

Consulting on the protection of native taonga species in the Heaphy Lowland area

The Department of Conservation's Buller Office plans to reduce rat numbers to protect long-tailed bats, kiwi, whio and *Powelliphanta* snails from local extinction in the Heaphy Lowland area.

The area surrounding the Heaphy river is known for its lush forests and nikau palms. Giant northern rata, rare coastal cress, roroa/great spotted kiwi, powelliphanta/giant carnivorous land snails, whio/blue duck and pekapeka/ long-tailed bats are a few of the endangered species found in this area.



A Heaphy valley stream. Image: Jane Williams



Juvenile piwakawaka/fantail 5 months after aerial predator control. Image: Carole Tilman.

Why we are controlling possums and/or rodents

The Heaphy Track goes through the planned operational area and is a great place to experience healthier populations of native species due to regular pest control.

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2020-media-releases/heaphy-survey-shows-birdlife-on-the-rise/>

Due to consistently high seed production in the lowland forests of this area, rodent numbers are constantly high, threatening all native species.

Rats and possums are the main predators for Powelliphanta snails, of which five of the species are unique to the Heaphy valley. They live nowhere else on earth.

By keeping rodent numbers at low levels, the long-term goal is to allow for the reintroduction of species such as mohua/yellowhead, tieke/saddleback and kākāpō.

Predator control works

After successful aerial 1080 treatments, rodent numbers typically decrease to zero, before rat numbers rise again with the boost to breeding that abundant food provides. Lizards, bats and invertebrates also benefit from this temporary predator knockdown.

Annual 5-minute bird counts in the Heaphy Lowland project area started in 2015. Since then, the range and distribution of kākā, weka and toutouwai/robin have increased. Korimako/bellbird, pīwakawaka/fantail, tauhau/silvereye and tui have made significant increases in numbers while other bird species remain stable.



Rat-killed penguin chick. One healed, one fresh injury. Image: David Cunningham

Consultation – Have your say.

DOC is planning to control rodents over approximately 24,000 ha of the Kahurangi National Park using cereal baits containing biodegradable 1080 applied aurally. Helicopters with calibrated buckets will distribute bait along pre-determined and monitored flight paths.

The Department is consulting on the effects of this predator control plan and would like to hear your views.

Use of a range of predator control methods to protect species.

Aerial application of cereal pellets containing 1080 is the most effective control method over large areas. It is the



Great spotted kiwi. Image: Tui De Roy.

only viable method in remote, rugged terrain.

Ground-based trapping and bait stations are effective in smaller more accessible areas. Aerial 1080 operations target rodents. Stoats are also reduced effectively as they eat rodents/possums.

Time frame

At this stage, this operation will occur between the 1st of July and the 31st of August 2021. The operation is weather dependent. Notification will be provided nearer the time of operational commencement.

Planning

DOC engages and works closely with its Treaty Partners, for all predator control, and is discussing this plan with Ngati Waewae.

Vector Free Marlborough Limited (VFML) has been engaged to carry out the Heaphy Lowland operation on its behalf.

VFML will begin contacting landowners and other affected parties to discuss the proposed work and seek information about any matters of significance.

DOC will carefully consider your feedback received during the consultation phase and where possible will

mitigate the effects of the operation on you. This will be done before VFML proceeds with lodging consent applications.

Once consents are approved, a notification fact sheet will be distributed nearer the time the operation is to start in order to confirm any changes to the project area and provide information about when the operation will happen.

Several weeks ahead of the operation commencing, VFML will provide a public notice in the local newspaper and, immediately prior to the operation starting, place warning signs at entrances to public conservation land.

After the operation takes place, DOC will contact iwi, landowners and other stakeholders to provide details about outcomes such as the reduction of predator numbers and provide further updates when available.

Use of 1080 requires permission from the local Public Health Protection office of the Ministry of Health.

DOC assesses vertebrate predator control operations that use a toxin on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). DOC staff follow procedures approved by the EPA. These regulations ensure that the toxin is applied safely to safeguard the public and the environment.

Key Facts: What you need to know.

1080 is a manufactured, biodegradable toxin. Its active ingredient, fluoroacetate is salt that occurs naturally in poisonous plants in Australia, Africa and Brazil. It does not accumulate in the environment or in animal tissue. It is broken down naturally by micro-organisms, fungi and plants into harmless compounds and does not leave permanent residues in soil, water, plants or animals.

The Department of Conservation complies with all relevant regulations and takes a precautionary approach to the aerial application of biodegradable 1080.

All operations begin with an aerial pre-feed of non-toxic bait to prime possums/rodents to eat the toxic bait that will be applied afterwards.

- The toxic cereal bait pellets contain 0.15% of 1080. They are about 2cm long, cylindrical and dyed green.
- Non-toxic pre-feed cereal pellets are about 2cm long, cylindrical and sandy coloured (not-dyed).



Powelliphanta superba prouseorum. Image: Kath Walker

Managing risk

1080 is poisonous to humans, domestic and game animals. Dogs are highly susceptible. In areas where the toxin has been applied, the risk to dogs will remain until poisoned carcasses have disintegrated, which can be more than six months.

The presence of warning signs indicate that pesticide residues may still be present in baits or animals.

These risks can be eliminated by following these rules:

- **DO NOT** touch bait or eat bait pellets
- **WATCH CHILDREN** at all times
- **DO NOT EAT** animals from this area or from within the "buffer zone" outside the treatment area boundary. The buffer zone is 200m for rabbits, 1km for hares, tahr, wallabies and possums, and 2km for deer, pigs and any other animals.
- Remember, toxic baits or carcasses are **DEADLY to DOGS**

Observe these rules whenever you see warning signs about pesticides. These warning signs indicate pesticide residues may be still present in baits and animals. When signs are removed this means you can resume normal activities in the area. This can be up around 8 months.

Please report suspected vandalism or unauthorised removal of signs. If in doubt, check with DOC. The DOC Pesticide Summary provides more information <https://maps.doc.govt.nz/externalmaps/index.html?viewer=pesticidesummary>

For more information

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The Heaphy Lowland project area predator control plan

The map shows the planned application area for predator control. It is indicative: the boundaries will change subject to consultation and other operation planning requirements.



Rat attacking bird. Image: Nga Manu Images

