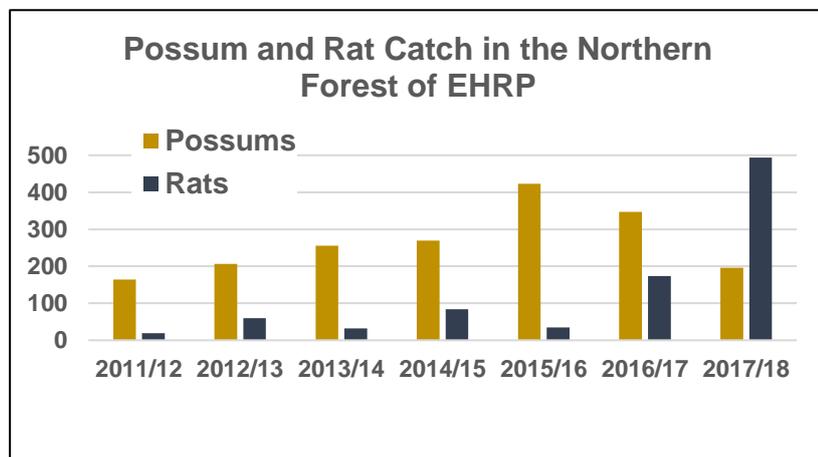


Catch in the Northern Forest

For nearly 20 years, MIRO has operated a network of traps in the Northern Forest of East Harbour Regional Park (EHRP), located in the hills behind Eastbourne. Starting with 18 Timms traps in 1999, this network now comprises 400 possum traps (with associated rat poison feeders) and over 200 DOC200 stoat traps. This volunteer trapping effort, well-supported by Greater Wellington, has kept the possum population sufficiently low for our native trees to recover from the severe possum browsing that occurred prior to the start of trapping, and many people have noted the increase in birdlife (e.g. kereru and tui).

The plot below shows the annual possum and rat catch over the past 7 years. The increasing number of possums caught over the 2011–2015 period is most likely due to possums invading from neighbouring forested areas, rather than breeding prolifically within the Park. The decrease in the catch in the past year is most likely due to OSPRI's 1080 drop over part of the Northern Forest last winter. We expect the catch to be even lower in the coming year as OSPRI contractors undertake ground-based possum poisoning in areas of the forest (and on some private land) outside of where 1080 was dropped.

Our rat catch shows an opposite trend to the possums, with significantly increased catches in the last two years. This might seem strange given that 1080 drops have been shown to be very effective at knocking down rat populations for some months. However, there



are a couple of possible reasons for this: a) we have tripled the number of DOC200 traps in the forest over the past two years; and b) rats breed far more quickly than possums, so their numbers recover more quickly from the poisoning. A further operation to be aware of is Greater Wellington's continued poisoning of rats in the Mainland Island, which consistently lowers the rat population there compared to untreated areas of the Northern Forest outside the Mainland Island.

The aim of deploying more of the DOC200 stoat traps was to control the weasel and stoat population in the Northern Forest. While weasels and stoats are voracious killers of our native birds, their numbers in the forest are generally low compared to rats, so as a result mainly rats are caught in these traps. However, to effectively control the rat population we would need to deploy about 4,000 traps, which is not currently feasible. That said, we did catch 17 weasels and stoats in the last year, as well as 33 hedgehogs.

Feral cats are also a threat to our birds, skinks and geckos, but on average we catch fewer than one each year. In the coming year we will be deploying more effective feral cat traps in the Northern Forest, with the traps sited at a safe distance from urban areas, in order to achieve a higher catch rate and thus provide more protection to native species. Other plans include 'fortifying' the northern and eastern boundaries of the forest to reduce future possum invasion, and extending the DOC200 coverage further east towards Rimutaka Forest Park, thus providing protection for kiwi, should they eventually venture in our direction.

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