

RISING — to the — CHALLENGE

Stories from the Covid-19 crisis



The Covid-19 lockdown has given Taranaki Mounga a chance to breathe - and rejuvenate.

TARANAKI MOUNGA: COVID 19 AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE MOUNGA TO BREATHE

Iconic Taranaki Mounga has had an opportunity to rejuvenate during the Covid-19 lockdown, says local iwi.

“The lockdown has allowed the environment and particularly Taranaki Mounga time to breathe,” says Taranaki Mounga Chair and iwi leader Jamie Tuuta.

“Culturally it has allowed our Mounga to balance himself. This has helped by no-one tramping around him.”

Taranaki Mounga, which has huge cultural and spiritual value for Māori and non-Māori, is the centrepiece of the project by the same name, which is restoring the ecological resilience of the Mounga and its surrounds. The project is a partnership between Taranaki Iwi Chairs Forum, the Department of Conservation (DOC), NEXT, government agencies and Taranaki businesses and community. It aims to rid the Mounga of animal and plant pests, restore lost species and strengthen the pool of some existing bird species.

Tuuta says the impact of the project was felt during the lockdown - its people noticed more birdlife.

“This could be our own rebalancing with nature during this time,” he said.

“In Taranaki, the Covid-19 reset is an opportunity for us all to connect with our Mounga in our own way.”

“As we emerge from these most extraordinary circumstances we need to come together as people to look after each other, and just as importantly, the environment that defines so much of who we are, and that we are all completely dependent on.”

Jan Hania
NEXT environmental director

Under Covid-19 Level 2 protocol the Mouna is now open for visitors and trampers, with strict cleaning, hygiene and social distancing guidelines. Conservation workers, including volunteers, are also back at work.

Taranaki Mouna Acting Project Manager Sera Gibson says there was no predator control in the Egmont National Park during Level 4 – and during Level 3 a small number of the Taranaki Mouna DOC rangers checked and reset the possum detection network on the Kaitake Range. The wider DOC biodiversity team was also able to service and bait the stoat trapping network.

“We respected and adhered to all the restrictions during lockdown. And whilst there has been some disruption in our predator control we are now able to clear traps of dead possums and stoats, and also picking up some activity on our sensor cameras,” she says.

“Our team is delighted to be fully back at work and its fabulous to welcome our volunteers trappers back at level two.”

Lockdown presented some unscheduled opportunities for the Taranaki Mouna team, including Taranaki Mouna DOC ranger Tama Blackburn who stockpiled materials and made more than 100 ferret traps.

“These are now being deployed onto our existing stoat and possum networks on the Pouakai Range and Mount Taranaki. “

“Restoring Koro Taranaki is important to Tama and his whānau, and the rest of the Taranaki Mouna team. This shows the level of commitment we have within our conservation team.”

Around the same time as lockdown three juvenile whio ducklings were quietly released into the Kapuni Stream on the south side of the Mouna, after a planned public release was cancelled due to the Covid-19 crisis. Whio breeding has been one of the early success stories of the Taranaki Mouna project, and the juveniles will help to grow the population of this endangered species. This year has seen a record number of ducklings on the mountain with 87 recorded, as compared to 33 last year, largely due to the extending trap network, a recent 1080 operation and exceptional volunteer contribution to servicing the trapping networks.

NEXT environmental director Jan Hania says the mahi by the Taranaki Mouna team and the whole Taranaki community is starting to pay dividends, and the Covid-19 crisis reiterates how important it is for New Zealanders to care for our land – and our people.

“As Jamie Tuuta says, this crisis has given Taranaki Mouna a chance to breathe,” he says.

“That’s important for our people too. As we emerge from these most extraordinary circumstances we need to come together as people to look after each other, and just as importantly, the environment that defines so much of who we are, and that we are all completely dependent on.”

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