

Urban trapping in Eastbourne and the Bays is about to go to the next level!

Working under the auspices of MIRO and in partnership with Hutt City Council (HCC) and local residents, the ERAT (Educating Residents Around Trapping) project is about to start a 3-year rollout of predator trapping across Eastbourne and the Bays.

For the past 18 months, ERAT has been running a loan scheme using 20 goodnature A24 traps purchased by HCC. The learning from this has been used to design a project that we hope will achieve sustainable predator control within the residential areas of Eastbourne, from Point Howard all the way to Burdans Gate and including the foreshore. This will be achieved by working with residents to create and run trap lines using a mix of traps (DOC200's, Snap-E rat traps in tunnels and goodnature A24 self-resetting traps) to establish an 80m² grid. Once in place, this will greatly diminish pests such as rats, mustelids (e.g. stoats and weasels) and hedgehogs, which will in turn help the survival of many of our native species such as lizards and ground-nesting penguins and dotterels, who have had to cope with so much habitat destruction and disturbance already.

The ERAT project has been designed to overcome three main difficulties:

1. Dislike of trapping. It has become very apparent that a lot of people do not wish to interact with rats or the yucky side of trapping. We will overcome this by offering to provide a regular trap clear and re-bait service by a trained neighbourhood trap line operator (a volunteer). In addition, we can provide an indicator arm on many of the traps that will alert the trap owner to the trap's being triggered, so there will be no need to even approach the trap.
2. Sustaining the effort. In our experience, many people start off setting traps with enthusiasm or due to necessity (for fear of damage to property), but the reality is that once the initial population has been controlled, trapping efforts fall away until rats are sighted again or damage reoccurs. This loss of enthusiasm is quite understandable, but for trapping to provide sufficient protection to vulnerable species, traps need to be kept set so that pest populations are always low. ERAT hopes to maintain a high level of effectiveness across the whole trap network by regular (at least monthly) visits by the neighbourhood trap line operator who will be expected to maintain traps and upload catch data to a website so that local hotspots can be identified. The volunteer operator will be thoroughly trained in how to maintain and keep the traps working safely and effectively and will be kept informed of the latest research going on in the field of urban pest control. They will also alert the property owner of the clearance of pests with notes left in letterboxes. We appreciate that many residents are already trapping or poisoning rats and mice effectively and we are very supportive of this. It would really help the ERAT Project, however, if we know who is doing their own trapping so that we can design the trap network accordingly, thus avoiding any duplication of effort.
3. Fear for pets and children's safety. ERAT has been able to appoint a local veterinarian to the project Steering Group to make sure that we not only stick to the guidelines of traps that are safe for our pets, but also that we achieve humane standards in regard to any animals that we are targeting. After all, it is not their fault that they are here and it is of the utmost importance that we remember and promote this understanding. It is because of human error that we have got into this situation and it is only through human/humane intervention that we can mitigate some of the damage we have caused through the introduction of these mammalian pests to New Zealand.

While we have some confidence that an effective urban trapping network will control pest animals, the ERAT Project will also put in place pest monitoring using tracking tunnels. This involves placing

inked cards in baited tunnels several times each year so that the prints from pests passing through the tunnels are recorded. The cards are analysed so that pest levels are determined and the trap network can be improved if required. Local schools and scout groups will be approached to help with this side of the project, with some schools already monitoring pests on the foreshore. Our aim here is to help educate the children about both the presence of pests and the native treasures we are trying to protect.

An initial spur into action for urban trapping was the long-term need for the next generation of trappers to, in time, take over from the keen volunteers who have been maintaining the pest trapping effort in East Harbour Regional Park for nearly 20 years under the banner of Mainland Island Restoration Operation—aka MIRO. A related issue is that the urban environment may act as a reservoir for rats when food in the neighbouring forest is in short supply, with the rats quickly reinvading the forest in a beech mast year. While we cannot currently control rat numbers in the forest, eliminating any urban reservoir will be very helpful when we are eventually able to mount a more effective campaign against rats there.

Last but not least, ERAT is about community resilience—the project aims to build good communication between residents and the trap line volunteers (who are also residents) with the aim of creating a community that unites to control pests, protect their homes, family and the natural treasures that exist around us in Eastbourne.

A launch of this next phase of the ERAT project will be held at the Eastbourne RSA on Saturday 24th June from 3.00 p.m.

Sally Bain—ERAT Project Manager and MIRO Committee Member

Interested in helping with ERAT?

Email: info@miro.org.nz or F: www.facebook.com/educatingresidentsaroundtrapping/