2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Aotearoa New Zealand

The Nature Conservancy

Aotearoa New Zealand

Te Papa Ao Tūroa, Aotearoa
Manaaki Taiao, Tiaki Ora

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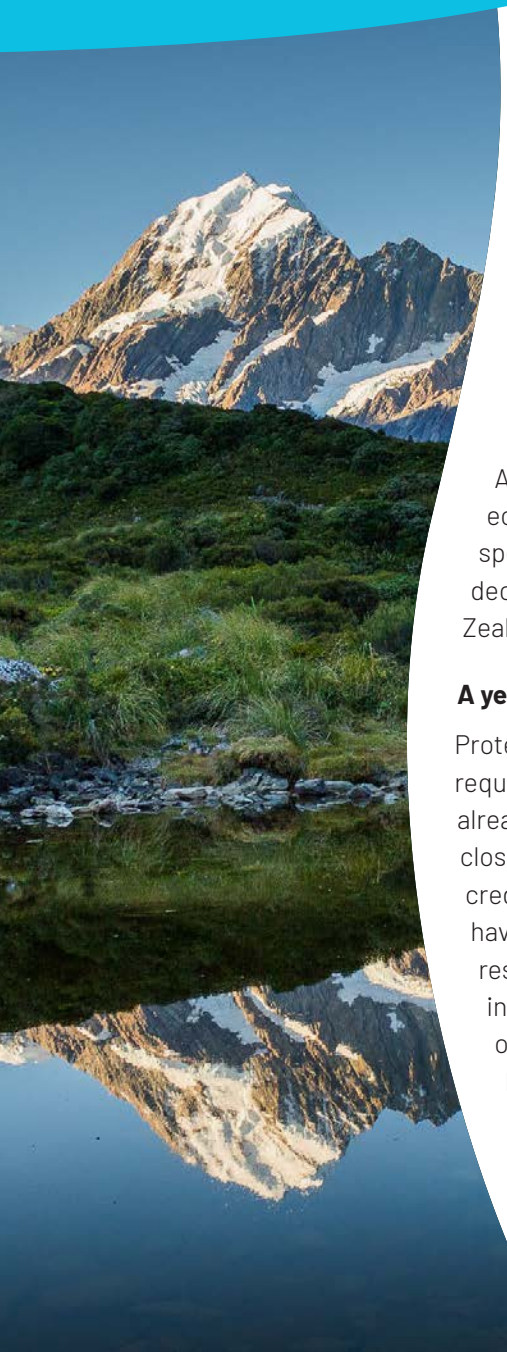


Cover: Kōtuku/white heron bathing—kōtuku are honoured by Māori for their rarity and beauty © Roger Smith/2025 TNC Oceania Photo Contest; Left: Aoraki/Mount Cook, the highest point in New Zealand, rises above the landscape in the South Island © Sebastien Roche/2025 TNC Oceania Photo Contest; Right: Erik van Eyndhoven © Lisa Duncan

Tēnā rā koutou kātoa, dear friends,

Last winter, torrential rains caused unprecedented flooding in Te Tai-o-Aorere/Tasman District.* Newly planted native seedlings were inundated at Beuke's Bush, a precious remnant of ancient forest where The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has contributed to local partner restoration efforts. Yet when some of our team dug the buried plants out of the silt and sand, they miraculously found them still alive. Nature's resilience is impressive, but she also needs a helping hand.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a global hotspot of unique species and ecosystems found nowhere else on Earth. However, invasive species, pollution and habitat destruction have caused a stark decline in biodiversity and climate resilience, leaving New Zealanders ecologically, socially and culturally poorer.

A year of groundwork

Protecting and restoring ecosystems is a long-term challenge requiring large-scale, sustainably financed solutions that do not already exist in New Zealand. Among other initiatives, we have been closely involved in informing government policy on nature-based credits to support wetland and lowland forest restoration, and we have launched a new study looking at the most effective ways to restore lowland forests at far greater scale. Working on the projects in this report has built knowledge and expertise that will inform our next steps in protecting nature, supporting communities and livelihoods, and building resilience against climate change across New Zealand.

This year has also seen some of our partnerships mature to the point where TNC can now move on to new work. For example, Revive Our Gulf, which is working on large-scale shellfish restoration in the Hauraki Gulf, has now achieved sufficient momentum that TNC will hand over our role by the end of 2026, leaving the project in the very capable hands of local leaders.

I want to express my huge thanks to our staff and partners, who have worked tirelessly during the year to advance greater change for nature. We could not do it without you.

Lastly, I want to thank Abbie Reynolds, our previous Country Director, who has moved on to fresh opportunities. Abbie has been an exemplar of wise, decisive and caring leadership through a considerable period of change for TNC and has set our business unit up for success in the future, for which we are hugely grateful.

We know New Zealanders want to bring back nature. It's our job to make it as easy as possible for all of us to do that. Because, together, we find a way.

Dr Erik van Eyndhoven
Interim Country Director, Aotearoa New Zealand
The Nature Conservancy

*Note for international readers: we use both Māori and English names, recognising the status of Māori peoples as mana whenua (Indigenous Peoples) in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Who We Are

Eki ana te whakataukī: Manaaki whenua, manaaki tangata, haere whakamua.

As the proverb says:
Care for the land, care for the people, go forward.

TNC staff member Lucy Garrett unearthing seedlings from silt following Tasman Bay flooding, Beuke's Bush © TNC

TNC is a global conservation organisation dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change; conserving lands, waters and oceans at an unprecedented scale; providing food and water sustainably; and helping make cities more resilient. TNC is working to make a lasting difference around the world in 83 countries and territories (39 by direct conservation impact and 44 through partners) through a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector and other partners.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, we combine the power of science, our global knowledge and the wisdom of local partners to help solve New Zealand's conservation challenges.

Muddy **Waters,** **Clear** Benefits

Protecting shorelines, storing carbon, unlocking investment in nature

Seabirds, eels and shorebirds like the kuaka/bar-tailed godwit depend on flourishing coastal wetlands to survive, as do the communities they border, which rely on wetlands to provide flood protection. But New Zealand has lost up to 90 percent of all wetlands, putting people and biodiversity at risk while releasing vast stores of carbon into the atmosphere. As floods grow more frequent and climate change accelerates, restoring these ecosystems has never been more urgent.

> “Anything that happens on the whenua (land) and at our maunga (mountains) is going to influence our moana (ocean) too, and estuaries are just right in the middle of that.
>
> **Manaia Pearmain-Fenton**
> Ecology Teaching Fellow and Researcher, University of Otago

Restoring coastal wetlands in New Zealand needs funding, practical examples and a stronger body of research. This year, we published a study from seven sites across 300 hectares showing that **coastal wetlands could generate blue carbon credits** that, when combined with other sustainable financing mechanisms, could help offset the cost of their restoration and maintenance. Building on these results, TNC is now exploring a **catchment-scale restoration study** with local government, iwi and hapū (Māori tribe and sub-tribe) partners, as well as exploring the establishment of a restoration pilot project. We are also drawing on successful TNC projects such as seagrass restoration on the Virginia coast in the United States.

Above: Kuaka/bar-tailed godwit moves through the surf at Pūkorokoro/Miranda © Enzo Giordani/2024 TNC Oceania Photo Contest; Left: Pūkorokoro/Miranda's coastal wetlands are vital for thousands of migratory birds each year © Lauryn Wachs/TNC

To promote additional revenue for nationwide wetland restoration, and nature-based solutions more broadly, TNC has published joint research with Bank of New Zealand (BNZ) and Deloitte into **market demand for voluntary carbon and biodiversity credits from New Zealand** (including those generated by wetlands), and the requirements for attracting investment in them. TNC has also published a report with the Ministry for the Environment outlining the current blue carbon data gaps and a plan to address them. By supporting five wāhine Māori to attend the Australasian Saltmarsh and Mangrove Network conference last year, TNC is championing Indigenous knowledge and investing in early-career researchers.

Learn more about our blue carbon work

The **Upside** of Being Bogged Down

Rewetting peatlands as a climate solution

Rabia Sheikh taking a core sample from a bog on Rēkohu, courtesy of Rabia Sheikh; Above: Peatlands at Raurimu, Manawatū-Whanganui in the North Island, with Mt Ngauruhoe in the background © Rachel Hall/TNC

On the Rēkohu/Wharekauri/Chatham Islands, Rabia Sheikh is hard at work taking soil samples from peatlands as part of her Master's research, supported by TNC and partners. Over thousands of years, these ancient wetlands have slowly built up huge carbon stores. Rabia's research is discovering just how much is locked up here, and exploring how the potential to generate carbon credits might influence landowners' decisions about managing their farms to conserve and restore peatlands.

Despite covering only 3 percent of the planet, peatlands store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests, a third of all soil carbon and 10 percent of freshwater, as well as providing habitats for some of our most remarkable animals and plants. But in New Zealand, over 200,000 hectares of peatland—three times the size of New York City—have been drained for agriculture, releasing the equivalent of 6.5 percent of the country's carbon emissions each year.

Rewetting peatlands by blocking drains and allowing water to return creates a substantial opportunity for New Zealand to drastically reduce emissions. Beyond the potential climate benefits, restored peatlands can also improve water quality and drainage while reducing fire risk by preventing carbon-rich soils from drying out and becoming highly flammable.

A recent study estimates rewetting up to **3,000 hectares** of drained peat across New Zealand every year over the next ten years could:

- Avoid the release of up to **1.25 million tonnes** of carbon dioxide emissions
- Be the equivalent of removing up to **290,000 cars** from the road for one year

For peatland restoration to gain traction, it needs to be easier and more affordable for landowners and communities, while also enhancing the important cultural role of peatlands. To explore how this could take shape, TNC completed a high-level pre-feasibility study at five peatland sites to both **assess the potential of existing voluntary carbon markets to fund restoration and highlight the social and cultural significance of peatlands to New Zealand.** Drawing on insights from this study and our coastal wetlands work, and working with the government to better understand the opportunity to incentivise peatland restoration, we aim to enable impact at scale for these vital habitats.

Learn more about these incredible carbon sinks

Above: The Motueka River in Te Tai-o-Aorere/Tasman District at the top of the South Island, watering the exceptionally fertile soil © cmfotoworks/iStock; Inset: Native tree plantings at Beuke's Bush, continuing 40 years of restoration © Elliot Easton/TNC

Reweaving a Living Landscape

What it means to leave the land better

Before 1984, 11 hectares of ancient trees in Beuke's Bush remained—the largest remnant of a once-expansive native forest in the Moutere River catchment in the northern South Island. Today, Ruth Beuke looks out over a much-expanded woodland, the result of more than 40 years of community restoration driven by her family, who have called this valley home for five generations.

> "When I was growing up here, it was a place I could go and explore and reflect on nature. It's important to us as a family that the next generation will have that opportunity as well; we want to leave that legacy for the community of the future.
>
> **Ruth Beuke**
> Moutere resident

In 2025, an additional 10,000 trees were planted at Beuke's Bush, supported by TNC and our partner Kotahitanga mō te Taiao (KMTT)—meaning Collective Action for Our Nature—the largest collaborative conservation alliance in New Zealand.*

Te Tauihu o te Waka a Māui, 'the prow of Māui's canoe'—the northern tip of the South Island—and the Kawatiri/Buller region, have many rare and unique ecosystems at risk from biodiversity loss and climate impacts, with some now retaining less than one percent of their native vegetation cover. As well as their ecological importance, these places also hold deep significance to local iwi and hapū (Māori tribes and sub-tribes), who have historically used them for mahinga kai (food-gathering), rongoā (traditional medicine) and other cultural practices. Despite a strong desire among communities for solutions, a lack of sustainable financing and coordination at a landscape-scale makes progress challenging.

Restoring native forests and wetlands to at least 15 percent of lowland areas will create the conditions for nature to recover at scale. But we need to know what areas to target to achieve the greatest impact.

Guided by iwi leadership, mātauranga Māori (knowledge) and Western science, KMTT is working over 3.4 million hectares of land and sea across the northern South Island in partnership with TNC. In 2025, this work supported the planting of more than 25,000 native trees, and trialled new approaches to controlling weeds and invasive wilding pines, including drone-targeted herbicide application.

Using insights from projects such as Beuke's Bush, and the experience of TNC's Global Carbon and Resilient Watersheds/Nature for Water Teams, TNC and KMTT are now **piloting a feasibility study to restore fragmented lowlands across the Motueka, Moutere and Riuwaka river catchments.** As well as building a spatial model to identify the highest priority areas for native revegetation, it will **develop planning, financing and implementation solutions—including potentially carbon trading**—to make it easier to adopt catchment-scale restorative land management practices, which could also be applied across New Zealand.

Learn more about restoring native habitats

*KMTT partners comprise Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō, Ngāti Koata, Ngāti Kuia, Ngāti Rārua, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāti Waewae, Rangitāne o Wairau and Te Ātiawa iwi; Buller District Council, Nelson City Council, Marlborough District Council, Tasman District Council and West Coast Regional Council, as well as the Department of Conservation, the Ministry for the Environment and Fisheries New Zealand.

Land for **Life**

Regenerative solutions for healthier communities

Owned by Michael and Roz Thomas and their family, Mangatawhiti is a 1,300-hectare sheep and beef farm in the Hawke's Bay, one of New Zealand's agricultural hubs. But for farmers like them, soil loss stemming from historic forest clearances on erosion-prone soil is a major concern, with 6.8 million tonnes being lost every year—exacerbated by the loss of native forest from these hills.

Farmers need support to switch to regenerative practices that prevent soil erosion and enhance biodiversity, freshwater quality and climate resilience.

Mangatawhiti is one of the 12 pilot farms in the Land for Life programme, a partnership between TNC, Hawke's Bay Regional Council (HBRC) and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). With the support of Land for Life, the Thomas family has now protected three bush blocks and two wetland areas on the farm and aim to plant 2,000 native trees per year.

> "We could see these beautiful blocks of native bush and the concern was that if we didn't do something they would be gone. There would be nothing left for our grandchildren.

Michael and Roz Thomas
Hawke's Bay farmers

Left: Planting native trees along a hillside farm to help reduce erosion © Hawke's Bay Regional Council; Above: Aerial view of native plants along a Hawke's Bay riverbank © Hawke's Bay Regional Council

One of TNC's roles in the partnership was to design and test a comprehensive financing and implementation solution for farmers, to benefit from potential carbon credits generated from planting natives and exotics on farms. TNC was also responsible for attracting the philanthropic funding necessary to pilot, validate and scale this solution across the Hawke's Bay and wider New Zealand.

After exploring these options, TNC will step back from the project in 2026. Working on Land for Life has led to key insights on how to support landowners to scale reforestation work, which we will take forward in our other restoration projects, including restoring lowlands and wetlands.

Restoration work continues on the pilot farms, and the project will now be led by HBRC with support from MPI. HBRC remains committed to Land for Life and has included farm planning as a cornerstone of its Next Generation Land Management model. TNC will work with HBRC and MPI to ensure all knowledge gained is captured and to provide a seamless transition for all parties.

Learn more about Land for Life

> “The marine space is the end of the line, and our whakapapa (ancestry) means we have an intrinsic relationship and responsibility to tiaki (care for) all our taonga (treasures) across ecosystems and species.
>
> **Te Kāhui Tangaroa group**

The Harvest of **Tomorrow**

Restoring the ocean through time, science and local leadership

Above: Gathering kūtai for deployment to seed new kūtai beds © Shaun Lee; Top right: Fishing boats moored near Oban, Stewart Island © Ross McCullough/2025 TNC Oceania Photo Contest

New Zealand’s coastal waters are only as healthy as the species that sustain them—and few are more vital than kūtai (green-lipped mussels).

Kūtai are an anchor species for marine health and an important economic resource for coastal communities. To bring them back, we need to strengthen marine restoration science, practices and capability in New Zealand. In recent decades, kūtai reefs have become increasingly threatened by climate change, overfishing and increased sediment and runoff from changes in land use, driving the widespread loss of shellfish beds.

Since 2018, TNC has played a vital role in supporting and accelerating the Revive Our Gulf project to seed kūtai beds in the Tīkapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi / Hauraki Gulf, **creating large-scale experimental sites and deploying over 28 million kūtai.** With momentum growing, TNC will hand over our role by the end of 2026—leaving the project in the capable hands of the Revive Our Gulf Trust, with the University of Auckland and iwi partners Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust and Ngāi Tai Ki Tāmaki.

To strengthen Māori leadership in marine science and aquaculture, TNC is also working with Te Kāhui Tangaroa (TKT), the newly-established iwi marine leadership group within KMTT.

TNC is committed to scalable, restorative marine practices that align with iwi priorities and global conservation goals. Drawing on our Hauraki Gulf experience and the expertise of our global colleagues, we have **developed a restorative aquaculture programme to support nature-positive aquaculture throughout New Zealand.**

In the struggle to balance protecting our oceans with growing seafood demands, sustainable aquaculture offers an encouraging avenue for producing seafood while boosting fish stocks.

Learn more about restorative aquaculture

2025 at a Glance

Conservation doesn't begin in the field—it begins with research, planning and the hard work of identifying pathways for impact. This year, we did exactly that.

Banking on nature

We invested in building the evidence base for credible nature-based credit markets, with research on:

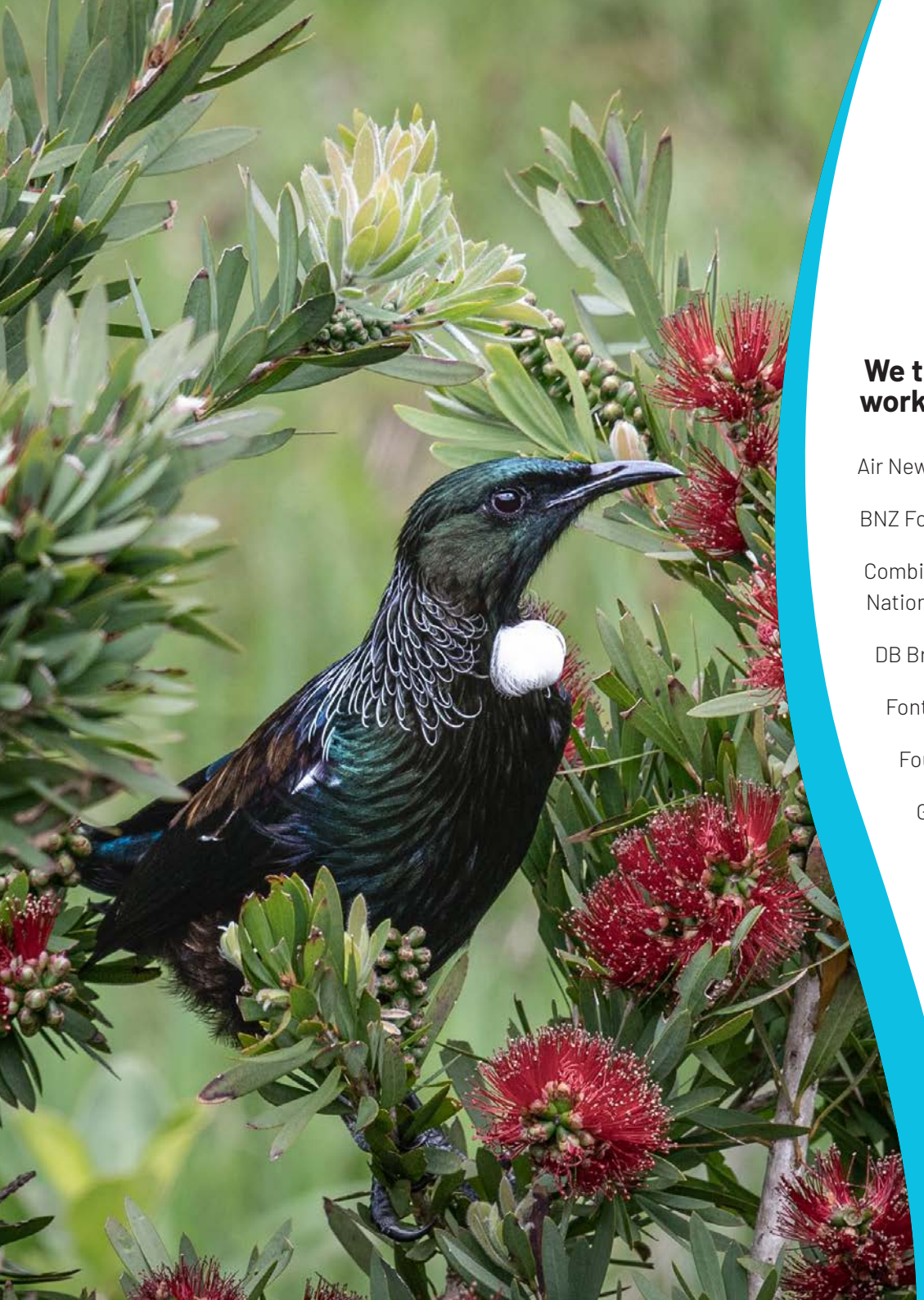
- the market demand trends, barriers and opportunities for nature-based credits from New Zealand, with BNZ and Deloitte
- outlining the current blue carbon data gaps and a plan to fill these, with the Ministry for the Environment
- the potential of blue carbon credits to fund coastal wetland restoration
- the potential of existing voluntary carbon markets to fund peatland restoration.

Roots of restoration

To lay the groundwork for restoration across land and sea, we:

- examined how to best restore fragmented lowlands across the Motueka, Moutere and Riuwaka river catchments in the Tasman District at the top of the South Island
- commissioned a spatial model to identify which areas of the KMTT rohe (region) are the highest priorities for native revegetation
- developed a restorative aquaculture programme to support nature-positive aquaculture throughout New Zealand.

Top to bottom: Kaimai Ranges, made of ancient volcanic rock, Bay of Plenty © Hamish Ashton/2025 TNC Oceania Photo Contest; Inset: Pohowera (banded dotterel), which nest directly on gravel or sand near rivers and coasts, Birdlings Flat, Canterbury © Ellie Morgan/2025 TNC Oceania Photo Contest



We thank all of our supporters who make this work possible, including:

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Rātā Foundation

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We are also very grateful for the assistance from all our supporters and funders not listed above, including those who wish to remain anonymous.

A tūī rests on a pōhutukawa branch © Mitchell Murdoch/2025 TNC Oceania Photo Contest

How **You** Can Help

For more information on
The Nature Conservancy's Aotearoa New Zealand programme, and how your support can make a real difference, please contact:

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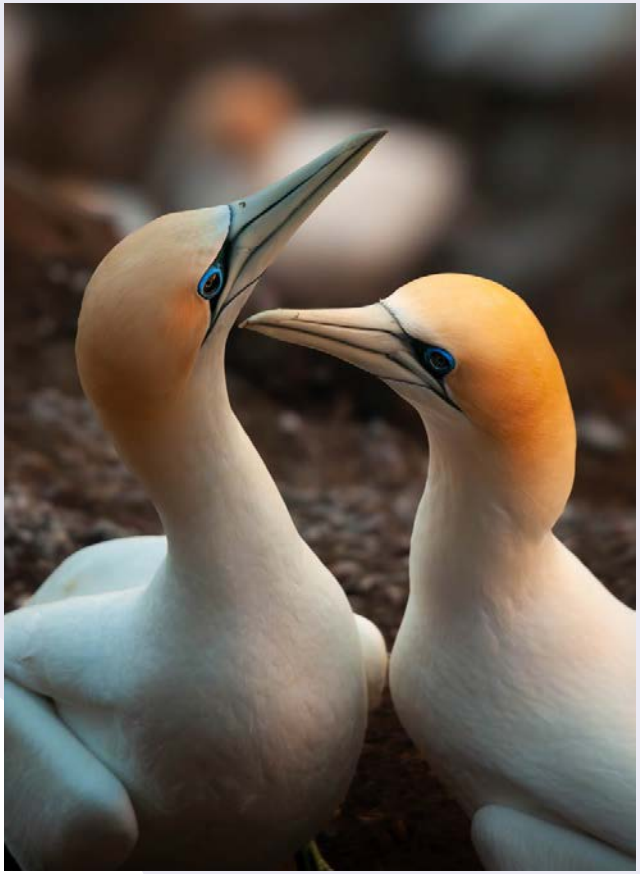

Clockwise from top left:
Pluteus Velutinornatus over moss heads, Golden Bay, Tasman © Nic Wooding; Tākapu/gannet colony at Muriwai, Auckland, one of only three nesting sites on mainland New Zealand © Kabir Gosai; Swimmers move through the coastal waters of Ōakura, Northland © Ruby Dewerse; Two of the Archway Islands at Whahariki, West Coast of the South Island © Sebastien Roche; The endemic and rare tuatara are New Zealand's largest reptiles © Brendon Doran
(All from the 2025 TNC Oceania Photo Contest)