

# The island life

Little Barrier Island in Auckland's Hauraki Gulf could soon join the likes of the Grand Canyon and the Great Wall of China as a World Heritage Site.

Brian Hartz gets to know the humans – and other animals – who call it home.



It takes a special type of person to willingly commit to a three-year stint on a remote island where rare species of reptiles, insects and birds count as your only neighbours. But it's a life less ordinary that agrees with Shane McInnes and Liz Whitwell so much that they've asked for a two-year extension.

The couple work as Department of Conservation (DOC) rangers on Little Barrier Island in the Hauraki Gulf, about 80km northwest of Auckland. They're charged with protecting the island's bio-security as well as studying and caring for its unique flora and fauna.

Also known as Hauturu – Maori for "resting place of the wind" – Little Barrier has been hailed as New Zealand's most unspoiled ecosystem.

A protected nature reserve

where no landings are permitted except for scientific and conservation purposes, Hauturu is home to more endangered bird species – many of which are no longer found on mainland New Zealand – than any other island in the country. In addition to supporting iconic threatened creatures such as kiwi and tuatara, the 2187-hectare island also contains more than 400 species of native plants.

At first it was a lonely assignment for McInnes as Whitwell wasn't able to join him full-time for the first two months.

Now together, DOC has provided a phone service, broadband Internet access and satellite TV to help keep the couple connected with the outside world and they look forward to the fortnightly mail runs from DOC's Devonport-based supply ves-

sel to replenish their food and fuel stocks.

The work – an endless array of challenges requiring a jack-of-all-trades skill set – also keeps them busy. One day they'll be fixing a generator or patrolling the island's perimeter by boat, the next writing a detailed scientific report on the captive tuatara breeding program.

But it remains a solitary life which suits McInnes and Whitwell.

"Yeah, we're pretty happy out here," McInnes says.

"Some days when it's raining and blowing and you don't want to be outside doing the job, you think it might be nice to be back on the mainland. But all we have to do is spend half a day there in the noise and traffic and we're ready to get back to the island."

It's a good thing that McInnes and

Whitwell like the quiet life because they find it awkward holidaying together given that the island must be manned at all times.

"We generally go off as a couple only once a year, during winter, when there isn't much activity and DOC can find a temporary replacement for us," McInnes says.

The rangers receive a generous amount of assistance from volunteers associated with the Little Barrier Island Supporters' Trust.

Established in 1997, the trust supports the conservation of the indigenous values of Hauturu and its significance as a wildlife sanctuary of international importance. Although it works closely with the DOC, as a charitable trust it receives no government funding and must rely on a network of volunteers willing to donate time, money or services.

## What's a World Heritage Site?

New Zealand has three World Heritage sites: Te Wahipounamu (Southwest New Zealand including Mount Cook National Park and Fiordland National Park), Tongariro National Park and the Sub-Antarctic Islands (the Snares, Bounty Islands, Antipodes Islands, Auckland Islands and Campbell Island).

World Heritage status recognises the universal and internationally significant natural and cultural values of an area, attracting increased national and international interest along with greater scrutiny in the overall management, development,

preservation and enhancement of a site.

In March 2005, after looking at a number of sites throughout the region, the Auckland Regional Council singled out the Auckland volcanic field and Little Barrier Island as being the most appropriate sites to put forward for consideration as World Heritage Sites.

"Hauturu (Little Barrier) is a sanctuary that all Aucklanders and New Zealanders can be proud of," said Graeme Murdoch, ARC's then-director of heritage.

"The wildlife, particularly bird life, on the island is abundant with many species which don't do so well on the mainland thriving here. It has become a haven for a full range of forest birds, plus tuatara and giant weta. World Heritage status would strengthen the overall value of the island, and may lead to greater protection in years to come."

Shona Myers, Murdoch's successor at ARC, told *Boating New Zealand* that Little Barrier Island and the Auckland volcanic field are still in the running for World Heritage Site status.

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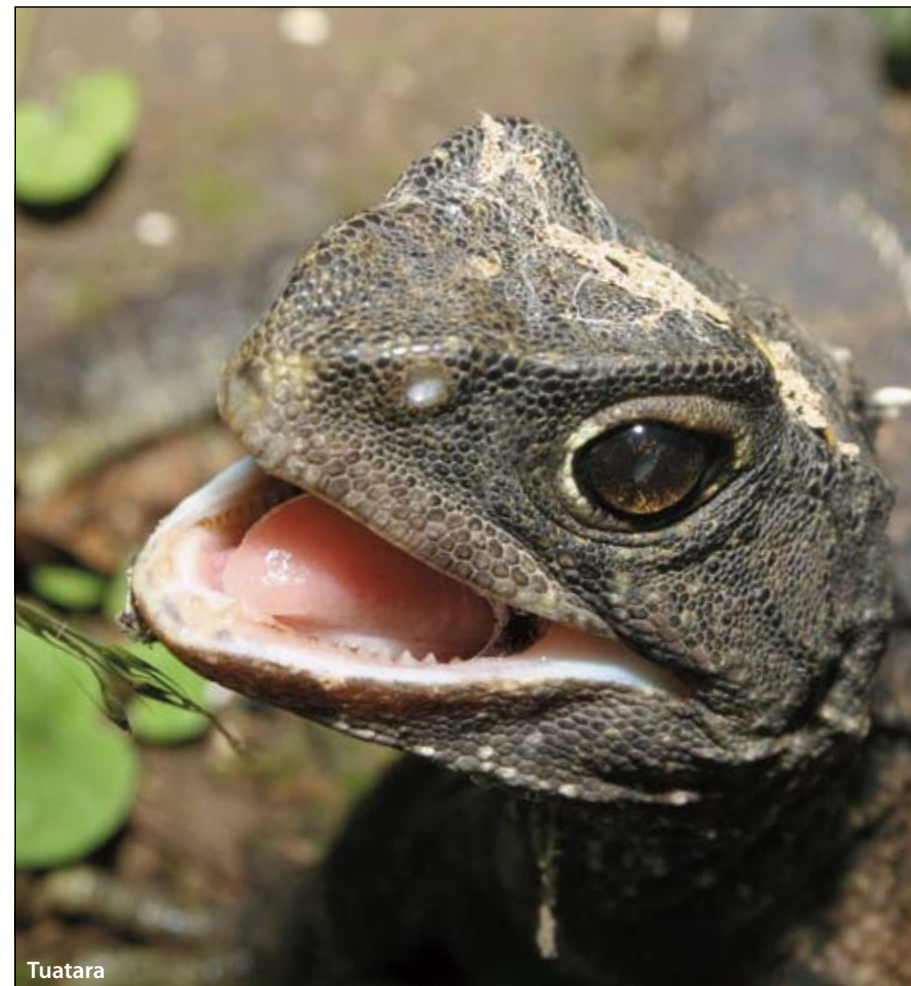
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Tuatara



Kaka



Bellbirds

As a way of thanking these people the trust chartered a 360 Discovery ferry, *MV Kawau Cat V*, in mid-April for a leisurely cruise to Hauturu and invited *Boating New Zealand* along for the ride.

Trustee Ruud Kleinpaste – an entomologist known as The Bugman to readers of *Boating's* sister publication *Growing Today* – was master of ceremonies aboard *MV Kawau Cat V*. He skillfully supplied plenty of information, humour and, as it turned out, sympathy for the unlucky souls who became seasick during the six-hour round-trip cruise from Auckland.

En-route to the island, which became a protected nature reserve in 1895, Kleinpaste and other trustees emphasised that despite a strict no-landing policy and restrictions on recreational vessels' actions near the island, boaties aren't enemies of the trust. Far from it, in fact; the trust relies on boaties to act as its eyes and ears, reporting any sus-

picious activity on or around Hauturu.

If you're keen to set foot on the island, taking part in one of the trust's working weekends – in which volunteers help out with weeding, infrastructure maintenance and other tasks under the supervision of McInnes and Whitwell – is a great way to visit Hauturu. However, any visit to the island, no matter how potentially beneficial, must be approved by DOC's Warkworth office.

Hauturu's southern shore has a relatively sheltered area where the rangers can launch their custom-built 5.5m Surtees aluminium runabout when they need to get to parts of the island that are inaccessible on foot – or rendezvous with a ferry filled with the Little Barrier Island Supporters' Trust and friends.

Boaties will surely be impressed with the rangers' boatshed and ramp which allows all-tide, single-handed launching and retrieval via an

electrically operated cradle that glides up and down a set of rails. As the ferry's passengers looked on, McInnes launched the Surtees and drove out to pick up a mooring. With the runabout secured, the ferry captain skilfully reversed the nimble *Kawau Cat V* up to the waiting ranger and crew helped him aboard where McInnes conducted a question-and-answer session about life on the island.

The rangers are warranted under the Conservation Act to enforce the no-landing policy at Little Barrier Island – meaning they can make arrests if necessary. McInnes would like to see a zone around the island prohibiting anchoring, fishing and diving but admits that DOC's jurisdiction

ends at mean low water spring, making boaties responsible for self-policing in the waters near Hauturu.

"I'd say ninety-nine percent of boaties know they should keep their distance, but every now and then we'll come across someone who's landed and we'll have to have a chat with them," McInnes said.

"DOC frowns upon landing because so much money has been spent on making the island predator and pest free. Little Barrier is perhaps New Zealand's best nature reserve so we have to take a hard stance against illegal landings."

Although nominated in 2005, Hauturu hasn't yet joined locations such as the Great Barrier Reef as a UNESCO

World Heritage Site (see sidebar page 49). But Hauturu, says the trust's patron, artist and ornithologist Don Binney, is one of Earth's most special places

"It's arguably the last virtually intact example of northern New Zealand biosphere," Binney says.

"It is one of the few island spaces anywhere that has resisted almost entirely human encroachment, social encroachment and developmental encroachment. Little Barrier is a global wonder, a global treasure... something for the world to look after."

#### Little Barrier Island Supporters' Trust:

Denise Le Noel, (09) 916 8860 or 021 614 524, [info@littlebarrierisland.org.nz](mailto:info@littlebarrierisland.org.nz), [www.littlebarrierisland.org.nz](http://www.littlebarrierisland.org.nz)



Shane McInnes and Liz Whitwell

## Visiting Little Barrier Island

Little Barrier Island enjoys an exceptional degree of biodiversity due in large part to the near-total absence of humans and invasive plant and animal species. Thus, you'll need a permit from the Department of Conservation to visit Little Barrier Island. Apply to DOC's Warkworth office: [warkworth@doc.govt.nz](mailto:warkworth@doc.govt.nz) (09) 425 7812.



The rangers' boathouse and launching ramp



McInnes aboard DOC's customised Surtees

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