

Threats to Moutohorā

Moutohorā is presently rodent and predator free. This has taken many years to achieve and is vital for the protection of threatened native plants and animals.

Public access to Moutohorā is restricted because of two major threats to the flora and fauna on the island—fire and the reintroduction of rodents.

Rodents can stow-away in dinghies and containers, or swim ashore from boats moored offshore. The island is continually monitored to prevent rodents re-establishing.

Because of the low rainfall and dry vegetation, fire is a risk at all times and a serious risk in summer. Fire would destroy vegetation and kill the indigenous fauna, especially insects and lizards.

During the fire season (December to April) trained volunteer fire fighters are stationed on the island to help prevent unauthorised landings which increase the threat of fire and rodent reintroduction.



Kororā, little blue penguin. Photo: © Len Doel.

Access

Public access to Moutohorā Wildlife Management Reserve is restricted.

Landing on Moutohorā is by permit only.

Contact the Department of Conservation or Te Runanga o Ngāti Awa for further information regarding guided trips to Moutohorā.

Take care visiting natural areas



No smoking or open fires are allowed on the island.

Further information

Department of Conservation

P.O. Box 114
Murupara 3062

Phone: 07 366 1080
Fax: 07 366 1082

Te Runanga o Ngāti Awa

P.O. Box 76
Whakatane 3158

Phone: 07 307 0760
Fax: 07 307 0762

For further information about recreation activities and conservation visit: www.doc.govt.nz

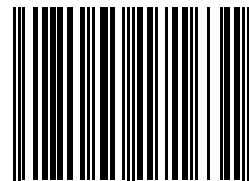
DOC HOTline
0800 362 468

Report any safety hazards or
conservation emergencies
For fire and search and rescue call 111

Cover photo: Pōhutukawa
flowering on Moutohorā.
Photo: Tansy Bliss.

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Moutohorā (Whale Island)



BAY OF PLENTY



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Introduction

Moutohorā, or Whale Island, lies 6 km northwest of Whakatane in an area of frequent volcanic activity.

The 143-ha island is a remnant volcanic cone, which has been eroded leaving two peaks, Motu Harapaki (353 m) and Raetihi (189 m) which fall away to cliffs on the north and north east. There are three sandy bays—One Roa (Boulder bay), One Pū (Sulphur bay) and Te Rātahi (McEwan's bay) and a small wetland behind the sand dunes of One Roa.

Hydrothermal activity occurs in the form of hot springs known as Wai Ariki/Ngā whā in One Pū and Te Rātahi. There are no permanent freshwater streams on the island.

Ngāti Awa holds manawhenua to the island and are tangata whenua. Following the Ngāti Awa Settlement Act 2005, the Department of Conservation and Ngāti Awa jointly manage Moutohorā through Te Tapatoru a Toi, (Joint Management Committee) a committee consisting of members nominated from Ngāti Awa, the Bay of Plenty Conservation Board and Minister of Conservation.

The island is currently managed for ecological restoration of its ecosystem. This includes protection of habitats for indigenous plants and animals and conservation of historic and cultural resources.



Tieke (North Island saddleback) were released onto Moutohora in 1999. They are now well established on the island. Photo: © Len Doel.

History

There are numerous recorded archaeological sites of Māori and European origin. Māori settlement concentrated on the eastern and western ends of the island. A pā was built on Raetihi and a number of house terraces, middens (food refuse dumps), stone tool manufacture areas and stone walls occur on the island. Māra kūmara (kūmara gardens) were located at Te Rāwhiti on the eastern end of the island.

The first recorded occupation of the island was by Te-Rongo-Tauaroa-ā-Tai, a grandson of Toroa (chief of the Mataatua waka), who lived at Raetihi Pā (summit of gentle breezes) about 1400 AD. The genealogy from Rongo reveals that some of the descendants may be found among Ngāti Awa. Other notable rangatira (chief) occupants were Taiwhakaea I, Te Ngārara, who seized the ship *Haweis* in 1829 for contravening the tapu of a site at Wai Ariki, Tautumuroa and Kakara.

After permanent Maori occupation ceased in the early 19th century, Ngati Awa continued to visit the island to gather kua oi titi (grey-faced petrel) and kaimoana (seafood) and to collect hāngi stones.

Europeans first lived on the island in the 1830s when an unsuccessful attempt was made to establish a shore-based whaling station. The venture failed without a single whale being captured. Hans Tapsell bought the island from Ngāti Awa some time in 1867 although Ngāti Awa maintains that the island was never actually 'sold'. Hans Tapsell's daughter Katherine and her husband George Simpkins operated a trading station on Moutohorā in the 1860s. In 1876 George Simpkins leased Moutohorā and its mineral rights to Messrs Pond and Tunny, who operated a sulphur refinery in Auckland. The sulphur extracted was of poor quality and in 1878 they consigned their lease to Buckland, a stock auctioneer who used the island as a holding paddock to graze stock destined for the Auckland markets. Buckland continued to remove sulphur from Moutohorā. Fifty tons was shipped off in 1893 and a party of men worked the deposits in One Pū up to 1895 when the venture was abandoned.

The next phase of industrial activity began in 1915, when quarrying provided rock for construction of the Whakatane harbour wall. This activity continued until 1920. A total of 26,000 tons of rock was removed.

Wharves, tramlines and houses were built in One Roa and Te Rātahi.

In 1924 a local fisherman, Jim McEwan was the only resident remaining on Moutohorā. He is believed to have remained until the late 1930s.

Further investigation for the extraction of sulphur was carried out in the 1940s but an industry never developed.

In 1965 Moutohorā was gazetted as a Wildlife Refuge while still under private ownership. The island was purchased from the Orchard family by the Crown, on behalf of the former NZ Wildlife Service in 1984. It was gazetted as a Wildlife Management Reserve in 1991.



N.Z. fur seals are frequent visitors to Moutohora, especially during winter. Photo: © Len Doel.

Vegetation

The vegetation on Moutohorā has changed significantly from its original composition. This began with clearing and burning by Māori. European settlers and visitors progressively introduced goats, rats, sheep, rabbits and mice, all of which decimated the plants and their seed.

Further damage by fires occurred in the 1970s.

When the island was acquired by the Crown in 1984 it was covered mostly in grass, with forest and shrub remnants in the gullies and on steeper sites. It is likely that pōhutukawa forest was once the dominant vegetation with a component of mangaeo and podocarp trees. There is also wetland vegetation in One Roa. Since the elimination of browsing animals and the implementation of a planting programme the vegetation has changed dramatically, with vigorous growth and regeneration.

From 1984 to 1989 a planting programme established 12,000 plants of 45 species on Moutohorā. A mixture of broad-leaved shrubs or small trees, along with large broad-leaved trees, shrubs, climbers, flax and dune plants were planted.

Today Moutohorā is covered by a mosaic of naturally regenerating pōhutukawa, māhoe and kānuka forest; with bracken fern and pasture grasses rapidly disappearing.



Mature pōhutukawa forest on Moutohorā. Photo: Grant Crail.

In recent years a range of threatened native plant species, thought to have occurred previously on the island, have been reintroduced as part of the restoration of the original flora. Species planted include sand tussock, shore spurge, sand pimelea, Cook's scurvy grass, pīngao, native cucumber and New Zealand cress.

Fauna

Livestock were probably first transported to the island by George Simpkins in the 1860s. In 1943, all stock except goats were removed. Eradication of the remaining introduced mammals, including goats, rabbits and rats, was finally achieved by 1987. The re-establishment of any of these pest animals would severely harm regeneration and protected species.

One of the significant features of Moutohorā's current fauna is the breeding colony of grey-faced petrels, which number in the tens of thousands. Sooty shearwaters, little blue penguins, the threatened New Zealand dotterel and variable oystercatcher also breed on the island.



Grey-faced petrel. Photo: R. Slack.

Other bird species include tara-nui (Caspian tern), kārearea (New Zealand falcon), kākārīki (red-crowned parakeet) and forest birds such as tūi and pīwakawaka (fantail). North Island kākā is a threatened bird species that occasionally visits the island. Three lizard species—common gecko, speckled skink and copper skink—also occur on Moutohorā. New Zealand fur seals breed on the island and are seen all year round.



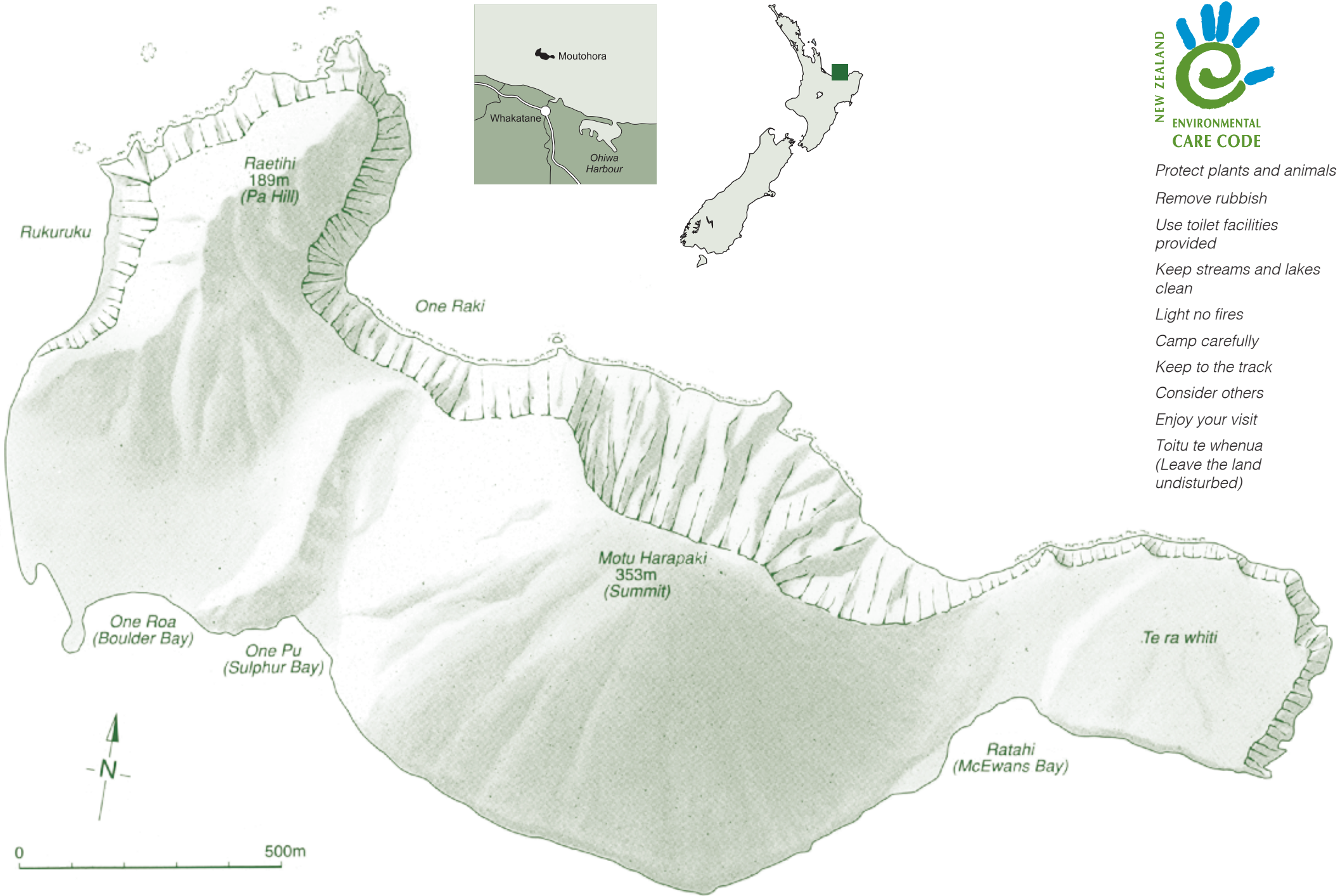
Copper skink. Photo: © Len Doel.

Tuatara were released onto the island in 1996 but it will be several decades before they become common. Tieke (North Island saddleback) were released in 1999 to rekindle cultural traditions of Ngāti Awa concerning the Mataatua waka. Tieke are commonly seen or heard and are a colourful addition to the island.



Northern tuatara, released onto Moutohorā in 1996. Photo: © Len Doel.

Since 2001 young kiwi sourced from the Whakatane Kiwi Project have been released on Moutohorā. The aim is to establish a breeding population of at least 24 birds.



- Protect plants and animals*
- Remove rubbish*
- Use toilet facilities provided*
- Keep streams and lakes clean*
- Light no fires*
- Camp carefully*
- Keep to the track*
- Consider others*
- Enjoy your visit*
- Toitu te whenua (Leave the land undisturbed)*