

Protecting vulnerable native species in Nelson Lakes National Park

The Department of Conservation's Rotoiti Nelson Lakes District plans to reduce rat, stoat, and possum numbers to protect kea and kiwi in around 36,000ha of Nelson Lakes National Park.

Why we are controlling predators

In autumn 2019 most of New Zealand's native beech forests experienced an exceptionally heavy beech seed fall and alpine tussock seeding ('mast').

At Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa, Department of Conservation (DOC) rangers monitored both a massive increase in the number of rats and mice due to the amount of seed available as food, and a subsequent increase in stoat numbers during summer as they fed on the rats and mice. These very high numbers of rats and stoats put all birds, giant land snails, long-tailed bats, lizards and insects under even greater predation pressure than they usually face.

In addition, we know from previous research at the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project (RNRP) in the St Arnaud Range that during winter months, rodent numbers decline which forces stoats to switch their food source to birds.

The most recent predator monitoring at the end of February 2020 at Rotoiti and Rotoroa shows rat and stoat populations are still much higher than normal.

Native species in danger of extinction in the Nelson Lakes National Park include great spotted kiwi/roa, kākārīki/parakeet, kākā, kea, South Island robin/toutouwai, pekapeka/long-tailed bats, giant land snails (*Powelliphanta* spp.), and whio.

Predator control on the western side of the St Arnaud range and the Travers and Sabine valleys will give these species a chance to breed and their young to reach adulthood.



Kea playing *Photo: Andrew Walmsley*

How it is happening

The St Arnaud operation is being managed by Vector Free Marlborough Ltd (VFML), who will use helicopters to distribute cereal baits containing the toxin 1080 onto the ground to target possums and rats.

All helicopters will be equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS) hardware to ensure accurate placement and adherence to consent conditions.

Why we are using this method

Aerial application of cereal pellets with 1080 is the most effective control method over large areas. It is the only viable method in remote, rugged terrain.

Helicopters with calibrated buckets distribute pellets along pre-determined and GPS monitored flight paths.

The cereal pellets used in the operation are targeted at rodents. Possums are also killed. Stoats are killed after they eat the rodents and possums that have consumed the pellets.

Operational planning

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

DOC assesses and approves all pesticide operations on public conservation land on behalf of and following procedures approved by the Environmental Protection (EPA). DOC approving managers apply conditions to ensure that all legal and policy requirements are met, and that any potential risks of the operation are managed.

People most affected by this operation prior were consulted by DOC and/or contractor staff prior to finalising the operational detail and area. This involved considering their concerns and needs regarding the operational details and timing.

Timeframe

Toxin application is scheduled to commence from 8/09/2020. The application of non-toxic prefeed bait will precede toxin application by at least five days.

All work is weather dependent and people intending to visit the affected area before 25/09/2020 are advised to check the DOC website for the status of the operation.

For more information

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Important information

1080 is a manufactured biodegradable toxin. Its salt fluoroacetate occurs naturally in poisonous plants in Australia, Africa and Brazil – and in very low concentrations in New Zealand's native pūhā.

1080 is poisonous to humans and domestic animals. Dogs are highly susceptible. Poisoning can occur through eating baits or poisoned animals. The risk to dogs will remain until carcasses have rotted, perhaps for more than six months.

Toxic bait pellets contain 0.15% 1080. They are cylindrical about 2 cm in diameter and dyed green.

Non-toxic bait pellets are cylindrical about 2 cm in diameter and sandy coloured (not-dyed).

These risks can be eliminated by following these rules:

- **DO NOT** touch 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 2 km for deer, pigs and any other animals.
- Remember, poison baits or carcasses are **DEADLY to DOGS**

Observe these rules whenever you see warning signs about pesticides. Warning signs indicate that pesticide residues may still be present in baits or carcasses.

When signs are removed, this means that you that you can resume normal activities in the area. Please report suspected vandalism or unauthorised removal of signs. If in doubt, check with DOC.

If you suspect poisoning

Always contact:

- **Your local doctor;** or
- **Local hospital;** or
- **National Poisons Centre:** 0800 764 766 (urgent calls) or 03 479 7248 or dial 111