

# PĀNUI

## NEWSLETTER

### Ngahuru/Autumn 2024

#### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Kia ora everyone and welcome to the Autumn 2024 newsletter.

The Owhango Alive team have had another busy 4 months, with continued trapping, working bees, visits to other predator control groups and workshops with Cam Speedy – there is always something to learn and refine our “best practice” with trapping and also to network with other groups in our region.

I have always been keen to grow the predator controlled area around our Ohine-tonga Scenic Reserve, Owhango village etc.

The intent of this growth is that the halo effect offers more and more “safe” areas for our native flora and fauna to grow and thrive.

Over the 12 years that I have been involved in OA, there has certainly been a steady growth of other groups, private enterprises and general acknowledgement of the necessity for these predator control groups to keep up this valuable work.

See the table for the numbers of despatched predators for the months of December 2023 and January/February 2024, by our dedicated Owhango Alive team.

The Owhango Alive calendar was, once again, a roaring success, with 270 sold – the most ever! Thanks to all of you who purchased one (or more!). Appreciation also, goes to the generous submitters of the photos and the team who create the calendar. Good work.

And a special “Thank You” goes to the team at Blue Hill Cafe, who sold over 100 copies of the calendar for us – you gals and guys rock!

The working bees have continued regularly, with OA volunteers and DOC staff – we’re certainly seeing a difference in the Reserve – but as always, there’s more to be done.

Well, as we head towards the colder climes, I hope you all enjoy the coming autumn months and start of winter – it’s time to hunker down and plan for the coming year.

My thanks go to all of you who volunteer, donate and support the team that is Owhango Alive.

To get involved or to receive our updates and newsletters, just flick us an email at [owhangoalive@yahoo.com](mailto:owhangoalive@yahoo.com)

You can also check us out on our facebook page

Nga mihi,

Mark Fredericks

Owhango Alive Chairman

#### TRAP DATA FOR the months of December 2023 and January/February 2024,

Feral cats	- 26
Ferrets	- 1
Hedgehogs	- 41
Mice	- 29
Possums	- 9
Rats	- 371
Stoats	- 4
Weasels	- 5
Rabbits	- 1
Unknown	- 6
TOTAL	- 498



<b>SPONSOR DATA</b>	1December to 31 March	Mouse	Rat	Unspecified	Cat	Total
Anderson-Smith						
Claire Stevens			2			2
David Partis and Suzanne Wilkinson		1	1			2
Derek & Ann Percy (Swimming Hole 1)		1			1	2
Derek & Ann Percy (Swimming Hole 2)			2			2
Fa'i Pudney, Tauranga			2			2
Grace & Mary Donald						
Jacob Simmonds		2				2
Kayden and Zander McConkey			1			1
Knowles Family		1		1		2
Lucy Simmonds						
Manawa Energy (BH01)			1			1
Manawa Energy (BH02)			4			4
Manawa Energy (BH04)						
Manawa Energy (BH05)			2			2
Manawa Energy (SH02A)			1			1
Manawa Energy (SH04A)			1			1
Manawa Energy (SH05)			1			1
Margie Riley (Lagoon 18)						
Margie Riley (Tawa 1)		2	1			3
Marsaili Cash (Boat Hole 22)			3			3
Marsaili Cash (Boat Hole 3A)		1	2			3
Marsaili Cash (Swimming Hole 4AA)			2			2
Marsaili Cash (Swimming Hole 7A)			2			2
Martin Bond			3			3
McEntee Family: "Admiral Ackbar"			1			1
McEntee Family: "Stumbleduck"			2			2
McEntee Family: "Verminator"			1			1
McEntee Family: "Weasel Vin Diesel"			3			3
Mike Camm			1			1
Nan & Malcolm Pullman			3			3
Ngakonui Valley School		1	2			3
Opie Family			1		1	2
Phil & Kate Taylor			5			5
Rachel & Marty Cashin						
Richard & Felicity Porter.			1			1
Sally & Mark			3			3
Shirley and Kevin McEntee		2				2
Simmonds family, Melbourne			3			3
Stent Family			2			2
Taumarunui Auto Centre			2			2
The Baylis Family, Owhango						
The Golden Family			2			2
TMN Hort and Beaut Soc			2	1		3
Turangi Painting Services		1	1			2
Weir Family		1	3			4
<b>Total Result</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>86</b>



## OWHANGO ALIVE VOLUNTEERS – LESLEY AND MERVYN AITKEN *Marion Johnston*

Mervyn and Lesley have always been nomadic in terms of where they are stationed and could not, with honesty, commit to being responsible for a trapline. However there were other chores and Mervyn became treasurer, a position he held until 2022 when the organisation moved to being an incorporated society. Lesley's willingness found her enthusiastically supporting Merv and others in their work which included working bees, meetings, Festivals, World Rivers Day, dinners and copious occasions that have been hugely effective in moving towards our goals

Lesley told me that birds have always been a factor in her life...budgies, canaries, seagulls. Hence, her early experience gave her a sense that birds had "character". Growing up near the sea she had little experience of bush and the many birds which inhabit it but several years of tramping gave her a love of both bush and birds, and this experience has been naturally enhanced by living in Owhango.

"Seeing "character" in birds is still a fascination for me. Being able to enjoy this in the company of like-minded folk is a bonus" she told me. "My most vivid memory is of a night raid in the bush, with torches, cameras and a very knowledgeable guide, Tim Holmes(trapping volunteer), who revealed the secrets of numerous insects, spiders and other nocturnal creatures."

Merv is a hard man to corner about what first inspired his interest in native flora and fauna but corner him I did and here is his story.

He spent 6 years in the Boys' Brigade and gained a great interest in camping and tramping in particular at a dedicated campsite at Lake Rotoma which was on the side of the lake but surrounded by native bush where they were taught bushcraft - how to identify trees, swing from vines, tickle trout and generally create mayhem. The nearby swamp housed lots of waterbirds while the resident frogs made a deafening chorus. Later, in a leadership role, he took boys all over the Tararuas, Otaki Forks, Wainuiomata, Kaimais, and then with Lesley tramped in the Chatham Islands, Queen Charlotte Sounds, the Heaphy track, St James, Tongariro, and Great Barrier Island staying in DOC huts.

Merv has contributed many well considered speeches on occasions and more recently, since we have celebrated World Rivers' Day annually, written some very thoughtful pieces – sometimes sent from abroad – to add to the importance of the day.



## THE LEAP YEAR WEDDING! *Sally Lashmar*

On February 29th 2024, Jess Richards and Tyler Jarman were married, over in Tauranga.

Jess and Tyler are both volunteers with Owhango Alive, with trapping and working bees.

We'd all like to wish them both well for their future together, and given that the wedding took place in a Leap Year, it will take a while for the 25th anniversary to roll round!

All the best Jess and Tyler, from the Owhango Alive Team.



Our regular working bees have continued to make advances into the weeds along the tracks of the Ohinetonga Scenic Reserve – we had a bit of a lull over the Christmas period, but launched back into it in February.

And whenever we walk the track for mere pleasure, we pull a privet seedling out if spied, or cut back some blackberry, make a note of where some of the bigger culprits are hiding out, for future attention.

Of course, the Blue Hill Cafe continues to reward, after a couple of hours of slogging away.

Many of the trapping team are also in the working bee team, so you may notice the giveaway sign of a trapper who, when out walking and weeding, will demonstrate the “Bob and Peer” move – this is to see if the trap they are walking past or working around, needs to be cleared or reset. It involves the “Bob” (bending down while walking past a trap) and the “Peer” (a short sighted squint into the trap box). Most of us carry a small screwdriver to clear the trap if required, or to reset it.

After attending a number of trapping forums over the last few months, the refinements to our techniques have certainly produced dividends – good numbers of predators are being caught, an eye for detail is being cultivated plus an openness to try out different baits, sites and trap preparation is being implemented. Let’s be predator hunters and not just trap checkers.

There is a great Predator Control Calendar put out by PREDATOR FREE NZ, which gives guidance as to what is happening seasonally over the trapping year, so we can bait and trap accordingly.

Check it out on line – it can either be bought or downloaded.

Happy weeding and trapping!





## ACOUSTIC SURVEYING FOR LONG-TAILED BATS/PEKAPEKA-TOU-ROA IN OHINETONGA

Luke Easton (Biodiversity Ranger, Whakapapa Office DOC)

The most threatened species known to inhabit the Ohinetonga Scenic Reserve (ca. 148 ha of remnant podocarp/broadleaf indigenous forest, in Owhango) is the critically endangered (pekapeka-tou-roa, or *Chalinolobus tuberculatus*). This species is in serious decline except in areas where large-scale pest control is ongoing (O'Donnell *et al.* 2023). Long-tailed bats are distributed throughout the Tongariro region, from Rangataua Forest (southern slopes of Mt Ruapehu), Erua, and Tongariro Forest. New Zealand bats are extremely vulnerable to habitat loss (especially via the removal of roost trees) and depredation by introduced mammalian pests such as rats, stoats, and cats (Borkin *et al.* 2022; O'Donnell *et al.* 2023).

Following a reconnaissance in June 2021 which confirmed the persistence of long-tailed bats at Ohinetonga, two formal surveys were conducted over summer (December/January) in 2022/23 and 2023/24 using AR4s (acoustic recorders). The purpose of these surveys is essentially to test whether acoustic recorders can be used as an appropriate monitoring method for bats given the challenges faced by more intensive monitoring methods. Acoustic recorders were placed out around the reserve during December 2022/January 2023 and December 2023/January 2024, and left for at least 4 to 16 nights (Fig. 1). Recorders were set to record 'bat-like' sounds from 2030–0530 (24 hr time). Data were manually processed in the software BatSearch3 (Fig. 2), where bat passes were confirmed and counted using a hand counter. Only calm nights (i.e., nights with little to no wind and light to no rain) were included in analyses. Figure 1. Map of AR4 locations (2022/23 in purple, n = 11; 2023/24 in blue, n = 2). The main communal roosting area is circled in red.



Figure 1. Map of AR4 locations (2022/23 in purple, n = 11; 2023/24 in blue, n = 2). The main communal roosting area is circled in red.

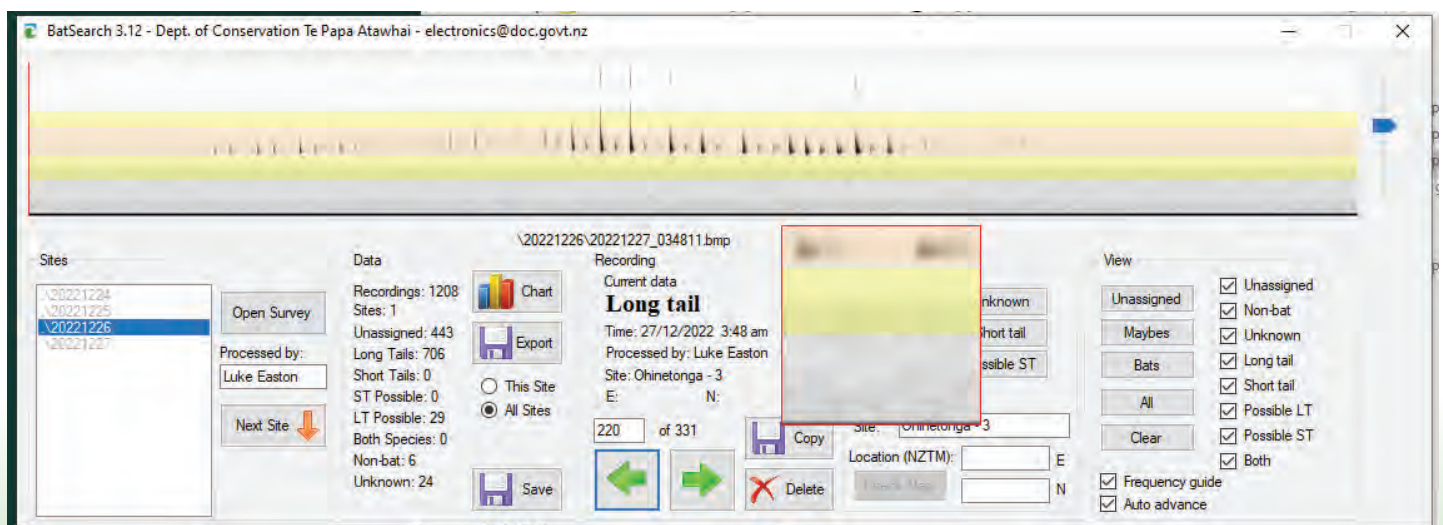


Figure 2. Example of a long-tailed bat pass, in this case an echolocation call.

In January 2023, 11 recorders were placed out for 16 nights. One recorder failed and two nights had poor weather (24th and 27th January 2023), leaving 14 nights appropriate for detecting bat activity. Over 25,100 bat passes were recorded over the entire monitoring period (bat passes averaged between 126–306 passes each night from 24th to 27th December 2022 [ $n = 4$  recorders] and 123–290 passes each night from 14th to 29th January 2023 [ $n = 10$  recorders]) (Fig. 3). In summer 2023/24, only five recorders were set out (three at new sites, two at previous locations), for 13 nights (21st December 2023 to 2nd January 2024). Several nights had heavy rain. Three recorders failed, leaving only two that worked (including one at a previously sampled site; Fig. 1). A rat also damaged one of them. Up to 1,679 passes were recorded on one recorder on a single night, located within the vicinity of the highest bat activity observed in 2022/23 at the northernmost sampling point. This very high level of activity is possibly due to bats emerging from a cluster of roosts within close proximity to the recorder.

Bat activity is inversely related to the relative time of detection, which suggests that the local bat colony (or colonies) is utilising communal roosts within the reserve on some nights (i.e., highest activity is recorded at dusk as bats are emerging from nearby roosts), and elsewhere in the wider landscape on other nights (i.e., lower activity is recorded after dusk as bats are not emerging from nearby roosts). Fluctuations in activity also support this conclusion (Fig. 3). Bats are mobile and utilise the same roosts for short periods of time (usually for 1–3 nights), hence fluctuating activity is typical bat behaviour (see O'Donnell *et al.* 2023 and references therein). Bats were mostly detected around 2100, on dusk.

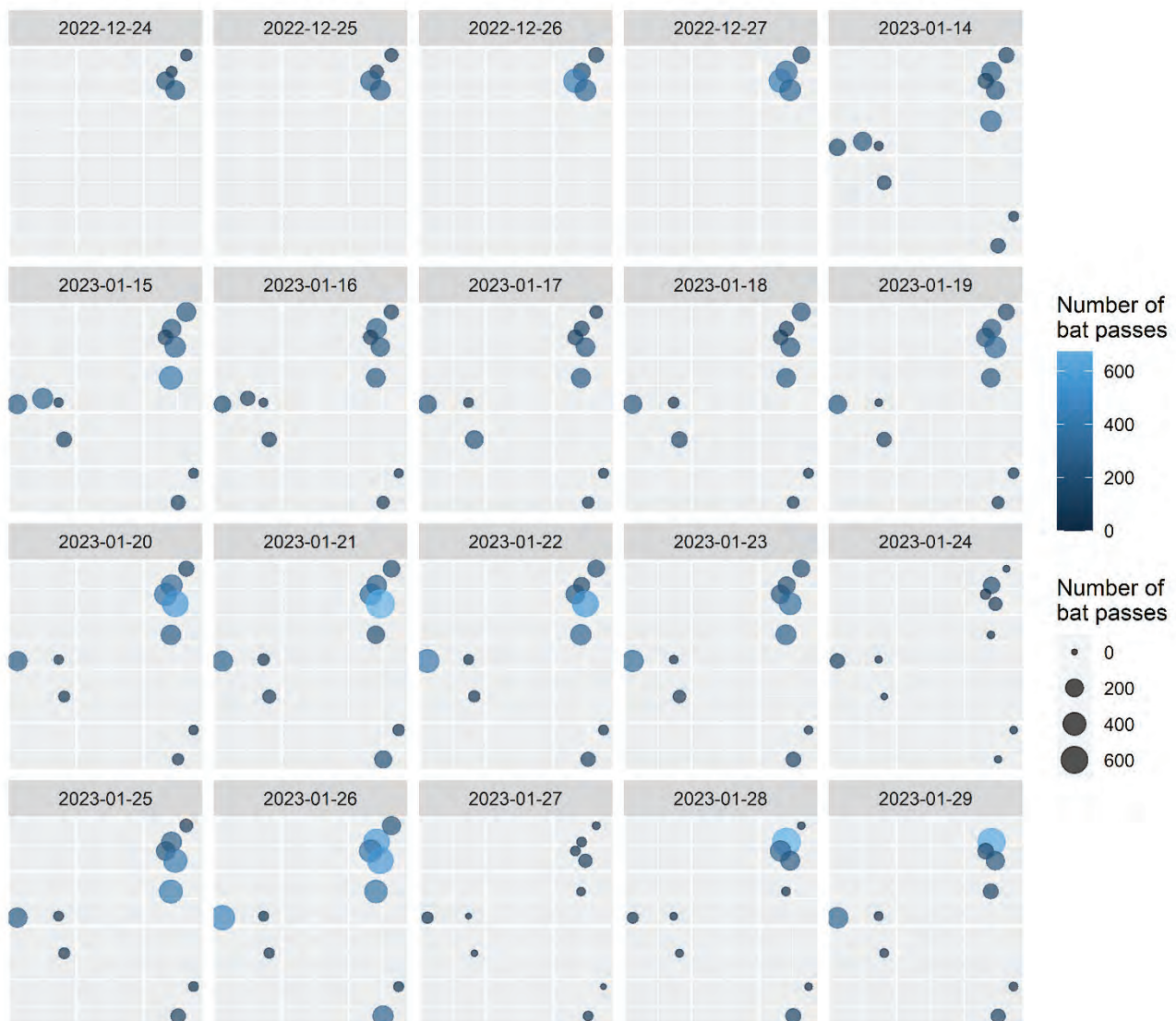
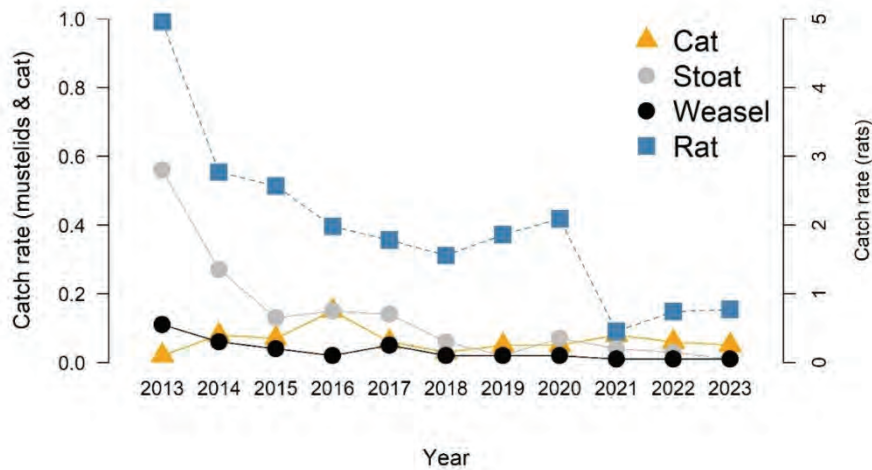


Figure 3. Bat passes recorded during summer 2022/23. The colour and size of circles are proportional to the number of passes recorded.

Preliminary results confirm that bats are returning to the northern area of the reserve to roost every summer. Identifying specific active roost trees however is virtually impossible without tracking a transmitted bat to a roost.



Long-tailed bats (as well as other threatened species, including whio/blue duck) are benefiting from the intensive trapping programme run by Owhango Alive as trapping has been effective in reducing mammalian predator abundance (Fig. 4). Reducing predation pressure on resident long-tailed bats is likely aiding their population recovery, even if we do not yet have explicit evidence to support this notion. Cats, stoats, and rats are all known predators of bats (Borkin *et al.* 2022; O'Donnell *et al.* 2023), thus by controlling pests to low numbers within Ohinetonga and surrounds is essential for the persistence of this long-tailed bat population. Over the last several years (2021–2023), cats have been prolific; catch rates of cats have even surpassed that of stoats and weasels (Fig. 4), with between 47–66 cats trapped each year. Installing a new trap line (comprising traps suitable for targeting both cats and small mammals) that intersects the roosting area is therefore strongly recommended.



**Figure 4.** Corrected trap catch rates (per 100 nights) from Owhango Alive between 2013–2023, for pest species: cat (orange triangles), stoat (grey circles), weasels (black circles) [left axis], and rat (blue squares) [right axis]. Rat catches are represented by the right axis given their relatively higher catch rates compared to the other pest species. Data sourced from TrapNZ.

#### References

Borkin K, Easton L, Bridgman L 2022. Bats attacked by companion and feral cats: evidence from indigenous forest and rural landscapes in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Zoology*.

O'Donnell CFJ, Borkin KM, Christie J, Davidson-Watts I, Dennis G, Pryde M, Michel P 2023. Conservation status of bats in Aotearoa New Zealand, 2022. *New Zealand Threat Classification Series 41*. Department of Conservation, Wellington, New Zealand.



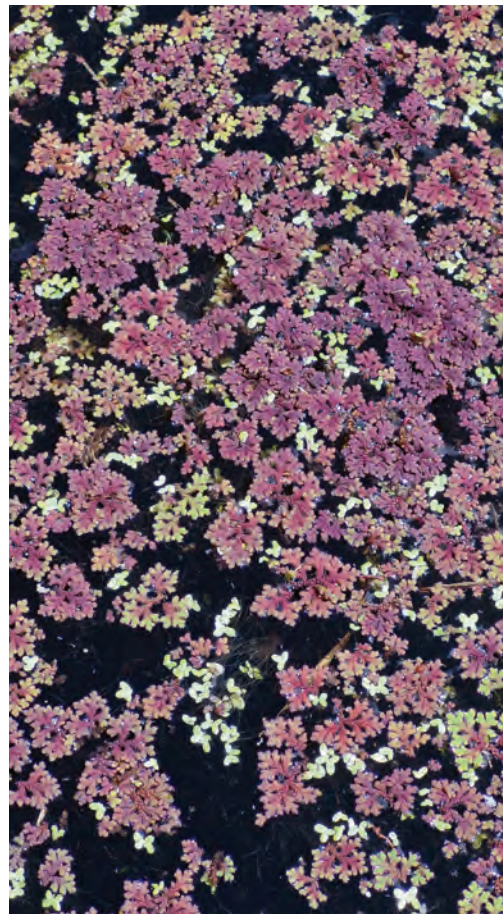
The pekapeka-tou-roa, or long-tailed bat (Ian Davidson-Watts)



## THE ONLY FLOATING FERN KNOWN WORLD-WIDE

Rosemary Steele

Often seen on the surface of the Lagoon (and other still water features like ponds) is the only floating fern known world-wide. It is *Azolla rubra* and consists of small stems 1-2cm long with leaves 2.5mm x 1.5mm long and fine roots which hang in the water. The plants are green to begin with and then turn pink or red later in the year. *Azolla* often forms thick mats which can fool dogs and children into thinking they are a solid surface.



*Azolla* normally has symbiotic blue-green algae *Anabaena* living in its cells which are able to convert atmospheric nitrogen to a form the fern can metabolize. When the fern dies the nitrogen products can be used by other plants. Consequently, it can be used in rice paddies or the garden as a useful fertilizer.

Also present in the photo are small plants known as duck weed. They are all small and have minute flowers which are not often seen.





When we incorporated Owhango Alive as a not for profit society, we established rules and a constitution. Included in our constitution is the ability to award Lifetime memberships as a recognition of those who have gone “above and beyond” what is expected of volunteers.

This year we awarded six of our amazing volunteers with Lifetime Memberships. Tania Dewitt and Sally Lashmar started Owhango Alive in 2012 with a handful of donated traps and gardening tools to tackle the invasive weeds and to trap mustelids and rats that were endangering our precious bird life, especially the whio. Owhango Alive grew from there and today we operate over three hundred and thirty traps both in the Ohinetonga and around the village of Owhango. To date the traps have removed over nine thousand pests while volunteers attending working bees have removed countless trailer loads of invasive plants. Tania moved away from the area but remains in contact with us, while Sally is a committee member and can still be found every week out checking traps and keeping an experienced eye on the forest.

Mark Federicks joined Owhango Alive in its first year and put his trapping and pest control expertise to great use, today Mark is Chair of our committee and can best be described, along with Sally, as a driving force of the society.

Mervyn Aitken joined in the early days, was the treasurer until recently and as a retired reverend he has made time each year to prepare a sermon for our gathering on World Rivers Day in September each year.

Marion Johnston also joined in the early days and is a regular trap checker, she was active as secretary for many years and is Owhango Alive archivist as well as serving on our current committee

David Johnston is our repair man, for the past 11 years he has maintained the traps, built the trap boxes and innovated improvements.



*Mark Fredericks & Peter Brennan*



*Sally Lashmar & Peter Brennan*



*Mervyn Aitken & Mark Fredericks*



*Tania Dewitt with Mark Fredericks & Peter Brennan*



*Marion Johnston*



*David Johnston*



## PAMPAS OR TOETOE



**PAMPAS**  
SOUTH AMERICAN  
HIGHLY INVASIVE



**TOETOE**  
NZ NATIVE

### When does it flower?

After Christmas

Before Christmas

### What does the flower look like?

Thick, upright flower heads

Drooping flower heads

### Look at the leaves

One prominent midrib  
Snaps easily when pulled

Several veins  
Does not snap when pulled

For more info: <https://www.nznatureguy.com/2021/06/13/toetoe-or-pampas-grass-3-tips/>  
<https://www.tiakitamakimaurau.nz/protect-and-restore-our-environment/pests-in-auckland/pest-search/corjub/>

I hope you found something of interest in this Autumn Newsletter. Articles for the next newsletter are most welcome.

A reminder from the Ōwhango Alive team that we are still looking for hi res photographs for the 2025 calendar in landscape format rather than portrait,

Ka kite ano

David Robinson  
Editor

Unless otherwise stated all photographs were taken by Sally Lashmar