

MIRO's Pest Control Results from the Northern Forest and Parangarahu Lakes

Possums in the Northern Forest. For over 20 years, MIRO has operated a network of 435 possum traps in the Northern Forest of East Harbour Regional Park, located in the hills behind Eastbourne. MIRO volunteers, well-supported by Greater Wellington (GW), clear and re-bait the traps at least monthly. Over the past year only 189 possums were caught, which indicates that the possum population is being kept sufficiently low for our native trees to recover from the severe possum browsing that occurred prior to the start of trapping. Over this time, many people have noted the increase in birdlife (especially kererū and tūī).

Weasels and Stoats. We also control weasels and stoats in the forest using over 220 DOC200 traps, which are co-sited with half of the possum traps. While weasels and stoats are voracious killers of our native birds, their numbers in the forest are generally low, with only 28 caught in the past year, down from a high of 43 caught the year before. This higher number was due to the 2019 beech tree seed 'mast', when the trees produce very high quantities of seed, providing food for rats, which breed up very quickly. The weasel and stoat population then also rises as they feed on the rats, but trapping with the DOC200s seems to have got the increased numbers back under control. The DOC200s also caught 50 hedgehogs.

Rats. The rat population is probably back to normal in the forest, after the mast-year peak, but remember that we cannot control rats across the forest, so the decrease is just part of a natural cycle we see in the rat population, which is largely related to food supply. In the Mainland Island (20% of the forest, where GW undertake intensive poisoning of rats) the rat population is back to being very low, which is good news for our birds. We are continuing to test new traps and other techniques that are becoming available, in the hope of eventually being able to control rat numbers across the whole forest.

The Parangarahu Lakes. Out at the Lakes, the main focus of our trapping efforts is to protect shore-nesting birds (by targeting rats, weasels, stoats and hedgehogs) and to also protect revegetation plots by targeting possums. During the year 76 possums were caught using 58 traps around the Lakes area, which is fairly consistent with previous years, but is double the catch rate for the Northern Forest, indicative of higher possum numbers out at the Lakes. This is borne out by the fact that GW killed a further 57 possums as part of night shooting operations. However, the weasel and stoat catch was way down on last year with 16 caught using 102 traps along the coast road and around the Lakes. This is a similarly low catch rate as in the Northern Forest, which should be good news for our shore-nesting birds, such as the banded dotterel. However, GW service other DOC200 traps on the foreshore adjacent to the Lakes (so very near to the nesting areas). At these sites they unfortunately caught a further 14 weasels and stoats, which shows our inland and coast road trap network is still letting many of these pests through. In spite of this, dotterel nesting success has been greatly improved over the past few years, from a low of 3% of nests hatching at the lowest point, to a high of 57%, which is a very positive outcome.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our 50 or so dedicated trappers who, year after year, make this all happen.

Terry Webb and Parker Jones, MIRO

Interested in helping MIRO? Email: info@miro.org.nz