

JOBS
FOR NATURE

MAHI
MŌ TE TAIAO



Accelerating conservation through community connections and collaboration

A Jobs for Nature case study, 2020 – 2025





He rau ringa e oti ai

With many hands,
the work will be completed

Sunrise ceremony to celebrate finishing planting in the valley behind Rāpaki. Photo: Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō

Jobs for Nature has brought communities together to achieve better outcomes for te taiao (the natural world)

Nature provides us with countless benefits, yet Aotearoa New Zealand faces a biodiversity crisis, with some of the world's most threatened animals and plants found here. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy recognises that:

‘Our local conservation champions play a significant role in inspiring the actions of others in their communities. Resourcing to help community groups grow, connect with others, and gather and share knowledge will bolster the fantastic work already done to protect and restore our taiao.’¹

The New Zealand Government's Jobs for Nature programme was an investment of \$1.2 billion in te taiao. The programme aimed to revitalise communities through nature-based capability development and employment between 2020 and 2025. As part of this initiative, the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) allocated \$485.3 million into 225 projects nationwide with a wide range of conservation objectives. DOC focused on Māori- and community-led conservation to strengthen local environmental aspirations, advocacy and stewardship to deliver lasting benefits for te taiao together.

¹ Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation.



What we delivered

As a result of Jobs for Nature funding, projects built and strengthened partnerships and connections, such as with iwi, whānau and hapū, community groups, landowners, science, government and corporate organisations. This supported knowledge sharing and enhanced advocacy for conservation at a local level.

Jobs for Nature projects reported providing training or education to over 28,500 people² within their wider communities. These people are now more informed about and engaged in local conservation issues.

What we achieved

The Jobs for Nature projects showed that community connections and collaborations can benefit conservation in many ways. Here, we focus on five key outcomes:

Connecting objectives regionally to better align strategies

Creating impact at landscape-scale by combining mahi

Becoming stronger together, by fostering connections and sharing resources

Generating social licence and advocacy in communities for conservation

Supporting volunteer efforts by amplifying mahi (work) and increasing engagement and motivation.



² Department of Conservation. 2022. Regional Investment Review Survey, undertaken by DOC of 193 projects to identify delivery risks and opportunities, transition requirements and regional alignment (unpublished).



Jobs for Nature projects are connecting objectives regionally to better align strategies

An opportunity exists to improve the biodiversity system by having a single point of leadership or coordination that links conservation groups together.³ Many Jobs for Nature projects worked strategically to connect conservation efforts, thereby reducing inefficiencies and focusing on priority outcomes, as highlighted in the following examples.



Kūmānu Environmental Team Controlling Old Man's Beard Vines, D'Urville Island, Restoring and Protecting Flora at Scale project. Photo: Rob Simons, Marlborough District Council

- The Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance is a collaboration between iwi, councils and government (17 partners in total) based at the top of New Zealand's South Island. It aims to restore and enhance nature across 3.4 million hectares of land and sea. Its principle is that conservation 'can go faster alone but further together' and uses the Māori worldview as a guide.⁴

The Restoring and Protecting Flora at Scale project, which is part of the Alliance, is administered by The Nature Conservancy Aotearoa New Zealand. Coordinated efforts enabled the project to focus on work that would deliver the best landscape-scale conservation gains across four South Island districts (Buller, Tasman, Nelson City and Marlborough):

'Collaborating with existing restoration initiatives (including DOC, LINZ [Land Information New Zealand], Councils, iwi and other private landholders) and/or community groups meant we could prioritise weed control work across the project's four-district areas. We focused on sites and initiatives that were ecologically significant, could deliver meaningful conservation gains within the project's resources, and are likely to be maintained going forward after the conclusion of the project's funding.'⁵

³ Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation.

⁴ The Nature Conservancy. Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance. [accessed 18 December 2025]. nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/asia-pacific/new-zealand/stories-in-new-zealand/new-zealand-alliance/

⁵ Quote obtained from unpublished End of Project Report, October 2024.



Matuku Link Planting Day, Partnering to Plant project. Photo: Phil Crawford from Sustainable Business Network (SBN)

- The Southern Lakes Sanctuary project is a consortium of six local groups that collectively represent nearly 100 community groups, landowners and businesses with the aim of restoring and reviving biodiversity in the Southern Lakes region.⁶ Paul Kavanagh, Project Director, said Jobs for Nature funding has helped them prioritise everyone’s efforts for maximum impact. Southern Lakes Sanctuary provides resources, coordination and advice, and boots-on-the-ground support.
- The Sustainable Business Network’s Partnering to Plant project acted as a conservation hub, providing coordination and advice. Matthew McClymont, Senior Partnerships Manager, says “we were a single point of contact organising 12 separate projects. Many of them were at quite an early stage in their capability journey, so we were helping with health and safety plans and doing a lot of quality control on reporting. There were a lot of questions coming our way that made us realise we were useful in that middle ground.”⁸

“A lot of trapping groups have been volunteer-led and sometimes operating in a quite fragmented way, so we’re amplifying their efforts but also directing it into areas that have potentially better conservation gains.”

*Paul Kavanagh,
Project Director, Southern
Lakes Sanctuary⁷*

⁶ Southern Lakes Sanctuary. 2025. Protecting the taonga of the Southern Lakes. [accessed 18 December 2025]. southernlakessanctuary.org.nz

⁷ Interview with Paul Kavanagh, Project Director, Southern Lakes Sanctuary. February 2024.

⁸ Interview with Matthew McClymont, Senior Partnerships Manager, Partnering to Plant. February 2024.



Ngapuke road planting. Photo: Mouri Tūroa project

Creating impact at a landscape-scale, by combining mahi

Research tells us that landscape-scale restoration – considering ecosystems, land use and human activities together – is vital to reversing biodiversity decline.⁹ As shown in the examples below, many Jobs for Nature projects achieved this by uniting groups and stakeholders for larger, more ambitious outcomes.

- Mouri Tūroa’s goal is to improve the health and wellbeing of the Whanganui River and its tributaries, as well as create nature-based employment.¹⁰ Sixty-five project sites are located throughout the catchment and receive varying levels of fencing, riparian planting, weed and pest control restoration. Gordon Cribb, Project Lead, says “we have worked with a wide range of different landowner types throughout the catchment. Private landowners, large sheep and beef corporations and trusts, schools, hapū, marae and Ahu whenua trusts (multiply owned Māori landowners). We also collaborate with five local nurseries – we provide them with support and labour, and they supply most of the plants we use.”¹¹



Trap preparation. Photo: Southern Lakes Sanctuary

- The Southern Lakes Sanctuary project operates at a large scale, and its Jobs for Nature investment supported it to ‘think big’ in its long-term vision of eradicating predators across its 660,000 hectare project area. The collective impact and increase in predator control, from around 6,400 traps to over 13,000, have led to “really exciting opportunities because of the scale of our mahi”, says Paul Kavanagh, Project Director.¹² In early 2025, Southern Lakes Sanctuary, together with DOC, Kāi Tahu and partners, achieved the goal of returning the endangered takahē to the Rees Valley.¹³ They have also brought back the endangered mohua (yellowhead) to the Matukituki Valley.¹⁴

⁹ McFarlane K, Wallace KJ, Shanahan D. 2021. Collective Approaches to Ecosystem Regeneration in Aotearoa New Zealand. Nelson: Cawthron Institute. Cawthron Report No. 3725.

¹⁰ Ngā Tāngata Tiaki o Whanganui. 2025. Mouri Tūroa Programme. [accessed 18 December 2025]. ngatangatatiaki.co.nz/our-projects/mouri-turoa

¹¹ Interview with Gordon Cribb, Project Lead, Mouri Tūroa. February 2024.

¹² Interview with Paul Kavanagh, Project Director, Southern Lakes Sanctuary. February 2024.

¹³ Department of Conservation. 2025. Takahē released to grow wild population. [accessed 18 December 2025]. doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2025-media-releases/takahe-released-to-grow-wild-population

¹⁴ Southern Lakes Sanctuary. October 2025. Mohua make their comeback in the Matukituki Valley. [accessed 14 January 2026]. southernlakessanctuary.org.nz/mohua-make-their-comeback-in-the-matukituki-valley



Freshwater monitoring in the Allandale Stream led by Living Springs. Photo: Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō

- Bringing a shared vision for landscape-scale conservation in Whakaraupō – Lyttelton Harbour to life required leadership, trust and commitment. The Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō project Programme Manager, John Kottier, united the partner organisations Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke, Living Springs and Conservation Volunteers New Zealand behind a common goal. “First, we needed to bring everyone together, understand how they operate, earn their trust, and focus our combined efforts where we could make the biggest impact,” John explains. Strong relationships, dedication and strategic mapping of the harbour’s conservation activities supported existing mahi, strengthened community spirit and delivered lasting outcomes.¹⁵
- The Chatham Islands, including Pitt Island, have a unique ecosystem including nearly 10% of New Zealand’s threatened and at-risk species.¹⁶ In early 2025, they joined the Island-Ocean Connection Challenge (IOCC), the international campaign that has community-led conservation at its core. Part of this challenge is a pledge to move towards creating a predator-free haven on Pitt Island (6,000 hectares)¹⁷ The Jobs for Nature Pitt Island Species and Habitat project has supported the groundwork for this:

‘Every resident on Pitt Island was in some way involved and positively impacted by the project. To have a project reach every local was one of the reasons this project was a success ... The cat numbers dropped an estimated 90% with residents noting a remarkable increase in bird life around the island.’¹⁸

¹⁵ Interview with John Kottier, Programme Manager, Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō. September 2025.

¹⁶ Department of Conservation [date unknown]. Predator Free Chatham Islands. [accessed 20 February 2026]. doc.govt.nz/our-work/predator-free-chatham-islands/

¹⁷ Department of Conservation. 2025. Three prime New Zealand islands join global restoration campaign. [Accessed 12 February 2026]. doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2025-media-releases/three-prime-new-zealand-islands-join-global-restoration-campaign/

¹⁸ Quote obtained from unpublished End of Project Report, February 2025.



Becoming stronger together by fostering connections and sharing resources

Building connections and sharing knowledge across groups brings many benefits for te taiao, including diverse perspectives, capacity building, and sharing best practice, tools and resources.¹⁹ The examples below show how Jobs for Nature projects collaborated to help nature.

- Mātauranga Māori, ancestral knowledge and contemporary science are complementary and naturally aligned.²⁰ For Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō, mātauranga combines Ngāti Wheke traditions with local families' deep connection to the land and waterways. The partnership with Frontiers Abroad provided the project with guidance from Dr Dan Hikuroa, a leading authority on mātauranga Māori, and strong relationships were built with local universities, councils and other organisations. These partnerships enriched both the science and story of Whakaraupō – Lyttelton Harbour, leading to tangible outcomes: invertebrates returning to streams, early ecosystem recovery, and establishing a learning and science hub with a central environmental data repository. The hub connects local schools, communities and university undergraduates with hands-on research and restoration, fostering the next generation of environmental kaitiaki (guardians).

This collective knowledge is a powerful tool and, by valuing these viewpoints equally, the Whakaraupō project shows that when knowledge and resources are shared, people and te taiao become stronger together.²¹



Kiwi monitoring. Photo: 800 Trust

- Using Jobs for Nature investment and support, the 800 Trust's once small and little-known project in remote eastern Taranaki has grown into a regionally recognised conservation initiative, powered by deepening relationships, rangatahi development and groundbreaking biodiversity technology. "When we began, we had no connections, no formal iwi involvement, and limited capacity. Now, Jobs for Nature has helped us catalyse something truly transformative," says Miranda Wells, founder of the 800 Trust.

The Trust now has a strong and growing partnership with Ngāti Maru. It has collaborations with Air New Zealand, Predator Free 2050 Ltd and the Toi Foundation, which provided vital support to develop Hark, the AI-powered acoustic sensor system.²² A doctoral student from the University of Auckland, funded by the George Mason Centre for the Natural Environment, is helping to develop statistical methods for estimating forest bird populations using Hark data. This pioneering research could reshape how biodiversity is monitored across Aotearoa.

¹⁹ McFarlane K, Wallace KJ, Shanahan D. 2021. Collective Approaches to Ecosystem Regeneration in Aotearoa New Zealand. Nelson: Cawthron Institute. Cawthron Report No. 3725.

²⁰ Predator Free New Zealand. [date unknown]. Mātauranga Māori. [accessed 18 December 2025]. predatorfree.nz.org/toolkits/groups-toolkit/governance/matauranga-maori

²¹ Interview with John Kottier, Programme Manager, Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō. September 2025.

²² 800 Trust. 2024. Hark. [accessed 18 December 2025]. hark.nz



Operation taiao kaimahi, Mikaire Albert takes tamariki through monitoring methods to measure the presence of pests, part of TOA TAI AO with Te Kura o Te Whānau ā Apanui. *Photo: Raukūmara Pae Maunga project*

Generating social licence and advocacy in communities for conservation

Māori- and community-led Jobs for Nature projects have shifted attitudes and behaviours towards conservation through local engagement and collaboration. As outlined in the examples below, this has built social licence for goals like a predator free Aotearoa and strengthened advocacy for local conservation.

- Raukūmara Pae Maunga is the largest iwi-led restoration project in Aotearoa. This is a partnership between the people of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, Ngāti Porou and DOC and involves pest control over 120,000 hectares of ngahere (forest or bush) in the largest mountain to sea native forest in the North Island, extending across the East Cape in Tairāwhiti (Gisborne) and the Bay of Plenty. The project has been instrumental in building iwi momentum for the use of aerial 1080 and deer culling consent. It demonstrates the importance of building capability and

capacity at place to restore a ngahere that has not had any large-scale pest control for over 40 years. The project is in its fourth year of operation and is achieving some of the best pest control results Aotearoa has seen from a restoration project. Trusted people, sharing trusted information:

‘So, we wanted to make sure that we did our research and led our own monitoring so that as iwi we can talk to our results and our experience. The gift that keeps giving with the Raukūmara is that it will always tell you what is happening to it, and once you see what the forest is telling you, you can’t ‘unsee’ it.’²³

²³ Raukūmara Pae Maunga. 2024. One year on – building iwi momentum for the use of aerial 1080. [accessed 18 December 2025]. raukumara.org.nz/post/one-year-on-building-iwi-momentum-for-the-use-of-aerial-1080



- As part of the Island-Ocean Connection Challenge, the peoples of the Chatham Islands have pledged to ‘significantly advance the removal of feral cats from Pitt Island to ensure the survival of critically threatened species.’²⁴ The Pitt Island Species and Habitat project has helped change the community’s attitudes towards conservation work and its relevance to them:
- For Te Ara Kākāriki, involving the community in its work is important for encouraging kaitiakitanga and creating a ripple effect for conservation.

‘Over the duration of the project, there was certainly a shift in attitudes towards feral cats. At the beginning of the project there were many residents who were opposed to feral cat eradication, however, now many see the benefits from the reduced numbers, so this was a positive outcome of the project. The project ended up being heavily focused on cats which was community driven.’²⁵

‘Involving the public contributes to a feeling of ownership of the environment and encourages ongoing care and protection of te taiao by the community. We support landowners to plant natives and do predator control. We’ve noticed more applications for assistance around these sites – our planting is encouraging more planting.’

Quote from Te Ara Kākāriki End of Project Report, 2025.



Community planting. Photo: Te Ara Kākāriki project

²⁴ Chatham Islands Landscape Restoration Trust. Island-Ocean Connection Challenge. [accessed 14 January 2026]. chathamrestorationtrust.org.nz/chathams-conservation/island-ocean-connection-challenge

²⁵ Quote obtained from unpublished End of Project Report, February 2025.



Get-together for conservation in Whakaraupō Lyttelton Harbour. Photo: Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō

Jobs for Nature projects have supported volunteer efforts by amplifying mahi (work) and increasing engagement and motivation

Volunteer and community involvement are vital for conservation restoration, and many initiatives would not exist without this.²⁶ For example, keeping volunteers engaged is vital to achieving goals like making New Zealand predator free by 2050.²⁷ Empowering action is also a key pillar of Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy’s aim of mobilising ‘all New Zealanders to help protect and restore our biodiversity’.²⁸

Research shows practical ways to sustain engagement and avoid ‘volunteer fatigue’, such as clear goals, acknowledging contributions, varied activities, connection, and celebrating progress.²⁹ The examples below highlight how Jobs for Nature projects are doing this.

- Community engagement is at the heart of the Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō project. They recognise that caring for te taiao takes many hands, perspectives and hearts working together: ‘He rau ringa e oti ai’, ‘With many hands, the work will be completed’.

The project’s partner organisations excelled at engaging volunteer groups from the community, corporate and education sectors to support the programme and its mahi. Guided by manaakitanga (respect, kindness, generosity) and whanaungatanga (connection), the project combines these values with hands-on restoration, which strengthens both ecological outcomes and connections between people and place. One main challenge is communicating the impact of the project to 400,000 residents, because many are unaware of Whakaraupō – Lyttelton Harbour’s degradation. Sharing successes and holding community events motivate volunteers and attract new participants, creating an ongoing effect that strengthens local environmental awareness and stewardship.³⁰

²⁶ Sextus CP, Hytten KF, Perry P. 2025. Volunteer commitment and longevity in community-based conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*. 20(1): 25–45. doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2024.2335995

²⁷ Department of Conservation. 2021. *Predator Free 2050 5-year progress report*. Wellington: Department of Conservation.

²⁸ Department of Conservation. 2020. *Te Mana O Te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020*. Wellington: Department of Conservation. Page 43.

²⁹ Hess, S. 2024. Saving nature, stress relief, sausie sizzle: What keeps volunteers committed? *Predator Free New Zealand*. [accessed 19 December 2025]. predatorfreenz.org/stories/things-you-should-know/what-keeps-conservation-volunteers-committed

³⁰ Interview with John Kottier, Programme Manager, Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō. September 2025.



- Close to 1,000 volunteers are supporting the Southern Lakes Sanctuary project, which acknowledges the need to empower the community. Paul Kavanagh, Project Director, notes:

“Our project is built on collaboration and community. We need to really support the incredible volunteers, because they are truly the engine of our mahi. We are trying to do the work that the community groups can’t do or don’t want to do, because for every paid staff member that we can get, we can mobilise an army to get out on the hills.”³¹

- On the Chatham Islands, the Pitt Island Species and Habitat project used Facebook Messenger as a way to engage people and celebrate achievements.

‘This was a fun way to keep everyone engaged and the competition between cat trappers fuelled. Celebrating successes, sharing excitement over conservation wins such as snipe visiting residents’ decks in the evenings, albatross chicks hatching, cat kills, and community tree planting days were fabulous for building momentum for the project.’

Quote from Pitt Island Species and Habitat End of Project Report, 2025.



Antipodean albatross chick on Mt Hakepa, Pitt Island Species and Habitat project. Photo: Bronwyn Henderson

³¹ Interview with Paul Kavanagh, Project Director, Southern Lakes Sanctuary. February 2024.



Project Pou Wiremu Wharepapa teaching taura from Potaka school about native rākau as part of planting over 15,000 native rākau throughout communities and kura. Photo: Raukūmara Pae Maunga project

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together

DOC acknowledges that it does not have enough capacity and resources to reverse nature’s decline by itself.³² By working alongside communities, unique benefits and opportunities can be achieved, with lasting biodiversity goals.

The Jobs for Nature investment in Māori- and community-led connections and collaborations has helped build momentum for future conservation work. Penny Nelson, Director-General, Department of Conservation, says:

“Everyone can see the transformation of Whakaraupō - Lyttelton Harbour. Driving around the harbour, the scale of the plantings and restoration will become clearly visible – showing the power of partnerships when communities, organisations, and agencies work together. We’ve also raised community awareness of environmental challenges and inspired ongoing involvement.”

John Kottier, Programme Manager Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō, Lyttelton Harbour³⁴

‘Jobs for Nature has inspired others to lift a spade, undertake trapping, and contribute to conservation across the country. Its success is building momentum for community conservation.

As a result, we have increasingly motivated neighbourhoods, cities, and regions working towards thriving ecosystems. Embedded in this is the collective spirit of community.³³

³² Department of Conservation. 2023. Briefing to the incoming Minister of Conservation. Wellington: Department of Conservation. doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/role/publications/bim-2023/bim-conservation-november-2023.pdf

³³ Ministry for the Environment on behalf of the Jobs for Nature Interagency Secretariat. 2022. Annual Review - Year Two. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment

³⁴ Interview with John Kottier, Programme Manager, Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō. September 2025.



Appendix:

Jobs for Nature projects included in this case study

Project name	Entity	Amount awarded (DOC)	Delivery term	Council region
Restoring and Protecting Significant Flora Ecosystems at Scale	Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance (KMTT): The Nature Conservancy Aotearoa New Zealand	\$6,000,000	3 years	Tasman-Nelson
Southern Lakes Sanctuary (SLS)	Southern Lakes Sanctuary Trust	\$2,986,000	3 years	Otago
Partnering to Plant project	Sustainable Business Network	\$5,000,000	2 years	Nationwide
Mouri Tūroa (Nga Awa Whanganui: Te Awa Tupua o Whanganui)	Ngā Tāngata Tiaki Custodian Trustee Limited	\$7,861,000	4 years	Manawatū-Whanganui
Kaimahi for Nature Whakaraupō - He Hau Ringa e Oti Ai	Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke, in collaboration with Living Springs and Conservation Volunteers New Zealand	\$4,504,000	3 years	Canterbury
Pitt Island Species and Habitat Protection	Chatham Island Council	\$640,000	3 years	Chatham Islands
The gateway to the Matemateonga range - Omoana Project - Rotokare to Omoana Biodiversity Corridor	800 Trust	\$606,352	3 years	Taranaki
Raukūmara Pae Maunga	Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, Ngāti Porou and DOC partnership	\$34,381,756	5 years	Bay of Plenty
Te Ara Kākāriki	Te Ara Kākāriki Greenway Canterbury Trust	\$953,000	3 years	Canterbury

COVER: Community planting.
Photo: Te Ara Kākāriki project

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