Judge's report:
An enormously fun competition to judge, giving me an education on the 2025 bug nominees with admirable research included in the writing, and a winning poem for each bug meant I could select a great variety of impressive poems. There were persona poems (written from the voice of the bug), apostrophe poems (talking to the bug), sonnets, alternative song lyrics, concrete poems (in the shape of a bug), and plenty of word play and humour – humour by the net-full! There were also quite a lot of rhyming poems where the rhyme often ended up taking over at the expense of the grammar or sounding tired or trite. And we know bugs are anything but trite! However, there were plenty of cases where rhyme was used in innovative and clever ways, such as in poems with cross-rhyme, slant rhyme or rhyming with surprising words or attitude.

Poetry is ultimately about language – and using sounds (rhyme, rhythm, repetition), imagery (metaphor, sensory language) and shape (linebreaks, space etc) – to inspire, affect, make something new. The winning poem "The mothman finds an exquisite specimen" layered language in exquisite ways so that the lines made me gasp, laugh and tore at my heart. They held up quoted phrases from an historical source so we could see words from the past refreshed within the context of today's loss of diversity.

As for the subject matter, I think I most engaged with poems that explored our complex relationships with the insects, rather than description of them – as in the primary school winner's poem "Snail's spaghetti" which compared the protagonist with the Powelliphanta/Giant Ground Snail in strange and lovely ways, and the winning haiku "mānuka tea", which made an observation on the things we share.

All of these wonderful poems will stay with me for a very long time. A huge congratulations to the winners, but also to those of you entered, pouring out your words. Every one of you has given so much to the world, in the small but powerful way you worked your language for us to open our eyes to our tiny and most precious taonga.

Gail Ingram (NZPS)
2025 NZ Bug of the Year Poetry Competition, judged blind 12 Feb 2025