

Predator-free offshore islands

in the Bay of Plenty Conservancy



The Bay of Plenty region includes 18 offshore islands, several of which have been cleared of exotic predators and now serve as protected havens for native flora and fauna. The islands are often surrounded by special marine areas that are home to an array of fish, underwater plants and animals, and marine mammals.

The Department of Conservation, in conjunction with local iwi in some cases, manages conservation on these protected islands, including threatened plant and animal monitoring and reintroductions, quarantine provisions and pest eradication. Three examples of the Department's work can be found on Tūhua (Mayor Island), Te Paepae Aotea (Volkner Rocks) and Moutohorā (Whale Island).

Tūhua (Mayor Island)



Tūhua

Tūhua is the tip of an ancient volcano and the only caldera (a collapsed volcanic cone) of its type close to New Zealand. It lies 28 kilometres north-east of Waihi Beach and has been isolated from the mainland for at least 15,000 years. Tūhua's geology is unusual, characterised by lava flows that contain large bands of obsidian (volcanic glass). The name relates to the ancient name for Me'etia Island in the traditional homeland of Hawaiki, which

was also a source of obsidian.

The island's ecology is unique, with significant wetlands and lakes and an exceptional pohutukawa forest which supports bellbirds, wood pigeons and a population of North Island kākā.

Tūhua was once internationally renowned for its big-game recreational fishing and diving, but overfishing seriously depleted fish stocks. The surrounding waters

about part of the island have now been designated as a marine reserve to protect marine life and restore fish populations. This reserve covers about five kilometres of coastline at the northern end of Tūhua and extends from mean high water mark to one nautical mile offshore. All fishing and removal or disturbance of marine life or other natural features within the marine reserve is strictly prohibited. Boating, swimming, diving and snorkelling are all encouraged within the reserve, and the high water clarity provides for spectacular viewing of marine wildlife. The remainder of the coastline surrounding the island, to one nautical mile from shore, is designated a non-commercial fishing zone where only recreational line fishing is permitted.

The island was once permanently inhabited, and humans and introduced mammals eliminated numerous seabird colonies and forest birds such as robin and whitehead from the island. Today the island is managed as a wildlife reserve and, apart from one small settlement in South East Bay, it is undeveloped.

Moutohorā



The island is administered by the Tūhua Trust Board on behalf of the owners, Te Whanau A Tauwhao ki Tūhua. The Trust Board and DOC work together under a co-management agreement to manage Tūhua. Pests including Norway rats, kiore, feral cats and pigs have been eradicated from the island. This has created opportunities to reintroduce plants and animals that have been lost. North island robins (toutouwai), brown teal (pāteke) and more recently kiwi have been reintroduced to date. The greatest challenge now is to keep the island pest-free, which means that strict quarantine measures must be enforced. Landing is permitted only at South Bay, where there are facilities available to reduce the risk of pests getting onto the island. If you would like to visit Tūhua, you will need to pre-arrange your visit with the Tūhua Island caretaker.



Moutohorā

Te Paepae Aotea (Volkner Rocks)

Te Paepae Aotea consists of pinnacles of rock that rise out of deep water to 133 metres above sea level at their highest point. The surrounding marine area possesses outstanding natural features of international significance, and a marine reserve has been proposed to cover an area of 1,444 hectares.

Te Paepae Aotea is a highly important wāhi tapu (sacred place) and holds traditional and historic values for tangata whenua. It is the departing place of the spirits on their final journey back to the spiritual homeland of Hawaiiki. Around Te Paepae Aotea, the marine waters are beyond the influence of rivers and pollution, with over 40 metres visibility. Fish species include red moki, scorpion fish, leather jackets, pink and blue maomao, blue moki, kingfish, hapuka and the sub-tropical coral fish – just to name a few!

The rocks were used in the past as targets in naval bombing exercises by New Zealand defence forces. Physical damage to the underwater habitat is discernable but localized, although the effects of underwater explosions on fish populations are unknown.



Rat trapping



Planting on Moutohorā

Moutohorā (Whale Island)

Moutohorā is a 143-hectare, predator-free island that lies about six kilometres northwest of Whakatane. It is a remnant volcanic cone that has been eroded away, leaving two peaks: Motu Hara, the central peak at 353 metres, and Raetihi at 189 metres.

Māori occupied the island until the early nineteenth century. Europeans first lived on the island in the 1830s when an unsuccessful attempt was made to establish a shore-based whaling station. Today Ngāti Awa holds manawhenua to the island and they manage Moutohorā in conjunction with DOC in order to protect habitats and indigenous plants and animals and to conserve cultural and historic resources. The island has numerous archaeological sites, both Māori and European.

All introduced species except wasps have been removed from the island, and several threatened species have been moved to the island for protection, including tuatara, kiwi, and North Island saddleback (tīeke). Moutohorā is also an important island for seabirds, with New Zealand's largest breeding colony of grey faced petrel, which number in the tens of thousands. They share the island with sooty shearwaters, little blue penguins and variable oystercatchers. Other threatened species include the Caspian tern, the New Zealand dotterel and the New Zealand falcon/kārearea.

Threats to the islands

The greatest threat to predator-free islands is the re-invasion of introduced mammals. Therefore visitors to these islands must adhere to strict quarantine measures to ensure they do not bring stowaways with them. Rodents in particular can swim ashore from anchored boats, or stow-away in dinghies and containers.

Fire is also a risk, especially on Moutohorā, because of low rainfall and dry vegetation. Fire would destroy the hard work that has been put in over many years to restore the vegetation of these special islands and could kill indigenous fauna such as insects and lizards. No smoking or open fires are allowed on Moutohorā and landing is restricted and by permit only.

Illegal harvesting and fishing also threaten the marine life surrounding these islands. Fishing and harvesting of marine creatures is prohibited within the Tūhua marine reserve and catch limits must be observed in all other areas. Also remember the effects that rubbish, pollutants and anchors can have on marine habitats.

Further information

To arrange a visit to Tūhua Island, ring the caretaker (07 579 5493). To learn more about the island's natural history and quarantine measures, contact the Department of Conservation Tauranga Area Office (07 578 7677).

For more information about Te Paepae Aotea and Moutohorā, contact the Department of Conservation Rangitaiki Area Office (07 366 1080).