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### **Conserving the health of people and the land for annual Pipiwharauoa hikoi**

Loving a communal backyard taonga was the underlying message as over 50 keen walkers gathered for the annual Pipiwharauoa: Hikoi for Healthy Nature, Healthy People walk around Lake Ngatu yesterday.

As part of Conservation Week celebrations in Te Hiku, the event is now in its second year and creates an opportunity for Far North communities to connect with the natural environment and each other using the Department of Conservation-managed walking track as a vehicle for sustaining health and wellness.

The pipiwharauoa has also become a deserving symbol of the annual hikoi, which is hosted by Te Rūnanga o NgāiTakoto to mark the return of Spring and the lakebed to the iwi from its settlement in 2015.

Healthy Families Far North was directly involved in the event's co-ordination and inaugural launch last year and has since moved into a support role.

"The ongoing collaboration between our partners, NgāiTakoto and the Department of Conservation, has been a wonderful outcome. Pipiwharauoa epitomises what is possible when we turn our gaze away from reactionary measures to chronic disease prevalence and come with a strength-based approach that celebrates our relationships with each other and the beautiful resources at our fingertips," says Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown.

As the bird's distinctive call resonated across the waters, kaumatua Kaio Awarau said its return to the area had marked the return of Spring for as long as he could remember.

"This bird has travelled from the mid Pacific, from the Kermadec Islands and from the Solomon Islands. What happens is it catches the trade winds that bring it right down the east coast of Australia and then across the Tasman Sea to Aotearoa. So it's a significant time for all of us to be here today to celebrate the arrival of the Pipiwharauoa," he said.



In addition to the track walk, members of the community were also involved in diving for kuta and creating kawakawa balm lakeside, to further build on traditional health and wellbeing practices.

Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Takoto CEO Rangitane Marsden says the ongoing conservation effort in and around the lake is a high priority for iwi as it moves into post-settlement phase.

“Our objectives into the future are to bring and connect people back to the land, so every opportunity we have to do that is a real positive for us. We have a good relationship with DOC, as a result of long conversations and agreements around how we partner and work together into the future. We have a major korowai conservation strategy being developed, alongside the community, because health and wellbeing is who we are as a people,” he says.

## **Ends**

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