	76,404.04
<u>Cost of Sales</u>	
Tools	–
Trapping Coordinator	3,771.88
Traps	12,032.75
Weeding – Property Pest Plans	–
Trapping Costs / Volunteer Reimburse	480.71
Event Expenses / refreshments	97.98
Weeding – Contractors	38,900.00
Total Cost of Sales	55,283.32
Gross Profit	21,120.72

Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 30 June 2026

<u>Operating Expenses</u>	
Bank Fees	0.12
Coordinator Fees	15,400.00
Depreciation	2,265.88
General Expenses	455.29
Motor Vehicle Reimbursements	96.16
Printing & Stationery	1,173.87
Subscriptions	483.00
Website Costs	172.72
Outreach & Marketing	3,076.00
Stripe Fees	12.55
Total Operating Expenses	23,135.59
NET PROFIT	(2,014.87)

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The work we do is greatly enhanced by the support and encouragement of our supporters, both financially and in kind. Without them, what we have achieved would not have been possible.

There are many to thank, including the list of agencies for which you can see their logo below. Thank you to all of them for the specific parts of our programmes you have funded.

Other groups have provided support in other ways, such as Te Kawerau a Maki and Ngati Manuhiri who have given us advice and training in matters Maori. Restore Hibiscus and Bays has supported generously in an ongoing way. Thank you to the Okura Ratepayers and Residents and Stillwater Residents groups for the use of their halls, gratis. Thank you to our local schools and companies such as Bunnings, New World Browns Bay and Pak'n'Save Albany for helping make our events successful.

We have appreciated the support of staff we have worked most closely with from Auckland Council, namely Dan Marrow and Sinead Brimacombe, and from DOC, Rebecca Rush and Sol Cranna-Smith.

And of course, a huge thank you to the FOOB committee and our volunteers.

You have all been awesome.



THANK YOU



Pāteke ducks. Credit: Frits Beneka

Toitū te marae o Tane Mahuta; Toitū te marae o Tangaroa, Toitū te tangata.

If the land is well, if the sea is well, the people will thrive.