

Regular Monitoring Shows that ERAT is Succeeding

Many predator-free groups are using pest catch rates as a measure of success, along with pictures of their catches on social media, thus using an element of competition as an impetus to encourage people to continue trapping. However, through my experience as a MIRO committee member, I quickly became aware that all the key decisions about pest control are made on the back of the results of monitoring rather than catch rate.

ERAT's monitoring system was designed by a scientist at Greater Wellington to give us an overall estimate of pest levels in each local area and thus show whether the network of traps is having the desired effect. I hope that once the project establishment funding finishes in December, the local areas can continue to run the monitoring system and use the results as a measure of their trapping success, spurring them into more action if needed. ERAT has provided the framework and hopefully the educational tools to local residents, so now it's up to each neighbourhood to improve upon it and we look forward to seeing what each area can accomplish.

Each local area has an operator (a volunteer) who has done their best to achieve complete trap coverage and an effective and sustainable network of trappers (neighbours). In effect, what has been achieved in their neighbourhood is called a Mainland Island. This term is usually reserved for patches of native forest (such as the Mainland Island in Butterfly Creek/Gollans Valley), where pest animals are kept at consistently low levels through either poisoning or trapping. The advantage of having so many traps in the residential area is that traps can be checked and cleared on a much more regular basis than in the forest due to easy access and a large number of people willing to help maintain the network. In doing so, we offer a safe refuge for animals and insects that we simply can't currently achieve in the forest. At present though, the latest rat monitoring in the forest shows rats tracking at 98% outside of the Mainland Island and 34% inside it. Unfortunately, these are extremely high rates and will result in a continued onslaught of pests on our birds, both in the forest and in the backyards of those properties backing on to the forest.

Although our monitoring continues to show low numbers of rats in the urban areas (8% tracking rate—a reflection on the good cooperation between neighbours to achieve low pest numbers), we need to be vigilant about setting our traps because of the high numbers in the forest. When those rats start to infiltrate the urban area in search of food, their numbers may quickly increase. By the time you start to see them they are probably far more numerous than just that one individual that was brave enough to be moving about during daylight, so please... even if you're not catching much, keep refreshing and checking your bait.

This mast (high seed-fall) year has resulted in much talk about giant rats, and I can testify to having cleared some very large rats from traps! I have also experienced some cases where the plastic Snap-E type traps have not managed to kill the rats that have triggered them, and this can cause the rats to become trap shy, thus making them very difficult to catch. We recommend the wooden Victor traps which will last about 2–3 years before needing to be replaced and can be purchased from most major hardware stores. We do not recommend people buy cheap traps—there are some very inhumane and ineffective traps on the market and their use will simply make rats much harder to catch. A mouse trap placed behind the rat trap or in the bait cavity of a DOC200 trap will not only catch mice but, as mice are a food source for rats, a freshly dead mouse acts as a very good bait for

rats and mustelids. We thus encourage you to leave a fresh mouse in your traps as bait for a few days. As you can see from the monitoring results (<https://miro.org.nz/monitoring/>), there is an abundance of mice and this is probably due in part to our success in lowering the rat numbers, so keep up the good work people and thank you so much for all your efforts.

Sally Bain—MIRO Committee member and ERAT Project Leader

