



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Code of conduct for researchers and volunteers on Tiritiri Matangi Island



The following code of conduct, agreed between the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi (SOTM) and the Department of Conservation (DOC), applies to all researchers and volunteers working on fauna and flora on Tiritiri Matangi Island (including researchers' assistants, volunteers working on SoTM projects, the weed team, pest monitoring team, etc.). Some sections are also relevant for DOC volunteers, SoTM volunteers (for instance on working weekends) and contract workers.

It is a privilege to work on this beautiful island amongst so many rare and endemic species. This code of conduct is intended to ensure that the Island's wildlife and habitats, and other people on the Island, are treated with respect and consideration, and that your work is carried out with due regard for your own safety and the safety of others.

1. Permits

All research activities on the Island must be authorised by a permit from the Department of Conservation (DOC). You need to be familiar with the permit conditions, whether you are leading a project or assisting with one. If you are leading a project it is your responsibility to show your permit to all researchers and volunteers working with you and to ensure they comply with it. As part of the conditions you need to have your permit with you – this is especially important in case your actions on the Island are questioned. It is also your responsibility to inform the Island Rangers about your project, let them know you are coming a week in advance, and to provide them with at least the permit number for their reference.

2. Health and safety

All research and volunteer work carried out on the Island is covered by a **Health and Safety Plan**. This could be the DOC plan, of which a copy is kept in the implement shed, and/or the *Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc. Health and Safety Management Plan*. Please also see your permit conditions for Health and Safety requirements .

If you are leading a project or supervising volunteers, you are responsible for ensuring that everyone involved has read the relevant sections of the appropriate health and safety plan and signed to say they have read it (you must also do this yourself, of course). If you are assisting with a project and/or working under supervision, don't wait for your project leader/supervisor to show you the plan – ask them about it and ensure that you read and understand it and sign to say that you have. If you volunteer on more than one project, you must read and sign the relevant health and safety plan for each project, and if your work spans more than one year, you must ensure that you read and sign it at the beginning of each year's work – the plan may have changed since the previous year.

Above all, of course, **follow the rules and guidelines in the health and safety plan**. They are there for your benefit and the benefit of those you work with.

3. Going off track

NB: 'off-track' means away from the designated public tracks. Working on the marked trails used by researchers in the bush constitutes 'off-track'.

- **Everyone going off-track must wear a badge**

A badge indicates to the public and others that you have permission to be off-track; without a badge you could be questioned by someone who has themselves been told to keep to the public tracks and is wondering why you are not doing so.

• Types of Badges

There are three kinds of badges:

- personal name badges worn by regular volunteers,
- generic ‘Researcher’ badges, worn by most researchers,
- generic ‘Volunteer’ badges.

Day visits? A supply of the ‘Researcher badges’ is kept in the ute that meets the ferry each day; these can be collected by volunteers and researchers on day visits and returned the same day when they leave.

Staying overnight? Your badges are kept in the Ranger’s Office and the implement shed. If you cannot find a badge, ask the Island Rangers or your project leader for one.

All ‘Researcher’ and ‘Volunteer’ badges must remain on the Island. Please return them to the Ranger (or replace them in the ute) when you leave, even if you are planning to return in the near future. This is important because the badges may be needed by others while you are off the Island.

• Who should be off track with you?

Remember that the permission to be off-track **applies only to the research/volunteer work you are involved in**. It does not extend to your spare time on the Island or to casual day visits, etc. Only those who are authorised to go off-track may do so. Overnight visitors staying in the bunkhouse may ask if they can see what you do. If this means taking them off-track **it is not permitted** (there is a notice to this effect in the bunkhouse common room); it would be a breach of health and safety guidelines and could be a breach of permit conditions. So if anyone asks if they may go with you off-track, please refuse politely and explain why.

4. Discretion when working off-track

It is very important **not** to create the impression that going off-track is generally permitted; it is a privilege granted to those who need to do it because of their work. Please be discreet about working off-track. If members of the public are present, wait until they pass before you step off-track. Be careful not to create visible tracks into the bush or through long grass (‘fluff up’ the grass at regular entry points so that it doesn’t look trampled). Try not to draw attention to yourself when off-track (for instance, do not shout out when public visitors are near). It is especially important to be discreet when watching nests.

5. Wildlife awareness

Remember that the species you are working on is just one of many using the Island’s habitats. You may be watching a kokako nest, for instance, but you could be sitting under a tui or bellbird nest without realising it. You may need to cross an area of bracken and muehlenbeckia, which could risk disturbing a fernbird nest. It is absolutely essential that you minimise the disturbance caused by your work to non-target species. This is especially important for possibly lengthy tasks such as mist-netting and nest-watching.

For this reason, it can be useful to share knowledge of nests, tuatara burrows, etc., with other researchers/volunteers, **but only with them**. Knowledge of nests and burrows, if casually passed on to others, especially bunkhouse guests, has in the past encouraged people to hang around nesting areas, or even go off track for a peep. This is against the interests of the wildlife and it may even disrupt your research.

If you are in an unfamiliar part of the Island and do not know what is around you, look and listen – apart from avoiding disturbance to other species, you might learn something useful to other researchers.

6. Behaviour around bird boxes and reptile shelters

Nestboxes are provided for five species on Tiritiri (hihi, saddleback, kakariki, rifleman and penguin). There are also some roost boxes provided for saddleback. Unless you have been asked to do so, please **do not look into boxes** used by species other than those you are working on. This is important because too much attention could cause some birds to desert their nests (and mess up other researchers’ data). If it is necessary for you to walk past or stand close to nestboxes, please be as discreet as possible. If you know a particular nestbox is in use, stay well away from it if you can or minimise the time spent in the vicinity.

If a nestbox provided for your target species happens to be used by another species (for instance a rifleman in a hihi box), please let the researchers/volunteers working on that species know about it, give them the location of the box and hand over to them the responsibility for monitoring it. If you have taken over monitoring in these circumstances, you should inform the relevant research team once the nest has fledged or failed, so that they can take back responsibility for checking it.

Shelters, usually attached to trees but sometimes on the ground, are provided for some reptile species, mainly geckos. It is equally important that these are not disturbed except by those studying and monitoring them.

7. Use of playback calls

Playback calls and songs are commonly used to monitor bird populations and attract birds for catching. It is very important to understand that, as well as being research tools, they interrupt and change birds' natural behaviour – in fact, if they didn't do this they would be no use for research. The use of playback calls, 'squeakers', bird imitations, etc., is generally forbidden on the Island, and one reason for this is the danger of birds becoming too used to them and therefore ignoring them when they need to be caught for research or welfare reasons. This can also result if researchers overuse playback calls. Please keep the use of playback calls to the minimum necessary to carry out your work. In particular, please do not play the calls of species other than those you are targeting, and above all, never use playback for casual reasons – for example to show birds to visiting friends or guided groups.

8. Use of flagging tape

Researchers and volunteers need to find their way around the bush – to mark trails to nests and nestboxes, vegetation plots, and so on. The sheer amount of research and monitoring carried out on Tiritiri means that there is a great deal of coloured flagging tape in the bush (visitors often comment on it), most of it pink or orange, these being the most visible colours (**use of blue tape is reserved for the weed teams**, please do not use blue tape for any other purpose).

For aesthetic, environmental and practical reasons, it is preferable to minimise the amount of flagging tape used on the Island.

- Some trails and sites need to be permanently marked because they are used annually (to monitor nest boxes or lizard shelters, or to mark weed sites, for instance).
- Others need only temporary marking and tape should be removed once fieldwork is complete; eg vegetation plots used for an MSc or PhD project, also nests of birds that are not going to use the same site again.

Please be diligent about removing any flagging tape that is no longer needed. Apart from being unsightly and bad for the environment (the plastic takes a long time to break down), it is confusing for researchers and volunteers to be faced with more flagging than they need. It goes without saying, of course, that you should remove only the flagging that was put up specifically for the project you are working on!

It is also important to be discreet in the use of flagging tape, especially close to the tracks used by visitors. A small piece that becomes visible only as you approach is better than a long piece that waves in the breeze and signals its presence to everyone. Use only as much flagging tape as you absolutely need to do your work. Also, please be discreet in what you write (if anything) on flagging tape. A message that signals 'Kokako nest this way' is obviously inappropriate and potentially disastrous. Keep it to something only your research team will understand.

9. Awareness of cultural sites

Tiritiri Matangi is of value for historical and cultural reasons as well as for nature conservation and scientific study. In addition to the historic precinct, which incorporates the lighthouse, foghorns and associated buildings, there are many Maori sites on the Island, including two pa, terrace sites, kumara pits, middens and two urupa (burial sites). While researchers and volunteers are not expected to know the locations of all these, it is important to acknowledge and respect their presence and to understand they are protected by law. Most researcher/volunteer activities are not of a kind that would damage historic or archaeological sites, but if your

work involves, for instance, digging or the placement of structures, it is important to check with the Island's rangers that no damage to cultural sites would ensue.

10. Using the 'Intentions Sheets'

When you go off-track it is important that others know where you are going and for how long. This is largely for your own safety; if you are late returning it could be because you've had an accident, and we need to know where to search for you. There might also be reasons why you might need to be contacted urgently – for instance if there is a message from your family, or if the ferry has been cancelled or re-scheduled.

- **If you are staying in the bunkhouse** and are working off-track during the day, either alone or with others, **it is essential that you fill in the intentions sheet in the implement shed**, indicating where you will be, your time of departure, what you are working on and your expected time of return. There is also a column for you to write your cell phone number (**keep your phone with you and turned on at all times**). Remember to sign yourself in when you return, or people might worry about you unnecessarily.
- **If you are on the Island for a day's fieldwork**, please fill in the intentions sheet that is kept in a box on the ute's trailer (and remember to sign in again when you catch the departing ferry).

If you are staying in the bunkhouse and planning to work outside at night, write your intentions and phone number on the whiteboard in the common room.

11. Sharing space with others (see the 'House Rules' on the bunkhouse notice board)

Researchers and volunteers often have to stay on the Island for spells of several days or, in the case of the annual hihi researcher, several months. This means sharing living space with others – paying visitors as well as other researchers and volunteers. Space in the bunkhouse is very tight – for cooking, eating, storing food, sleeping and for computer work, which you might have to do as part of your project. The dining table is a convenient place to set up your laptop, but it is also somewhere others want to eat, read, play cards or other games. Please be considerate in your use of shared space and organise your activities with regard for the needs of others. If you wish to play music or listen to the radio, please be courteous and ask others present whether they mind you doing so. You will probably find yourself sharing sleeping accommodation with others whose daily routine is different from yours. Please tell them in advance if you are working late at night or early in the morning, and move around as quietly as possible when others are trying to sleep.

The bunkhouse is cleaned daily and overnight visitors usually do the bulk of this work in the morning before they leave. Research and monitoring work can mean that you are not available at the right time to participate in the regular morning clean-up. Even if you are working odd hours and staying long-term, you are expected to play your part in keeping the bunkhouse clean and tidy on a daily basis.

12. Dealing with sick or injured wildlife

You might occasionally come across sick or injured wildlife in the course of your work (most likely birds, but possibly also reptiles). Sickness is different from injury, in that it may indicate a source of infection that needs to be dealt with. The most appropriate response to sickness or injury will depend on the individual circumstances. In general, the following guidelines should be followed:

As a general rule, if you find a sick or injured animal, carefully note its location, leave it where it is (especially in cases of sickness) and inform the Island Rangers. They will advise you what to do, inform whoever needs to know, and/or make a decision.

If you find a recently-dead animal whose death could have been caused by sickness, it may be important to send it for post-mortem. Do not handle the animal yourself (this is important as there is a danger of catching or spreading infection), but note and mark its precise location and inform the rangers and (if you know them) relevant project leaders.

And finally...

Stay safe and enjoy your time on the Island and the company of the wildlife and people who share it with you.