

**JOBS**  
FOR NATURE

**MAHI**  
MŌ TE TAIAO



# **Investing in the protection and recovery of Aotearoa New Zealand's Threatened and At Risk species**

**A Jobs for Nature case study, 2020–2025**





“When our environment is well,  
so are our people. One cannot  
be without the other.”

*Yvette Couch-Lewis,  
Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu Kākāriki  
Karaka Species Recovery  
Representative<sup>1</sup>*

Historically widespread, the kākāriki karaka / orange-fronted parakeet is now the rarest parakeet in Aotearoa.  
Photo: Te Waipounamu Threatened Species Protection project

## Protecting Aotearoa New Zealand’s threatened species needs support from all New Zealanders

Aotearoa is a world hotspot for unique biodiversity, with an estimated 80,000 different species, many of which are endemic.<sup>2</sup> However, of the 15,544 species identified under the New Zealand Threat Classification System,<sup>3</sup> 1,127 (7%) are threatened with extinction and a further 3,339 (21%) are at risk of becoming threatened.<sup>4</sup> With native plant and animal species declining at an alarming rate,<sup>5</sup> the natural and cultural heritage of Aotearoa and the ecological balance and resilience of its environment are at risk.

The New Zealand Government’s Jobs for Nature programme was a significant investment of \$1.2 billion into te taiao (the natural world) that was delivered through the creation of nature-based jobs between 2020 and 2025.

The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) allocated \$485.3 million of this fund to 225 projects with a wide range of conservation objectives.

Jobs for Nature has shown it can prevent further losses and support the recovery of taonga (treasured) species in Aotearoa by investing in people and communities. Through partnerships with iwi, hapū, whānau, councils, biodiversity agencies and community groups, Jobs for Nature projects have accelerated work for the country’s most threatened species.

<sup>1</sup> See the video at [doc.govt.nz/orange-fronted-parakeet](https://doc.govt.nz/orange-fronted-parakeet).

<sup>2</sup> Ministry for the Environment. 2007. Environment New Zealand 2007. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment. [environment.govt.nz/publications/environment-new-zealand-2007/chapter-12-biodiversity/introduction](https://environment.govt.nz/publications/environment-new-zealand-2007/chapter-12-biodiversity/introduction)

<sup>3</sup> [nztns.org.nz](https://nztns.org.nz)

<sup>4</sup> As at 27 February 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o Te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation. [doc.govt.nz/anzbs-2020](https://doc.govt.nz/anzbs-2020)



## What we delivered

Jobs for Nature projects supported:<sup>6</sup>

- over 8.6 million hours of conservation work, including nearly 2.2 million hectares of pest control (animals and plants) and around 5 million plantings
- 225 projects, of which 153 (68%) included animal pest control and 132 (59%) included plant pest control, creating safe environments for native species, including taonga, threatened and at-risk species
- 135 projects that involved ecosystem restoration, including in biodiversity hotspots such as Resolution Island, Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island), Pitt Island (Rangiauria) and Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. Other projects supported pest-free sanctuaries, including Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari and Pūkaha National Wildlife Centre.

Targeted support was provided for some of the most threatened species in Aotearoa. These included the kākārīki karaka / orange-fronted parakeet (Threatened – Nationally Critical), hoiho / yellow-eyed penguin (Threatened – Nationally Endangered), whio / blue duck (Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable), North Island kōkako (Threatened – Nationally Increasing) and ngutukākā / kākābeak (Threatened – Nationally Critical).

Five projects focused on reducing the spread and increasing public knowledge of myrtle rust and kauri disease. The country's iconic tree species that are vulnerable to these diseases are all threatened with extinction.

## What we achieved

Jobs for Nature projects created employment while also achieving the country's biodiversity goals. Three main outcomes were:

Directly contributing to the recovery of taonga bird species

Preventing plant species losses from diseases

Creating safe spaces for the iconic ecosystems of Aotearoa to better resist future pressures



<sup>6</sup> All values are as at June 2025.





## Jobs for Nature directly contributed to the recovery of taonga bird species

Projects included support for the hoiho and the kākāriki karaka. These endemic species are particularly vulnerable to predation by introduced species such as rats and stoats, habitat loss, and the pressures of small populations.

Hoiho is thought to be one of the world's rarest penguins.<sup>7</sup> A small sub-population in coastal Otago is being protected and conserved through the combined efforts of government agencies, local community groups and businesses.

This funding was a vital lifeline for Dunedin-based The OPERA (Otago Peninsula Eco Restoration Alliance) during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns, enabling them to keep staff and continue conservation efforts despite low levels of tourism. During the funding period, The OPERA rehabilitated 463 penguins, 435 of which were threatened hoiho, with a 98.5% success rate. There are now only around 143 breeding pairs of hoiho left in the mainland population.<sup>8</sup> More than half of these pass through the OPERA rehabilitation centre each year.<sup>9</sup> The funding also supported public education and expanded trapping and habitat management, protecting wild hoiho nesting on-site and enhancing habitats for other native species.

Jobs for Nature funding allowed the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust (YEPT) to employ three additional rangers. More rangers meant that sick and vulnerable birds were found sooner and treated. The increased care has helped combat respiratory distress syndrome, the newest threat to hoiho survival.

In 2 years, the funding also allowed YEPT to plant 5,600 native trees, maintain 33 km of walking tracks, build almost 2 km of fences, and control weeds and animal pests.

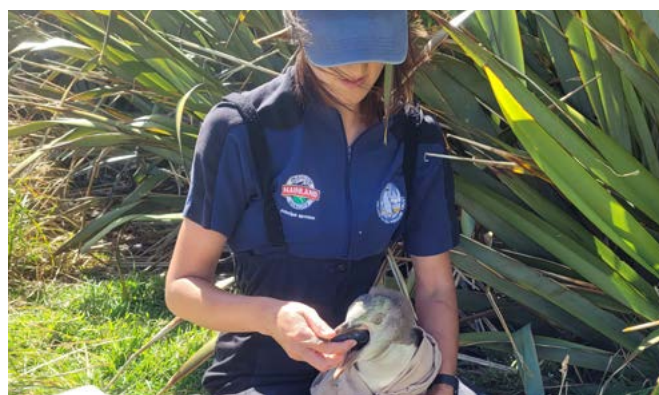
Sue Murray, General Manager for YEPT, says, "Jobs for Nature funding made a significant difference to the work we were able to deliver, resulting in better outcomes for the endangered hoiho".<sup>10</sup>

With the mainland hoiho population declining, these initiatives are essential parts of the network that is fighting to keep another taonga species from extinction so it can be enjoyed by future generations.

Kākāriki karaka is the rarest parakeet in Aotearoa.<sup>11</sup> The mission of bringing this small forest-dwelling bird back from the brink of extinction received a considerable boost through Jobs for Nature.



Hoiho feeding time. Photo: The OPERA



Hoiho chick being fed. Photo: YEPT

<sup>7</sup> [doc.govt.nz/hoiho](https://doc.govt.nz/hoiho)

<sup>8</sup> [doc.govt.nz/hoiho-nests-2025](https://doc.govt.nz/hoiho-nests-2025)

<sup>9</sup> [theopera.co.nz/our-story](https://theopera.co.nz/our-story)

<sup>10</sup> Information obtained from unpublished End of Project Case Study, September 2023.

<sup>11</sup> [doc.govt.nz/orange-fronted-parakeet](https://doc.govt.nz/orange-fronted-parakeet)



The kākāriki karaka is the rarest parakeet in Aotearoa. Photo: Te Waipounamu Threatened Species Protection project

The \$5.1 million Te Waipounamu Threatened Species Protection project is a partnership between Ngāi Tahu and DOC. It includes large-scale predator control and species monitoring of kākāriki karaka. With this support, the kākāriki karaka population has more than doubled, increasing from an estimated 180 to 230 birds in 2018–2019 to the current estimated wild population of 510.<sup>9</sup> This species is still critically threatened, but if the effort can be maintained, its future is looking brighter.

Archie MacFarlane, DOC Senior Ranger Biodiversity, explains that the funding created “breathing space” to establish baselines and identify predators, leading to improved management. Insights revealed that weasels are significant predators, prompting the team to lower trap trigger weights to catch these lighter predators.<sup>12</sup> The 480 km long trapping network, alongside 1080 poison operations, has reduced predator numbers. The result is a safer environment for kākāriki karaka to breed and thrive.

The reduction of predators has also helped other native species, highlighting the interconnected benefits of conservation work. The whio / blue duck, kea, kākā, mohua / yellowhead and roroa / great spotted kiwi are also benefiting from the reduction in predators.

“The best thing is seeing people talking about the species on social media and saying they are seeing them. Prior to that you could only see them way back out in the beyond surrounded by farmland and difficult to get to, and now people get to see them in easily accessible areas and they are thriving.”

Archie MacFarlane,  
DOC Senior Ranger Biodiversity<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Archie MacFarlane, Senior Ranger Biodiversity, Department of Conservation. 15 January 2024.





## Projects are preventing plant species losses from diseases

Many of the country's iconic trees hold special places in the hearts of communities. Some are under threat from disease caused by plant pathogens and could be lost forever without intervention.

Jobs for Nature projects helped to tackle this challenge by supporting biosecurity measures, such as management, prevention and control of plant diseases, including kauri disease and myrtle rust. The work included everything from early detection through to research and monitoring, training in surveillance, education, and track mitigation.

Kauri forests once covered 1.2 million hectares, from the Far North of Northland to Te Kauri near Kawhia, and were abundant when the first people arrived in Aotearoa.<sup>13</sup> Kauri are considered taonga by many people who see the health of these giant trees as a sign of the general wellbeing of the ngahere (forest) and the people. The remaining forests are under threat from kauri disease, which is caused by a soil-borne pathogen (*Phytophthora agathidicida*) and is fatal.

The Kaitiaki Kauri project, led by Te Rūnanga-Ā-Iwi O Ngāpuhi, undertook community education to protect kauri in Whangaroa, Russell and Ōpua Forests in the Bay of Islands and Puketū and Ōmahuta Forests in Northland. Education and awareness are vital in preventing the spread of kauri disease, which is primarily spread by human movement. The Rūnanga wove together Western science and mātauranga Māori, integrating holistic environmental relationships and evolving knowledge through generations to protect te taiao and prevent taonga species loss.<sup>14</sup> Their advocacy included guided kauri walks, community education at regional and national events, workshops for other Jobs for Nature projects with pest control teams, and in-school workshops using virtual reality sets and microscopes to



Kerikeri Primary School educational guided walk. Photo: Kaitiaki Kauri

engage rangatahi (young people) in protecting the ecosystem. By connecting with the community and educating the public, the Rūnanga is ensuring that the project is protecting kauri and building a sense of responsibility and kaitiakitanga (guardianship).

Other well-known tree species, including mānuka, pōhutukawa, rātā and ramarama, are threatened by myrtle rust.<sup>15</sup> This fungal disease can be easily spread by the wind and little is known about how to effectively manage it. Therefore, Jobs for Nature directly supported research and monitoring of myrtle rust, as well as prevention and education initiatives.

<sup>13</sup> [doc.govt.nz/kauri-disease](https://doc.govt.nz/kauri-disease)

<sup>14</sup> McAllister TG et al. 2019. Kua takoto te mānuka: Mātauranga Māori in New Zealand ecology. *New Zealand Journal of Ecology*. 43(3):3393. [dx.doi.org/10.20417/nzjecol.43.41](https://doi.org/10.20417/nzjecol.43.41)

<sup>15</sup> [doc.govt.nz/myrtle-rust](https://doc.govt.nz/myrtle-rust)



Community education as part of Te Whakapae Ururoa – Community Myrtle Rust Surveillance Project. Photo: Te Whakapae Ururoa

In the Bay of Plenty, Scion and Rotoiti 15 Trust worked together to monitor the spread of myrtle rust by reporting on tree health and identifying disease-resistant trees.

Rotoiti 15 Trust Chair Arapeta Tahana says the Jobs for Nature programme aligned closely with Rotoiti 15 Trust’s values and aspirations, particularly kaitiakitanga and tiaki taiao (care for the environment). Tahana says, “This could be a model of how science and kaupapa Māori can co-exist and benefit each other”.<sup>16</sup> Rotoiti 15 Trust invested in kaimahi (workers) to increase local understanding and capacity to protect the ngahere. Tahana explains, “We are committed to not only understanding the impact of myrtle rust within our environment, but to connect and understand our environment better”.<sup>17</sup>



Myrtle rust surveillance and monitoring. Photo: Scion and Rotoiti 15 Trust

Te Whakapae Ururoa – Community Myrtle Rust Surveillance Project invested in community knowledge. The project is dedicated to protecting the ngahere. It completed 4,300 myrtle rust observations throughout Tairāwhiti (Gisborne) and engaged with over 600 tamariki (children) and many other whānau in community spaces. This local engagement has led to more effective and widespread conservation actions. By learning and working together, the community feels empowered to take action against myrtle rust and contribute to the protection of threatened species.

“The project’s unique combination of field and laboratory work was crucial for developing effective strategies to combat this disease. By identifying and supporting resistant trees, the team worked to ensure that these species could thrive for future generations, leaving a full and thriving ecosystem.”

Scion’s kāuru co-leader  
Mariana Te Rangī<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> [scionresearch.shorthandstories.com/trw/index.html](https://scionresearch.shorthandstories.com/trw/index.html)

<sup>17</sup> [scoop.co.nz/stories/SC2204/S00031/new-science-recruits-put-myrtle-rust-in-the-spotlight.htm](https://scoop.co.nz/stories/SC2204/S00031/new-science-recruits-put-myrtle-rust-in-the-spotlight.htm)





## Creating safe spaces for iconic ecosystems to better resist future pressures

The combined efforts of all the Jobs for Nature-funded projects are helping to create safe spaces for species to flourish. Healthy species populations contribute to thriving ecosystems, which then have an increased resilience to climate change and severe weather events.

The impacts of mammalian predators on the native forest bird, plant, reptile and insect populations in Aotearoa is well documented.<sup>18</sup> In areas where rats, stoats and possums are suppressed or permanently eradicated, nature heals, allowing native wildlife to return and recover.

Many community groups, landowners, iwi, whānau and hapū who sought funding from the Jobs for Nature allocation expressed a clear vision: to create safer environments for the country's native and threatened species in their communities through predator control.

Save the Kiwi invested some of its Jobs for Nature funding in Pest Free Purerua in Northland. This is a community-driven project with Ngāti Torehina and Ngāti Rēhia supported by Kiwi Coast. Purerua Peninsula is likely to have the highest density of kiwi-nui / North Island brown kiwi in the country.<sup>19</sup> The number of possums, the first pest species to be eliminated from the Peninsula, remains at zero. The suppression of



Predator Free 2050 Ltd trapping and volunteers. Photo: DOC

other pests, such as stoats, has provided a safe area for North Island brown kiwi to live. Other taonga species, such as pāteke / brown teal, are also benefiting from the low predator numbers.

Predator Free 2050 Ltd received significant investment through Jobs for Nature to support predator management, leading to the creation of an additional 728 full-time equivalent roles. These have focused on research and development of new tools and technology, supporting iwi and hapū to exercise kaitiakitanga, and have supported growth in the areas managed for predators in Aotearoa. For example, the Predator Free Wellington project reported that 1,400 hectares of urban and suburban Wellington are now in the defence stage for rats and mustelids.<sup>20</sup>



Save the Kiwi and Pest Free Purerua. Photo: DOC

<sup>18</sup> Department of Conservation. 2024. Predator response: protecting native species 2024/25. Wellington: Department of Conservation. [doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/our-work/national-predator-control-programme/predator-response-booklet.pdf](https://doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/our-work/national-predator-control-programme/predator-response-booklet.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> pfp.kiwi

<sup>20</sup> Predator Free 2050 Ltd. 2024. Annual Report 2024. [accessed 21 July 2025]. [pf2050.co.nz/annual-report-archive](https://pf2050.co.nz/annual-report-archive)





Kerikeri educational guided walk. Photo: Kaitiaki Kauri

## Uniting for biodiversity and a sustainable future

Looking ahead, it is essential that these efforts continue to be invested in to allow innovation and expansion using new technologies and approaches to further protect and restore species and ecosystems. Achieving this goal requires collective support and the hard work of communities, iwi, hapū, whānau, local and central government agencies, and all New Zealanders.

Jobs for Nature has shown it is possible to create employment, protect te taiao and build a sustainable future for the unique biodiversity of Aotearoa if people work together. This will ensure that generations to come can enjoy and benefit from the rich natural legacy of Aotearoa and its biodiversity.



# Appendix

Project name	Entity	Amount awarded	Delivery term	Council region
Penguin Place (the Otago Peninsula Eco Restoration Alliance)	Penguin Place Ltd	\$633,000	2 years	Otago
Jobs Increasing Hoiho Conservation: the story of a taonga species	Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust	\$422,000	2 years	Otago
Threatened Species Recovery – South Island	Department of Conservation	\$5,105,400	4 years	Canterbury
Kaitiaki Kauri	Te Rūnanga-Ā-Iwi O Ngāpuhi	\$840,000	2.5 years	Northland
Myrtle Rust Jobs for Resistance	Scion (New Zealand Forest Research Institute Ltd)	\$3,775,120	3 years	Bay of Plenty
Te Whakapae Ururoa – Community Myrtle Rust Surveillance Project	Tairāwhiti Environment Centre	\$1,257,000.00	4 years	Gisborne
Acceleration and scaling up of community-led and iwi-led predator control projects (Kiwis for kiwi)	Save the Kiwi	\$17,700,000	5 years	Nationwide
Predator Free 2050 Ltd	Predator Free 2050 Ltd	\$76,000,000		Nationwide

COVER: The Threatened – Nationally Endangered hoiho.  
Photo: The OPERA

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