

FAST FACTS

Amazing Mollusks

Green-lipped mussels are known for their health benefits.

1

A superfood bursting with anti-inflammatory nutrients

2

A natural treatment for arthritis in humans and animals

3

A staple of New Zealand's Indigenous Māori people's diet

Bay Boosters

RECENTLY, AS PART OF A MISSION TO restore shellfish beds in New Zealand, barges dropped millions of farm-grown green-lipped mussels, or kūtai, into the Hauraki Gulf near Auckland. The Nature Conservancy is working with Indigenous Māori people and other partners to bring back the mussels, which have been decimated by decades of overfishing and agricultural runoff.

“Kūtai have an outsized impact on the healthy function of marine ecosystems by providing food, a safe place for juvenile fish to grow, and by improving water quality itself,” says Erik van Eyndhoven, TNC’s director of conservation in New Zealand. “They do a lot of heavy lifting.”

The Revive Our Gulf project has placed about 37 million kūtai since 2013—with a long-term goal of restoring them across more than 240,000 acres—but it’s challenging to reestablish the keystone species because of its complex lifecycle.

“We want a thriving, flourishing natural world,” says Nicola MacDonald, a descendent of the Ngāti Wai Tribe, who led the deployment on behalf of the Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust, a project partner. “That entire water space was a green-lipped carpet, and we want to return that carpet back to the Hauraki Gulf.” —P.L.



ONLINE: Help restore reef beds in the Hauraki Gulf at nature.org/mussels.

DROP ZONE: Green-lipped mussels are deposited into New Zealand’s Kāwau Bay to restore shellfish beds and attract species like fish, rays, seaweed and sponges.

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