

► Our connection to Tupuārangi

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NATURE AND PEOPLE

Mātauranga Māori tells us that shifts in the mauri of any part of an ecosystem eventually affect the whole system (see the [Matariki section](#) for the definition of mauri used in this report). The use or harvest of parts of the ecosystem such as birds and plants may cause such shifts in mauri. Any damage or contamination to the environment will therefore also cause loss of, or damage to, mauri (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013).

Some believe that if the stars Tupuānuku and Tupuārangi shine brightly when Matariki rises in the new year, people can plan for a plentiful harvest of crops, as well as berries, fruits, and birds from the forest (Matamua, 2017). Reflecting the connection of Tupuārangi to birds, during the rising of Matariki, kererū (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) were harvested in large numbers and preserved for the months ahead. This is seen in the proverb 'Ka kitea a Matariki, kua maoka te hinu' ('When Matariki is seen the fat of the kererū is rendered so the birds can be preserved') (Matamua, 2017).

The connections some Māori have with Tupuārangi can be demonstrated with the kererū. Historically, Tūhoe Tuawhenua (an iwi located in the Ruatāhuna region in Te Urewera) harvested kererū only in a particular season as a food source and for special occasions. There were strict observances around who would harvest kererū, as well as the ways in which their meat and feathers would be used and prepared (Timoti et al, 2017).

More recently, Tūhoe Tuawhenua have also reflected on the loss of kererū from the Te Urewera Ranges, particularly after the 1950s. Given the close linkages between kererū and Tūhoe Tuawhenua, some iwi members believe their declining interactions with kererū have contributed to the decline of the birds' population (Lyver et al, 2008).

This loss of connection to Tupuārangi shows how the loss of access to ecosystems can diminish the sense of connection to place, identity (especially through whakapapa/genealogy), and mana (power, authority). It also leads to the loss of Māori knowledge (mātauranga Māori) which comes from engaging with the environment (Lyver et al, 2008).

Practices concerning the harvesting of tītī (sooty shearwater or muttonbird) in the islands around Stewart Island (Rakiura) provide a further example of the inherent connections of humans to ecosystems – and the physical and spiritual worlds – in Māori worldviews. Tītī are an important source of food. Chicks are harvested by Rakiura Māori, who hold the manawhenua (territorial rights) on local breeding sites (King et al, 2013).

For Rakiura Māori, the harvesting of tītī (or 'muttonbirding') has not only food purposes but also significant social and cultural importance: in particular kinship links, the importance of keeping access rights to resources, and maintaining cultural knowledge (Wanhalla, 2009). Similar practices happen elsewhere in Aotearoa – for example, on islands off the Coromandel Peninsula iwi harvest small numbers of grey-faced petrel chicks (King et al, 2013).

Maintaining and rebuilding connections to customary harvesting of food (kai) reconnects people with land (whenua), wetlands (repo), and other ecosystems. Further, this supports the transmission of knowledge to the generations to come (Herse et al, 2021; Waitangi Tribunal, 2011).

Tupuārangi is also connected with plants and trees. Growing in our repo, harakeke has always been and continues to be an important resource in the Māori culture and economy. As well as being used for a wide range of medicinal applications, its leaves can be woven into baskets and other containers, mats, and clothing. The fibre (muka) can be twisted, plaited, and woven to make useful objects such as fishnets and traps, footwear, and ropes (DOC, 2022; Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research, 2022).