



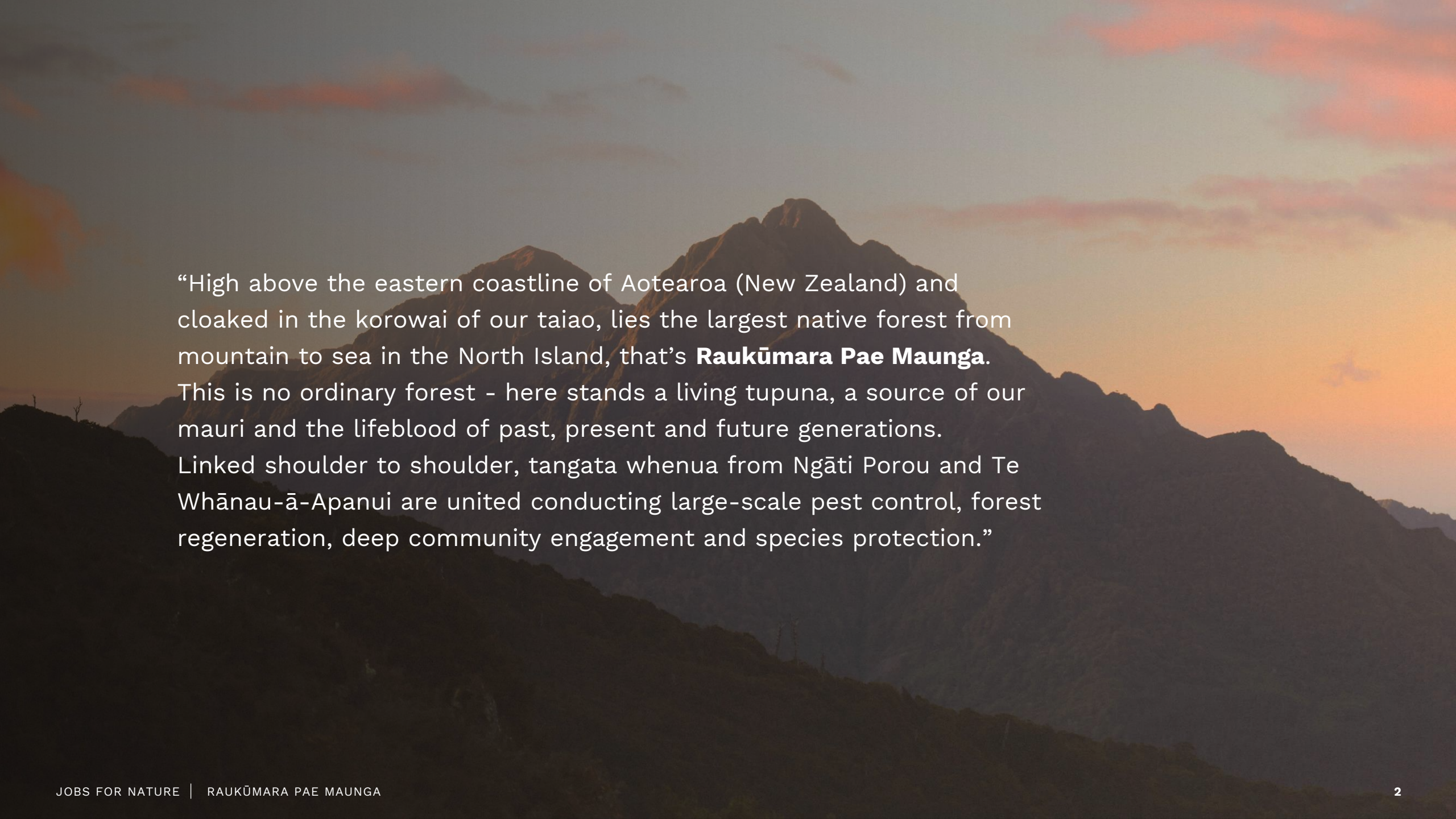
Raukūmara Pae Maunga

Ngāti Porou and Te Whānau-ā-Apanui

A Jobs for Nature case study

July 2025





“High above the eastern coastline of Aotearoa (New Zealand) and cloaked in the korowai of our taiao, lies the largest native forest from mountain to sea in the North Island, that’s **Raukūmara Pae Maunga**. This is no ordinary forest - here stands a living tupuna, a source of our mauri and the lifeblood of past, present and future generations. Linked shoulder to shoulder, tangata whenua from Ngāti Porou and Te Whānau-ā-Apanui are united conducting large-scale pest control, forest regeneration, deep community engagement and species protection.”

Raukūmara Pae Maunga

Indirect funding allocation (partnership)



Jobs for nature funding
\$34.4 million
(2020-2026)



Location
**Bay of Plenty;
Tairāwhiti**



Jobs created
37



Partners

Te Whānau-ā-āpanui, Ngāti Porou, Te Papa Atawhai (DOC)

Project description

A partnership between Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, Ngāti Porou, and Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) to strengthen cultural connections with the Raukūmara, involving pest control over 150,000 hectares of land for habitat and species recovery.

Project objectives

Restore: Habitat recovery

Protect: Predator control

Recover: Ecological and Species Recovery

Resilience: Connected, healthy, strong kaitiaki communities

Case study purpose

The Department of Conservation (DOC) and Verian extend their heartfelt gratitude to all Raukūmara Pae Maunga kaitiaki, kaimahi, and rangatira who collaborated with us to gather kōrero and prepare this project case study. Your unique insights, thoughts, and experiences are deeply valued and considered a precious taonga.

The purpose of this case study is to highlight the broad social and cultural outcomes delivered by the Raukūmara Pae Maunga (RPM) kaupapa, funded through the Jobs for Nature programme. The kōrero of RPM has been synthesised in this document to **highlight project outcomes that are evident far beyond environmental or conservation metrics.**



Case study methodology

The data informing this case study was gathered by Verian in partnership with the Raukūmara Pae Maunga team in order to protect RPM sovereignty over their story, experiences, and learnings.

- 1. Verian-RPM engagement began with a series of online hui to build whanaungatanga with RPM staff, and consolidate a shared understanding of the research purpose, approach, and outputs.
- 2. RPM and DOC entered into a data agreement to safeguard project kōrero.
- 3. RPM and Verian agreed to co-collect whakaaro from RPM kaimahi, kaitiaki, and rangatira via qualitative and quantitative methods. Fieldwork took place during May and June 2025.

RPM facilitated 1x wānanga ā-tinana with project kaimahi to delve deep into the social benefits born from their kaupapa. Further quantitative data was gathered on this via a survey of 19 kaimahi.

Verian facilitated 3x wānanga ā-ipurangi with various RPM kaimahi to cover the project implementation journey as well as gain insights into their values and ways of working.

The final case study was drafted by Verian with support and final approval from RPM staff before being handed over to DOC.



Kōrero within this case study is context-bound to this document, and cannot be summarised independently. This case study is reflective of research participants’ views only, and does not encapsulate the perspectives of all RPM kaimahi. Throughout the report we refer to RPM kaimahi as a collective for anonymity reasons, however we acknowledge that individual experiences differ across employees. Quantitative data reflects the perspectives of 19 kaimahi, and as such should be interpreted with caution.

Raukūmara Pae Maunga kaupapa background

Te Raukūmara holds cultural, historical, and spiritual significance for both Ngāti Porou and Te Whānau-ā-Apanui.

Te Raukūmara is the only large forest in the North Island that stretches uninterrupted from the mountains to the sea (Ki uta ki tai). The health of its rivers and land reflects the mauri of the ngahere – now in a critical state of decline after decades of cumulative pest damage. Restoring Te Raukūmara is not only about protecting biodiversity, but also about upholding the mana and legacy of those who whakapapa to her.

The Raukūmara Pae Maunga kaupapa was born when iwi raised the alarm of the rapid decline of the mana and mauri of the ngahere.

Following a unified call to action, RPM received Jobs for Nature funding in **2020** to undertake large-scale pest control operations.

RPM's establishment led to the creation of 37 jobs for ngā uri of Te Raukūmara in the conservation space – with 28 remaining today. Key kaitiaki operations include a focus on:

- **Large-scale pest control operations:** Since January 2023, 1080 has been used to control possums, rats, and stoats across approximately 116,000 hectares via aerial application. Deer and goat culling is also underway – with 12,000 animals removed to date.
- **Protecting taonga species:** Predator removal (primarily through 1080 applications) aims to give taonga species such as kiwi, pekapeka, and whio a chance to grow to adulthood and reproduce. Predator monitoring aims to support conditions for taonga species to thrive for future generations.

"The origins of Raukūmara Pae Maunga lie in the collective witnessing and wānanga of our people, our kaumātua, iwi and hapū leaders, taiao practitioners, and whānau, who raised the alarm that the mana and mauri of the ngahere were in steep decline. This wasn't just an ecological crisis; it was a spiritual, cultural, and whakapapa crisis."

Overall, RPM is delivering measurable impact and regional transformation.

RPM is the only project in the country that has combined aerial 1080 and ungulate control at scale across rugged terrain spanning 120,000 hectares. It has reduced rat and possum populations to near zero and removed over 10,000 deer, restoring the mauri of the forest and enabling regeneration of taonga species like kiwi, whio, pekapeka and pepeketua.

RPM has built a trained local workforce, revitalised iwi connection to whenua, and pioneered new technologies (i.e. deer DNA monitoring, GIS-based analysis, camera thermal work,) to inform conservation efforts nationally. It is a proven platform for delivering Jobs for Nature, biodiversity protection, climate adaptation, and cultural reconnection.

Its regional presence is already stimulating primary sector alignment, eco-tourism readiness, and restorative opportunities post-Cyclone Gabrielle.

RPM's outcomes so far include:

- Aerial 1080 over 116,000 ha
- Over 10,000 deer and 2,000 goats culled
- Possum rates reduced from 57% to 3%
- Rats reduced from 47% to 0%
- Over 15,000 native trees planted
- Over 500 tamariki and rangatahi engaged in taiao learning
- 28 remaining full-time staff, majority from local iwi
- Operations delivered in partnership with DOC and local contractors

Alongside these positive environmental outcomes, RPM kaimahi experience significant cultural and social benefits. These form the focus of this case study.

“Our initial aspirations were to protect and heal the Raukūmara as a whole ecosystem – our ancestral landscape – from generations of degradation. Over time, these aspirations have evolved to embrace the reality of conservation practice – shifting from solely environmental outcomes to a holistic vision of cultural revitalisation, economic sovereignty and, workforce development, and governance autonomy. The kaupapa is now as much about the restoration of mana and identity as it is about the whenua itself.”

A living, breathing pepeha: Counteracting disconnection

RPM job-creation has created powerful pathways for deep, tangible re-connection with the rich mātauranga, hītori, and kōrero woven through the Raukūmara.

For many kaimahi, employment through RPM enabled their whānau to return to their ancestral rohe – significantly strengthening their ability to reassert, express, and deepen their whakapapa connections. In total, **11 of 19 kaimahi surveyed say that working for RPM helped them return or remain in their ancestral rohe.**

The conservation mahi itself further deepens their whakapapa connections, empowering kaimahi to walk in the footsteps of their tīpuna and uphold the mana they carried, while actively restoring the ecological wellbeing of the ranges. Many also speak of spending more time on marae through their involvement in this kaupapa. Overall, **12 of 19 kaimahi surveyed credit RPM for helping them to connect and learn more about their whakapapa.**

Building both connection to the Raukūmara, and hands-on conservation skills empowers kaimahi to reassert kaitiakitanga over the ranges.

With increased conservation knowledge, 8 of 19 kaimahi surveyed feel better supported to embody and enact kaitiakitanga. Many note their new-found ability to access and spend more time within the Raukūmara through their mahi causes it to feel like a second home. One kaimahi spoke of the joy experienced by herself and her whānau when hearing bird song and seeing abundant kohekohe near an awa in the ranges for the first time post-1080 application.

These experiences highlight the impact RPM employment continues to have on empowering kaimahi re-connection to their whakapapa and intrinsic kaitiaki role.

"My pepeha was an aspiration. Now it's reality. My pepeha is living and breathing when I touch and walk across the Raukūmara... I'm able to work at home, at place, the home of my ancestors and am able to walk in their footsteps."

"This project opened up a doorway for our people to come in and **share kōrero tuku iho about our tīpuna and whenua.** As Māori we don't always share these korero out loud because they are sacred and tapu. And have been passed down for generations. Raukūmara has been a safe place for our people and that has allowed us all to grow in whakapapa."

In the words of kaimahi...

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"What's fulfilling is being able to take hold of the mana our tipuna once held over our ngahere. We are the voice of our ngahere but she always gives the direction."

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"We have been able to come together as an iwi, as hapū and as whānau to do this mahi that belongs to us. We have unique whakapapa which connects us to this ngahere. It's not just doing the work for conservation's sake, its because this ngahere is part of who we are. We are inseparable from one-another. The Raukūmara is more than a forest, it's a living being, a relative, a tipuna to us. Being part of Raukūmara Pae Maunga has helped me find a piece of myself that I had been long without."

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"Through the knowledge, new insights and understanding I've received from this kaupapa I've been able to connect deeper to the natural world around me and care about it."

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"A moment I'll never forget from this journey is standing in one of our awa post-1080 application and hearing the bird song roar, seeing kohekohe fruits abundantly for the first time, and watching the silent tears trickle down one of my uncle's cheeks. Joy."

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"Through this project I have had a lot more interaction with the Raukūmara, learning kōrero and traditional ways but also gaining my own understanding and observations to be able to learn, share, and reconnect."



From forest to whānau: Cultivating community well-being

Kaimahi frequently spoke of the ways their work goes far beyond standard mahi. Operations are underpinned by a desire to restore the mana and mauri of the Raukūmara for their mokopuna – a labour of aroha delivering value beyond financial compensation.

This significantly impacts well-being:

- **Individuals** feel more connected to their whānau, community, whakapapa – highlighting a sense of kotahitanga born from the kaupapa. They also feel stronger bonds with te taiao.
- **Whānau** feel proud of their relatives who work for RPM due to the magnitude of the kaupapa. Many positive work-place experiences enable individuals to enhance their wider whānau wellbeing through fulfilling mahi, whānau-friendly work hours, and economic benefits.

RPM has also fostered positive economic outcomes for ngā uri o Te Raukūmara, with kaimahi highlighting improved working conditions and compensation compared to their previous mahi.

- From the start RPM was committed to reaching out to uri of Te Raukūmara with employment opportunities and made a concerted effort to tailor job application processes for those who may be less familiar with corporate process (such as cover letters and CVs).
- Kaimahi were encouraged to visit RPM offices to collaboratively fill out job application forms.
- The result is a robust group of kaitiaki with strong commitment to rejuvenating the mana and mauri of Te Raukūmara.
- In total, RPM created **37 new jobs** for uri within their ancestral rohe.

"If I could thank this kaupapa for something, it would be the connections and relationships that have been built while working here and the opportunity for myself to grow, develop, and better understand what my values are."

"RPM has shown me that without whānau, hapū, iwi support, we would struggle. So being involved and giving back not just through work, but also through being a part of the community is a priority of mine."

In the words of kaimahi...

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“Working at home on my lands with my cousins has brought about a feeling of Kotahitanga. This is uplifting knowing that through our whakapapa we are making a difference.”

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“It's a ripple effect. I feel alive and energized and connected from being in some of the most beautiful places in NZ (in the Raukūmara). And this positive feeling affects my whānau and those around me in a positive way. So, you help to reconnect our people with a part of themselves (te taiao) that's been absent for generations.”

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“Connecting myself with the taiao which is where I go to calm myself and heal when feeling particular ways [improves my well-being]. And now knowing that I am making a difference provides reassurance that I'm doing good mahi.”

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“Employment at home is key. We get good pay reflective of our mahi – better than some places... I am no longer working dark to dark and am able to be there for my tamariki when I can.”

RPM employment empowers kaimahi through tangible and soft-skill development opportunities.

Kaimahi note the upskilling and capability building experienced throughout their involvement in RPM – ranging from personal confidence, computer skills, to sophisticated water monitoring and pest eradication techniques. Kaimahi training opportunities include:

- Computer literacy training, including email etiquette.
- Building personal confidence and interpersonal skills through being pushed out of comfort zones and building professional networks.
- Ngahere observation training rooted in mātauranga Māori, including water monitoring, biodiversity training, as well as plant and bird ID training.
- Species training including kiwi and egg handling, and pekapeka monitoring.
- Technical role-specific training for RPM staff, such as chainsaw training, helicopter familiarisation, GPS, and Sparrowhawk Firearms training.
- Pest control training, including deer and goat culling, trapping, bait stations and aerial pesticide application (1080).

Gratitude for the training opportunities is widespread amongst kaimahi, with 16 out of 19 surveyed saying they've learned new skills or experienced personal development by working for RPM.

See the appendix on page 15 for a full list of kaimahi training.

"If I could thank this kaupapa for something it would be giving the opportunity to whānau to upskill and work as kaitiaki of the Raukūmara Ranges... **building capability and engaging with iwi / hapū and whānau** to bring the Raukūmara to their front door and what she needs to restore. Growing succession and sustainability for our tamariki and mokopuna..."

"I'm not really a people person or a social person. Preferring the company of a dog and rifle or a small team in the hills. However, **this job has definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone** and helped me grow in these areas."



In the words of kaimahi...

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“When I started with RPM I didn't know how to use a phone or computer, didn't know anything about helicopter safety, dog training, shooting rifles, plant ID.”

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“I had always planned to come home & care for our own whenua, but this has given me more knowledge on how to better care for our own farm and land.”

“

“This mahi has given me hands on experience with 1080 and how it can be used as a tool to protect our ngahere. There is a lot of misconception about 1080 but it's no different to the rat poison you lay around your house in terms of its use and substance.”

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“Raukūmara Pae Maunga have provided training opportunities beyond and above what most organisations would provide.”

The RPM kaupapa will continue to deliver environmental, social, cultural, and economic impact for generations to come.

Looking ahead, RPM is poised to deepen its whakapapa-centred governance by embedding iwi values and kaitiakitanga into every layer of decision-making and operations.

Tangible next steps include securing long-term funding partnerships, expanding restoration efforts across iwi-prioritised zones in the Raukūmara, and further growing a skilled ecological workforce with clear pathways for rangatahi leadership. Strengthening organisational systems and monitoring frameworks will ensure accountability and impact, while aspirations centre on building a resilient, iwi-led conservation model that weaves mātauranga Māori into local economies, storytelling, and intergenerational legacy. A co-designed Raukūmara Management Strategy will anchor shared investment and enduring mana whenua authority, safeguarding the mauri of the whenua for generations to come.

"I wish more people understood that this mahi is generational. This kind of mahi exceeds lifetimes, it does not happen overnight, and it does not exhibit a finish line."



Appendix

See below for a full list of RPM kaimahi training opportunities.

A list of skills learned:

Controlled Substance License, Chainsaw Certification; Fire Safety Training; Helicopter Familiarisation; Bushcraft Training; Backcountry Navigation; 4WD Certifications; First Aid; LUV Certifications; ArcGIS & Quick Capture Training; Acoustic Recorder and Trail Camera Analysis; Training for specialised species monitoring and handling; Ground Hunter Technical; 6 Deer Detection Dogs Certified; Achieving the highest level of SAH (Safe Aerial Hunting) in NZ; Thermal Imagery Equipment & Thermal Assisted Shooting; Firearms and Firearms Safety in Helicopter; 1080 operations.



Ngā mihi



Jordan Ogilvy Lapish

jordan.lapish@veriangroup.com



Tialie-Dawn Parkes

Tialie-dawn.parkes@veriangroup.com