

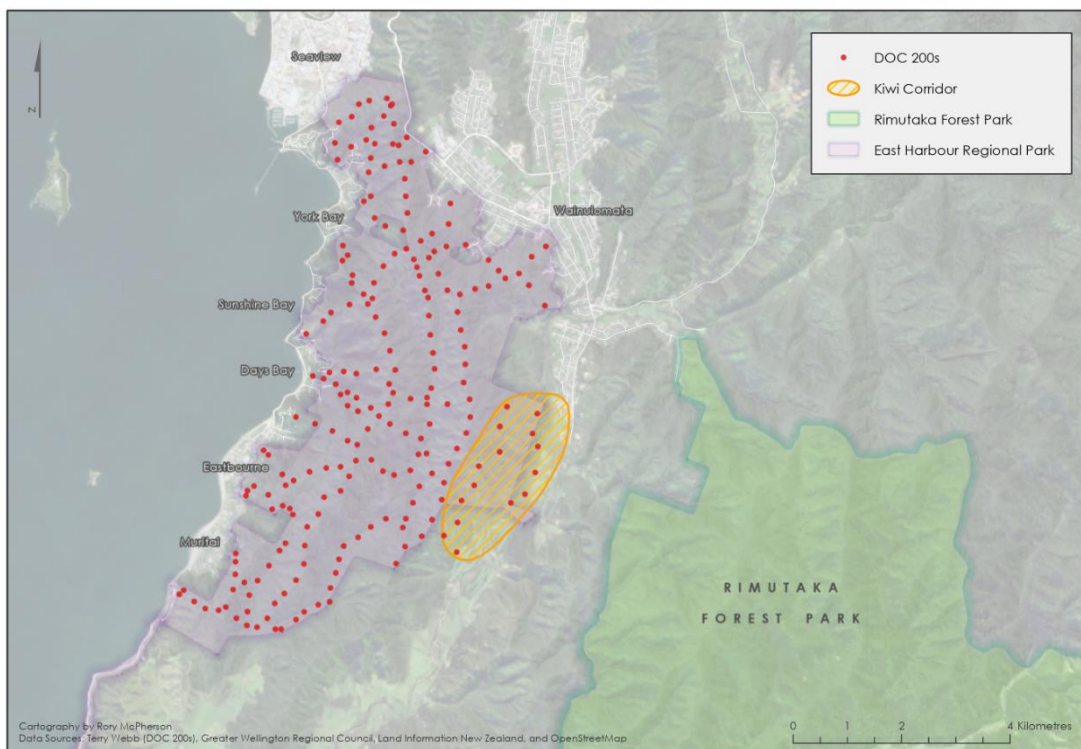
## Connecting our Forest to Remutaka Forest Park

The national Predator Free 2050 initiative to rid New Zealand of rats, stoats and possums is still 30 years away from achieving its goals, so what can we do in the meantime? One motivation for PF2050 is to protect our native birds. A short-term way to assist this is to link up areas of native forest where there is some degree of pest control. That's because, if our birds are living in small groups, they will in time come to lack genetic diversity, so some cross-fertilisation is required. Linking up populations with safe corridors helps to achieve this.

The Northern Forest of East Harbour Regional Park (the bush behind Eastbourne) sits adjacent to the western side of Remutaka Forest Park. Thanks to the Remutaka Forest Park Trust, a significant area of that park is protected from stoats, weasels and ferrets by DOC200 and DOC250 traps. The Trust translocated kiwi to the park in 2006 and an active breeding programme has since seen their kiwi increase in number and spread more widely.

For our part, MIRO's stoat and possum traps cover a large part of the Northern Forest but, until recently, stopped at East Ridge, so did not extend all the way to the Wainuiomata River and the Wainuiomata Coast Road. However late last year, with the support of Greater Wellington, the Wainuiomata Golf Club, and Hutt City Council, we have been able to put in a new trapline (the 'Kiwi Corridor' line) to cover most of the unprotected area. We have also supplied the golf club with 10 refurbished trap mechanisms so that they can trap on the course itself. We now believe that the Northern Forest is close to being a relatively safe habitat for kiwi.

Apart from pest animals, the main barrier to kiwi crossing to our forest is the Wainuiomata River, but ecologists tell us that it is possible for kiwi to cross in suitable places at times of low flow. Other than that, there is just the Coast Road, which has relatively low traffic volumes, especially at night when kiwi are out and about. So, in time, kiwi may venture across into our forest.



To see whether kiwi are in the forest we have been deploying some acoustic recorders on the eastern side of the forest for the past two years. Through recording at night for several weeks at each of 10 sites and then analysing the data, it is fairly easy to see whether any kiwi calls are present. So far, all we have seen on the records are lots of morepork calls, but we will continue to check each year.

Should kiwi eventually arrive, there are implications for dog owners as some dogs do chase and kill kiwi. At Remutaka Forest Park it took a lot of sustained effort to educate dog owners and get effective dog control through having all dogs on leashes. Hopefully that would be more easily achieved in Eastbourne given the high level of environmental awareness here, as demonstrated by the high level of support for both the roll-out of urban trapping through the ERAT project and the number of local people who have sustained MIRO's long-term (20+ years) trapping effort in the Northern Forest and at the Parangarahu Lakes.

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