

[View weather](#)

[View tide data](#)

- [Your Council](#)

- [News and Events](#)

The latest Council news and events

- [Meet the team](#)

Our staff and elected representatives

- [Meetings and Agendas](#)

Find out about upcoming meetings and read agendas

- [Community outcomes](#)

Social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing

- [Requests for Information](#)

How to request official information from the Council

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- [Local elections 2022](#)

Information on the upcoming local election

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- [Previous newsletters](#)

- [Our submissions](#)

- [Services](#)

- [Primary Services](#)

[Infrastructure](#) [Waste Management](#) [Pest Management](#) [Biodiversity](#) [Emergency Management](#) [Resource Management](#)

- [Community and Culture](#)

[Animal Control](#) [Cemeteries](#) [Library Services](#) [Gambling Venues Policy](#) [Historic Places](#) [Heartlands](#)

- [Rates, Consents and Licensing](#)

[Your Rates](#) [Building and Resource Consents](#) [Food and Alcohol Licensing](#) [Council Dues & Charges](#)

- [Coastal Services](#)

[Port Charges](#) [Navigation Safety](#) [Swing Moorings](#) [Marine Pests](#)

- [Environmental Data](#)

[Rainfall Data](#) [River Flow and Water Level Data](#) [Soil Temperature Data](#) [Tide Predictions](#) [Water Quality Data](#) [Wind Data](#)

- [Essential Freshwater package](#)

[What are the new regulations?](#) [Freshwater Farm Plans](#) [Wetland management](#) [Stock exclusion](#) [Fish passage](#)

- [Documents](#)

- [Annual Plan](#)

Sets out our work and priorities for the next financial year

- [Long-Term Plan](#)

Our work and priorities for the next decade

- [Annual Report](#)

An overview of the Council's activity

- [Resource Management Document](#)

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[View tide data](#)

Resource management framework summary

- [Regional Land Transport Programme](#)

Transport priorities for 2021 - 2031

- [Dog Control Policy & Bylaw](#)

Dog Control Bylaw overview

- [Vehicles on Beaches Bylaw](#)

Waitangi Beach vehicle bylaw

- [Rates Remission Policy on Māori & Moriori Freehold Land](#)

- [Navigation Safety Bylaws](#)

Managing boating and other activities on water

- [CDEM Group Plan](#)

Understanding hazards and risks to build capability

- [Investment Strategy](#)

A report on the Chatham Islands economy

- [Annual Plan](#)

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- [Search all Documents](#)

- [Contact](#)

- [View weather](#)

- [View tide data](#)

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- [News and Events](#)
- [Meet the team](#)
- [Meetings and Agendas](#)
- [Community outcomes](#)
- [Requests for Information](#)
- [Visit the Chatham Islands](#)
- [Local elections 2022](#)
- [Subscribe to our newsletter](#)
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Detector dogs with a nose for biosecurity

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The Chatham Islands recently had visitors of the canine variety as part of our ongoing work to keep the Islands free from Argentine and Darwin's ants and plague skink (also known as rainbow skink).

Dogs Jamie and Stella, alongside (human) handlers Brian and Laura, are part of the Department of Conservation's Conservation Dogs Programme. It's a nationwide programme that supports dog-handler teams to detect Aotearoa's protected species or in this case, unwanted pests.

Argentine ants are one of the world's top ten invasive species. They pose a serious threat to biodiversity by forming aggressive super colonies with equally large appetites. They take food away from nectar eating birds such as tūī, invertebrates and lizards.

Plague skinks are able to reach high population numbers in a short amount of time and can compete with native lizard species for food, habitat and space.

We're thrilled to report that no ants or skink were detected and the team will be back next year to check again. A big thank you to the Department of Conservation and Auckland Council, Brian, and Laura for supporting our biosecurity work on the Chatham Islands.

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[Local elections 2022](#)

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[View weather](#)

[View tide data](#)

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[Meetings and Agendas](#)

[Community Outcomes](#)

[Requests for Information](#)

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[Primary Services](#)

[Community and Culture](#)

[Rates, Consents and Licensing](#)

[Coastal Services](#)

[Environmental Data](#)

[Essential Freshwater](#)

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[Search all Documents](#)

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