

JOBS
FOR NATURE

MAHI
MŌ TE TAIAO



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Building conservation knowledge and skills

A Jobs for Nature case study, 2020-2025



**Kōrero noa iho, ka wareware
Whakaatu mai, ka maumahara
Mahi ngātahi, ka mārama**

**Tell me and I'll forget,
show me and I may remember,
involve me and I'll understand**



Tree planting for Kaimahi for Nature Connection. Photo: Whenua Iti Outdoors

Jobs for Nature has lifted conservation knowledge and capability across the country

Aotearoa New Zealand is in a biodiversity crisis, so it is important that New Zealanders have the resources and knowledge to act for nature.¹ 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 grown the skilled conservation workforce in Aotearoa. Kaimahi (staff) have been employed in nature-based jobs, gaining skills to help revitalise te taiao and contribute to climate change resilience. Additionally, a number of projects have trained tamariki (children) and rangatahi (young people) so that future generations can build connections to te taiao.

Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy recognises that we need all New Zealanders to help reverse the decline in nature.

¹ Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation. www.doc.govt.nz/anzbs-2020



What we delivered

A total of 7,103 kaimahi were employed by DOC's Jobs for Nature projects to collectively deliver over 8.6 million hours of conservation work.² The programme reached people who had never had the opportunity to do conservation work in a professional capacity.

Among these kaimahi, 957 completed formal training and gained a wide range of qualifications, including in horticulture, project management, pest control and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). This gave kaimahi qualifications that will help secure future employment opportunities.

Nearly everyone involved received informal training to support them in their roles. This training allowed kaimahi to build capability and confidence, and many will be able to contribute to future environmental issues. Already those conservation and practical skills have helped communities respond to severe weather events.

Projects also provided training or education to a further 28,559 people in the wider community, making them more informed and engaged with environmental issues.³

What we achieved

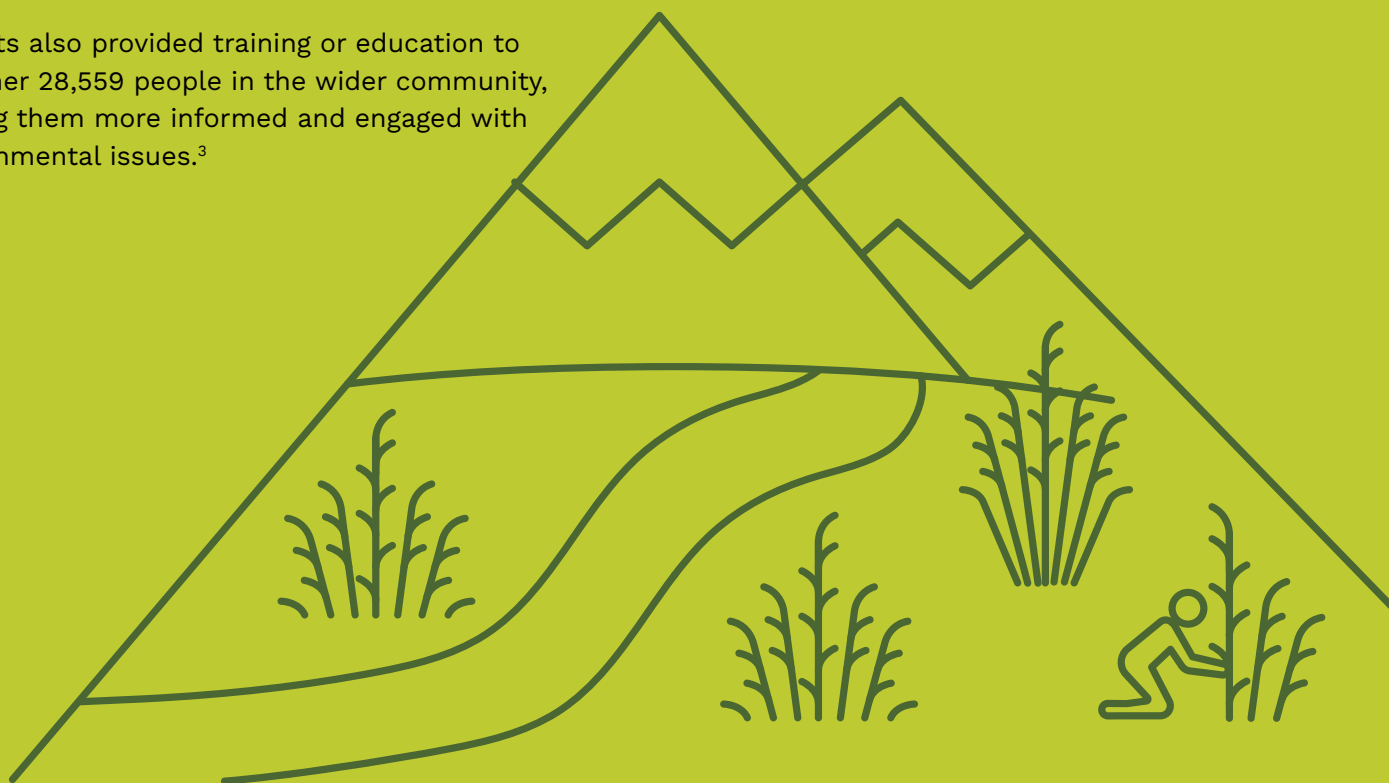
The Jobs for Nature projects have had many interconnected impacts that have increased the skilled conservation workforce in Aotearoa. Here, we focus on four key outcomes:

Projects are helping to fill the gap in the next generation of environmental kaitiaki (guardians)

Tamariki and rangatahi are building connections to te taiao

There are enduring benefits for kaimahi

The practical skills learned can be used to support communities



² All values are as at June 2025.

³ 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).



Projects are helping to fill the gap in the next generation of environmental kaitiaki

Gaps in capability and capacity across local and national environmental priorities were identified for many projects. The training that kaimahi received through Jobs for Nature has helped fill these gaps, as demonstrated by the following examples:

- When asked how the Predator Free Apprentice Programme came about, Jessi Morgan, Chief Executive of the Predator Free New Zealand Trust, said:

“Growing the capability and capacity of the Predator Free sector was high up on our list of things that we thought would make a difference to achieving New Zealand’s vision for a Predator Free future. We could see organisations advertising for people with experience and they weren’t finding anyone, they were just stealing people from other projects. Knowing there was a bunch of super experienced people out there, the idea was to create a ‘learn by doing’ space.”

Jessi Morgan, 2020

- Thibaud Guerin, Director of TriOceans and one of the facilitators of Te Pēwhairangi Marine Kaitiaki course, noted that the need for young people to be trained was mentioned at every hui (meeting):

“We have so many things that need to happen on the water and we didn’t have the opportunity for rangatahi to gain the knowledge that they need to get those jobs and to get that mahi done.”

Thibaud Guerin, 2023

Te Pēwhairangi Marine Kaitiaki was born from those conversations and the fortuitous timing of the Jobs for Nature funding, which allowed the vision to be implemented.

“Before the apprenticeship programme, there wasn’t a clear pathway into the sector ... So many young people love the outdoors and wildlife, so harnessing that passion and fostering those skills into a career is meaningful and crucial for the future.”

*Jessi Morgan, 2023,
Chief Executive, Predator Free
New Zealand Trust*

- Increasing future employment prospects has also been the goal of the Hēteri ā Nuku programme, which integrated both te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā (Māori and non-Māori worldviews) to train future environmental kaitiaki. The project sought to increase opportunities for Māori to pursue environmental careers and establish pathways into careers as environmental managers, technical specialists and scientists across iwi, government and private sectors.

These project outcomes highlight the importance of encouraging people into the conservation sector by creating meaningful career opportunities. Nature-based training has allowed Jobs for Nature participants to align their passion for the environment with their career, creating a skilled and motivated workforce that will support us in tackling the environmental challenges of our time.



Jenilee Hill – Predator Free Apprentice Programme graduate.
Photo: Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group



Tamariki and rangatahi are building connections to te taiao

Spending time in nature is good for people's wellbeing⁴ and can also motivate people to care more about nature and adopt behaviours that benefit the environment.⁵

Two of the project teams we spoke to told us about their objectives of empowering younger, school-aged participants to be connected to te taiao:

- Tane Manukonga, Kawihakahaere / Regional Manager at Sustainable Taranaki, mentioned in a 2023 interview that kaumātua (elders) from the Ngā Māhanga ā Tairi hapū in the Taranaki region saw the benefits of an educational programme for “Māori, pakeha, ... anyone who lived on our landscape” to help them understand the environment from a cultural perspective. This led to the Te Ara Taiao project, which facilitated local conservation activities in a holistic way. Tamariki have watched kiwi being released and have also learned how to care for them by tracking them with telemetry gear. They have tested the wai (water) in the awa (river) from beaches to farmlands, and then learned about the effects of artificial fertiliser and waterway protection.



Ko te whakakitenga a Te Ara Taiao he whakatipu i ngā rangatahi e tū pakari ana, e ū ana ki tō rātou ahurea, ā, e hono ana ki te taiao puta noa i Taranaki | Te Ara Taiao project intends to create thriving, culturally grounded, and environmentally connected young leaders across Taranaki. Photo: Te Ara Taiao

- At the top of the South Island, Jobs for Nature funding allowed Whenua Iti Outdoors to kickstart a programme that felt critical in the aftermath of COVID-19 lockdowns and isolation. Their Kaimahi for Nature Connection project focused on connecting tamariki and rangatahi to the environment and was inspired by the outcomes of Te Mana o te Taiao – specifically, that people's lives are enriched through their connection with nature. As Mark Bruce-Miller, Chief Executive Officer of Wehnuia Iti Outdoors, stated:

“We know the mental health and wellbeing of our young people is just being seriously, seriously challenged.”

Mark Bruce-Miller, 2023

Through projects like Te Ara Taiao and Kaimahi for Nature Connection, Jobs for Nature has empowered tamariki and rangatahi to take stewardship of te taiao. The projects are helping to drive intergenerational behaviour change, bringing more attention and momentum for the environment.

In partnership with Ngāti Koata, Kaimahi for Nature Connection set out to facilitate 18,000 immersive nature connection experiences. Over the 3 years the project ran, Whenua Iti Outdoors delivered more than 29,000 nature connection experiences to over 13,700 individual participants, comfortably exceeding the initial target.

4 Curran-Cournane F, Valiente M, Daly L, Nutsford C, Cunningham-Hales P, Ausseil A, Tellier P. 2022.

Value of nature for wellbeing during times of crisis: COVID-19 case study. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment. environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Value-of-nature-for-wellbeing-during-times-of-crisis.pdf

5 Aota Y, Soga M. 2024. Both frequency and diversity of childhood nature experiences are associated with self-reported pro-biodiversity behaviours in adulthood. *People and Nature*. 6(2):792–799. doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10608



There are enduring benefits for kaimahi

Research shows that formal training can enhance individuals' earning potential, opportunities for promotion and job security.⁶ Learning as an adult can also have significant impacts on physical and mental health and self-confidence, and can have a ripple effect at the community level.⁷

The examples of formal training given below demonstrate the breadth of skills that the Jobs for Nature projects have provided to individuals. These skills will benefit the future employment of individuals, and the collective uplift in capability and wellbeing will be felt by communities across the country.

- On top of gaining a sound understanding of the marine ecosystem, students on the 6-month-long Te Pēwhairangi Marine Kaitiaki course obtained their boat master, open water scuba diving and marine mammal medic certifications. The course finished with students presenting their projects to the local community. This event was a highlight for Thibaud Guerin, facilitator of the Te Pēwhairangi Marine Kaitiaki course, as he saw the personal growth in confidence and knowledge of the rangatahi, as well as the opening of doors within the wider community.
- Alongside training tamariki, Te Ara Taiao also invested in training the trainers. By hosting a wānanga (educational seminar) of around 70 local teachers at the marae, hapū and kaumātua helped teachers to understand the significance of the local landscape.



Te Pēwhairangi Marine Kaitiaki.
Photo: TriOceans

By empowering the people who teach tamariki, Te Ara Taiao has provided opportunities for future cultural and environmental learning.

- The National Hunter Education and Training Scheme was delivered in two parts by the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association and New Zealand Game Animal Council, respectively. Together, the project teams developed an online programme, trained 994 new hunters, supported 84 instructors to become qualified, and revised their training materials and content. This has increased the number of hunters in Aotearoa who have been trained in hunter safety and outdoor skills and who can now contribute to wildlife management and conservation.

Projects have provided training in:

- animal and plant pest control and monitoring
- catching, handling and tracking taonga (treasured) species, seabirds and other animals
- track building and maintenance
- historic site maintenance
- fence building and maintenance
- construction, including of nursery connecting irrigation
- bespoke carpentry
- research and analytical skills
- administration skills
- accounting software
- operational planning
- project management
- seed collection and propagation
- digger driver training.

6 Evertsson M. 2004. Formal on-the-job training: A gender-typed experience and wage-related advantage? *European Sociological Review*. 20(1):79–94. doi.org/10.1093/esr/20.1.79

7 Feinstein L, Budge, D, Vorhaus J, Duckworth K. 2008. The social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, University of London. discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10003177/1/Feinstein2008thesocialreport.pdf



The practical skills learned can be used to support communities

Severe weather events in 2022/23 demonstrated how transferable the skills gained through the Jobs for Nature programme are. The significant investment into training meant that there was a deployable workforce in communities that could be mobilised to assist with recovery efforts. As mentioned in the programme's year two evaluation report, 'The skills developed ... lent [themselves] to civil defence, from driving to clearing trees, outdoor first aid, chainsaw and scrub bar use, and construction'.⁸ Climate change is expected to increase the frequency of severe weather events, so the usefulness of these skills will endure into the future.

'One of the most direct and significant benefits of [Jobs for Nature] was the value of the ... workforce in helping communities to respond to major flooding events, especially after Cyclone Gabrielle.'

*Jobs for Nature evaluation:
Year two report; p. 10.*



Kaimahi for Nature Kaitiaki Kids.
Photo: Kaimahi for Nature Connection, Whenua Iti Outdoors



Learning with marine kaitiaki trainees as part of the Te Pēwhairangi Marine Kaitiaki project. Photo: TriOceans



⁸ Kereama J, Stevenson B. 2024. Jobs for Nature evaluation: Year two report. Wellington: Allen + Clarke; p. 10.
www.jobsfornature.govt.nz/assets/Publications/J4N-Evaluation-Year-Two-Report-Final-17-Sept-2024.pdf

Participants have developed a strong interest and motivation from meaningful work that connects them with nature, and many have a desire to continue in the field:

“There’s quite a number of those apprentices who will definitely be future leaders.”

*Jessi Morgan, 2023,
Chief Executive, Predator Free
New Zealand Trust*



Apprentice Māia Gibbs checks a trap in Taranaki. Photo: Taranaki Kiwi Trust

When connected and resourced, we can achieve a lot

Reversing the decline in nature will require everyone to work together.

Jobs for Nature funding has enabled 7,103 people to have the capability and skills to continue to take positive, sustained action for nature. This could be achieved by contributing to ecosystem restoration, improving habitat for taonga species or supporting community climate change resilience.

Iwi, whānau, hapū, communities and individuals have enhanced their capability and capacity to deliver nature-based work across the country and to better engage in local, regional and national conversations on biodiversity and environmental priorities.

The funding has also supported tamariki and rangatahi to connect with mātauranga Māori and tikanga (custom). Projects like Te Ara Taiao and Hēteri ā Nuku promoted local cultural heritage and ensured that Māori values and perspectives on the environment were shared. This has enriched our biodiversity system and helped us to move towards a vision of a more interconnected environment, which has empowered people coming into contact with te taiao to value and care for it.

Jobs for Nature has helped to breathe life into the vision of Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. With the programme’s funding coming to an end, it is critical that we continue to invest in the conservation workforce in Aotearoa.



Appendix

Project name	Delivery lead	Amount awarded	Delivery term	Council region
Predator Free Apprentice Programme	Predator Free New Zealand Trust	\$6,850,000	4 years	Nationwide
Te Pēwhairangi Marine Kaitiaki	TriOceans, in collaboration with Ngā Hapū o te Pēwhairangi and Carino Wildlife Cruises	\$627,080	3 years	Northland
Hēteri ā Nuku	Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai	\$6,000,000	3 years	Nationwide
Te Ara Taiao	Taranaki Environmental Education Trust (TEET), operating as Sustainable Taranaki (ST)	\$684,720	3 years	Taranaki
Kaimahi for Nature Connection	Whenua Iti Outdoors	\$980,000	3 years	Tasman-Nelson
National Hunter Education and Training Scheme	New Zealand Game Animal Council	\$212,000	3 years	Nationwide
National Hunter Education and Training Scheme	New Zealand Deerstalkers Association	\$488,000	3 years	Nationwide

COVER: Apprentice Hugo Pearce at work as part of the Predator Free Apprentice Programme.
Photo: Predator Free New Zealand Trust

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