

Vegetation

The park's plant life has to cope with a wide spectrum of climatic conditions and temperatures that range from warm to freezing cold.

In barren, dry, and cold environments like the Rangipo Desert or high slopes on the mountains, many plants like the vegetable sheep adopt a low creeping form, or shelter in cracks and crevices.

In moist alpine environments, mountain shrubs survive, many of them herbaceous. Common plants in this category include mountain inaka and white daisy.

Sedges, rushes and flax are common in the park's wetlands, such as those on the southern slopes of Ruapehu, and around Hauhangatahi.

The greatest variety of plants probably exists in the tussock grasslands so characteristic of the park's mid-mountain slopes. While red tussock may seem to dominate these landscapes, these native grasses shelter a large number of other plants including mosses, daisies, hebes and mountain toatoa.

Mountain beech forest is the most widespread forest type in the park, occurring as an almost continuous belt around the western and southern slopes of Ruapehu. Distinctive in these mountain beech forests is kaikawaka, or mountain cedar, which is recognised by its dark green, conical appearance.

Silver and red beech occur in isolated patches on the eastern slopes of Tongariro and extensively on the south slopes of Ruapehu, in a zone below the mountain beech. In other scattered areas of the park, usually between 600 and 900 m, various hardwood species and podocarps such as rimu, kamahi, kahikatea, and rata can be found.

Native plants in the park have been displaced by introduced plants (referred to as weeds) including heather and broom. Although these weeds have attractive flowers they are aggressively invading many tussock grasslands in the park.



Mountain daisy (top) and gentian

Protecting our natural heritage

Karioi Rahui

The Karioi Rahui is a 5,300 hectare ecological restoration project managed jointly by the Department of Conservation and the local iwi (tribe) Ngati Rangī. Located on the southern slopes of Mt Ruapehu, the area contains an almost complete ecological sequence of forest spanning the altitude 700-1500 m and largely intact sub-alpine vegetation in the 1200-2000+ m altitude.

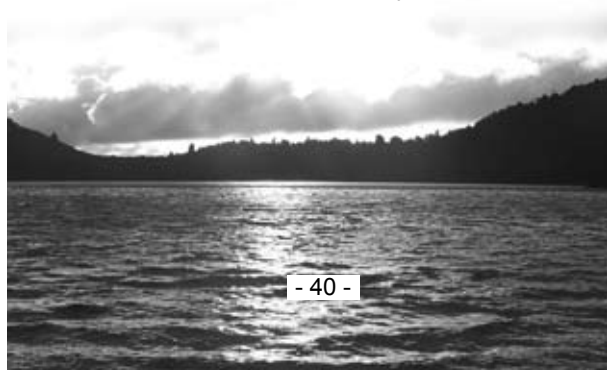
Almost half of the priority threatened species in the Tongariro/Taupo Conservancy exist in the Rahui, including the North Island's largest mistletoe population and the largest known population of short-tailed bats in New Zealand. There is also a small population of North Island brown kiwi. The Department of Conservation and Ngati Rangī are working together to protect the area by controlling pests like possums that destroy native plants and wildlife, and monitoring the bat and kiwi populations.

Access to the area is through the Rotokura Ecological Reserve, situated just off State Highway 49, 14 km southeast of Ohakune, where there is a half hour walk to tranquil Lake Rotokura.

Mt Pihanga and Rotopounamu restoration

Mt Pihanga is situated at the northernmost point of the Tongariro National Park. Lake Rotopounamu is nestled into the flank of Mt Pihanga, an easy 20 minutes walk from State Highway 27. A project commenced in 2003 with the aim of protecting and restoring the native biodiversity of the area. To date, Tongariro Natural History Society volunteers and the Department of Conservation have achieved the following steps toward restoration:

- Monitoring and investigation towards introduced pest control within the area
- Nesting success study of New Zealand robin
- Set up bat detection boxes
- Completion of a freshwater study of the lake



Tongariro Natural History Society

The Tongariro Natural History Society was established in 1984 by a group of like-minded people who had an interest in and love of Tongariro National Park's natural history.

The Society is a non-profit organisation cooperating with the Department of Conservation in interpretive activities and other related visitor-services within Tongariro National Park. Right from the outset its mission has been to promote a wide knowledge and understanding of the natural, cultural and social history of the park through publications and other activities.

Members work with the Department of Conservation on special park projects, undertake guided walks and field trips, assist with the Summer Nature Programme and help in the Whakapapa Visitor Centre.

The society welcomes new members. If you enjoy visiting the park and wish to give practical support or are interested in learning more about the Tongariro Natural History Society, contact them at:

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Photography

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Published by:
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai
Tongariro Taupo Conservancy
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ISBN: 0-478-14036-3