

## MIRO's Work in East Harbour Regional Park

MIRO is an entirely volunteer organisation, which in its earlier days was part of East Harbour Environmental Association, but since 2009 has been an Incorporated Society in its own right. Originally MIRO focussed on trapping possums because susceptible tree species in our local forest, such as rata, were being decimated. Now, after 20 years of trapping (400 traps serviced monthly, so approaching 100,000 site visits!), monitoring shows that possums have been kept at sufficiently low levels across the Northern Forest for the recovery of plant life. For example, a lot more rata blooms can be seen and we expect that there will be far fewer 'stag's heads'—the dead treetops caused by heavy possum browsing. Healthier bush means more food for birds, so birdsong in the forest is more plentiful and many tuis and some kereru now visit our urban areas. Although possum numbers are low, they are not quite low enough to stop bovine TB being transmitted through the population. For this reason, OSPRI are about to undertake more intensive control as part of their TBfree NZ programme.



Rata in the Northern Forest, 2012 Photo: Jill Bagnall

While possums decimate our forests, high numbers of stoats and rats attack the nests of many of our native bird species. To help our more susceptible bird species recover to a more sustainable level, the stoat and rat numbers need to be drastically reduced. To this end, in 2005 Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) established a Mainland Island in the forest, extending roughly from Days Bay to Kowhai Street and as far east as Gollans Stream. This is an area of intensive rat control by GWRC using poison bait stations. Mainland Islands are essentially sanctuaries without fences, so while they are somewhat less effective than fenced sanctuaries, they cost much less to establish and maintain. Rodent monitoring across the Mainland Island shows that rats have been kept below target levels for roughly half of the time, the problem being in beech mast years when the copious seed available means the rats quickly breed up to high levels. Better prediction of mast years will help with this, as will better control of the rat population in our urban areas. An indication of the success of the Mainland Island is that there is now a small population of kakariki (probably originating from Matiu/Somes Island) in the park.

All of MIRO's work in the park is done in close partnership with GWRC, who are ultimately responsible for park management. To help with the Mainland Island, MIRO operates 60 DOC200 predator traps there, targeting the other main predators of our native birds—stoats and weasels. More of these traps, housed in rectangular wooden boxes, are currently being installed, thanks to a GWRC grant. This will bring the total to over 200 traps, thus providing protection for our native birds from mustelids across the whole Northern Forest. Rat control outside the current Mainland Island remains a challenge for the future.

Two months ago, our Herald article covered our efforts to protect banded dotterels, which nest on the Eastbourne foreshore and on beaches beyond Pencarrow Head. In future articles, we will cover our work in growing plants using locally-sourced seed to speed up

forest regeneration in the Parangarahu Lakes area and how we monitor both pests and birdlife in the park. In addition, a new partnership between MIRO and Hutt City Council is taking shape in the form of a residential trapping project called ERAT, but more about that next time.

*Terry Webb— MIRO Chair*

Interested in helping MIRO? Email: [info@miro.org.nz](mailto:info@miro.org.nz)