

Consulting on the protection of native species in the Cobb and Parapara

The Department of Conservation (DOC) wants to reduce possums, rats and stoats to protect native species in Kahurangi National Park.

Native wildlife and forests need protection

The north-east of Kahurangi National Park is home to some of New Zealand's most iconic and lesser-known plants and animals. The Cobb and Parapara have open alpine tops and a variety of forest types including beech and lowland broad-leaved trees with large emergent podocarps and northern rātā.

There are many native species here that are at risk and need protection from introduced predators. This includes rock wren/tuke, whio/blue duck, great spottedkiwi/roora, kea, kākā, and eight species of Powelliphanta/ giant snails. There are also native plants that are under threat from possum browsing include three species of mistletoe.

Why we need to control introduced predators

Native species are fighting for survival due to predation from rats, stoats and possums. Without ongoing protection, we risk losing the unique natural heritage and biodiversity within Kahurangi National Park.

DOC is planning to reduce predator numbers across a total of approximately 113,000 hectares. A map is included on the last page.

To protect populations of native species in Kahurangi, we need to keep introduced predators at low levels. This requires large-scale predator control on average every 2-3 years.

In addition, we need to respond to environmental events called masts which occur every 2-6 years. During these events, certain forest types produce high numbers of seeds. This provides more food for rodents, and if left uncontrolled, there is a rapid increase in rats and stoats.

There is a beech mast forecast for Kahurangi in 2023. This heightens the risk for native species, especially when the seeds are gone because predators then rely on native species for their food source. Previous mast events have led to local extinctions of threatened species in New Zealand.



Anatoki Range and the Dragons Teeth

Monitoring native species and predators

Through sustained predator control, there is a big increase in breeding success for birds, their food source is more abundant, and the forest is healthier.

Whio/blue duck - Whio/blue duck live in many rivers within the Cobb and Parapara. Stoats have been filmed attacking females on the nest and robbing eggs. Whio are thriving in areas of Kahurangi where we are regularly controlling predators. For example, 79 breeding pairs were counted in the Wangapeka/Fyfe area in 2021. In 2003, only 3 were counted.

Rockwren/tuke - There are about three times more rock wren/tuke in areas where we control predators with 1080 compared to unmanaged sites.

Great spotted kiwi/roora - Kahurangi is a stronghold for great spotted kiwi/roora. Despite being the largest species of kiwi, roora chicks are still vulnerable to stoats until they are big enough to defend themselves.

Most mainland populations of kiwi are declining because stoats kill most of their chicks.

Monitoring of bird calls between 2017 and 2021 in the Heaphy River Valley shows the population of great spotted kiwi/roora is growing.

Kahurangi predator control in 2023/24

Predator control operations in the Cobb and Parapara are part of a larger, ongoing effort to protect Kahurangi National Park and the threatened native species that live here.

DOC has controlled predators every 2-3 years for the past 8 years in response to high rodent numbers and beech mast events. Operations are being planned in many parts of Kahurangi in 2023 and 2024.

This work is part of DOC's National Predator Control Programme, and it's critical to achieving the nationwide vision of Predator Free 2050. We are protecting threatened native species and forests while tools continue to be developed to eradicate possums, rats and stoats.

Our plan to protect the Cobb and Parapara

The most effective tool we have to control predators over large, remote areas is biodegradable cereal pellets containing 1080.

Bait pellets are distributed across the forest by helicopters using technology that enables precise and accurate placement to best target predators.

Ground-based trapping and bait stations are effective in smaller more accessible areas, however the number of predators can overwhelm trapping networks.

Because of the large size of the Cobb and Parapara area, we are proposing to split it into two blocks with each block receiving treatment at a similar time.

This will support stoat trapping and other conservation work by DOC and community groups in the Cobb Valley, Flora/Mt Arthur Table and surrounding areas.

Proposed timeframe

Predator control operations are done when monitoring shows predators have reached levels that threaten populations of native species.

The operations in the Cobb and Parapara are planned to occur between October and December 2023. Operations are weather dependent.



Whio/blue duck live in many parts of the Cobb and Parapara valleys. Photo by Shellie Evans

Have your say

DOC consults with iwi, hapū and key stakeholders including adjacent landowners for predator control operations where 1080 is the proposed method. We aim to understand people's views and answer any questions they may have.

Vector Free Marlborough Ltd (VFML) has been contracted to help manage the predator control operations.

The DOC team at Takaka Office or VFML staff will contact adjacent landowners and other affected parties to discuss the proposed operations.

We want to understand how you think it could affect you and your wellbeing, native flora and fauna, natural resources and your ability to protect, manage and use these resources.

As part of this consultation process, we will consider what we can do to mitigate any effects.

Consultation next steps

Your feedback during consultation will help guide decisions about the operational plan.

DOC or our contractor will update you about the outcomes of the consultation and any changes to the operational boundary plan. This update will be in the form of a notification fact sheet, and it will include a more precise timeframe for the operation.

Use of 1080 requires permission from the Ministry of Health. DOC is delegated the power of the Environmental Protection Agency to decide applications for permission to use 1080 on land administered or managed by DOC. DOC ensures that all legal and policy requirements are met, and that any potential risks of the operation are managed.

Key facts about 1080

Sodium fluoroacetate (1080) is a biodegradable toxin that is used to control rats, stoats and possums on public conservation land.

Its active ingredient, fluoroacetate, is found in poisonous plants in Australia, Africa and Brazil. It is also found at lower levels in our native plants.

1080 has been extensively researched and it is proven to effectively protect native wildlife populations.

1080 bait is broken down naturally in the environment by micro-organisms, fungi and plants into harmless compounds and does not leave permanent residues in soil, water, plants or animals.

Operations begin with the distribution of pre-feed non-toxic bait to prepare possums/rodents to eat the toxic bait that will be applied afterwards.

Managing risk

1080 is poisonous to humans, domestic and game animals. In areas where the toxin has been applied, dogs are highly at risk until poisoned carcasses have disintegrated. This takes four-to-eight months or longer. Seek veterinary advice for suspected poisoning of domestic animals.

Risks can be eliminated by following these rules:

DO NOT touch bait

WATCH children at all times

DO NOT EAT animals from this area or within the buffer zone outside the treatment boundary.

The standard buffer zone is 2 km for deer and pigs, 200 m for rabbits, and 1 km for hares, tahr, wallabies and possums.

Poison baits or carcasses are DEADLY to DOGS

Observe these rules whenever you see warning signs about pesticides. These signs indicate pesticide residues may be still present in baits and poisoned carcasses. When signs are removed this means you can resume normal activities in the area. Always report suspected vandalism or unauthorised removal of signs.

If you suspect poisoning, please contact:

- Your local doctor of hospital
- The National Poisons Centre: 0800 764 766 (urgent calls) or 03 479 7248 or dial 111
- Seek veterinary advice for suspected poisoning of domestic animals



Rat eats a Powelliphanta land snail
Photo: Ngā Manu Nature Reserve

Map of planned predator control areas within the Cobb and Parapara

The map on the next page shows the two proposed predator control areas covering 113,000 hectares in the Cobb and Parapara.

For more information

Please contact: Vector Free Marlborough Limited

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OR: The Department of Conservation

62 Commercial Street, Takaka

Ph: 03 525 8026 Email: takaka@doc.govt.nz

Visit the DOC website:

More information about DOC's National Predator Control Programme is available on our website

doc.govt.nz/our-work/national-predator-control-programme

You can also see public updates and detailed maps of predator control on public conservation land on the DOC website

doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/pesticide-summaries

Learn more about why we use 1080 to control introduced predators.

doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/methods-of-control/1080

Learn more about Predator Free 2050

doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/predator-free-2050

