

PUKENUI RANGER REPORT 01/10/2020

2020 has been another remarkably busy year for us rangers and has come with a wide range of unique tasks to overcome. Between the Covid-19 lockdown, an emergency kiwi translocation, cutting in new blocks adding new traps to our network as well as all the usual tasks it has been challenging to say the least! With that said we are happy to say the forest continues to thrive as a result of all the hard work and will only continue to improve for the foreseeable future! Read on for more detail of the past year's events.



Pete Graham and some of volunteers coming along to meet Waimaries chicks.



Waimarie's eldest chick.



Ranger Bevan with proud dad Waimarie.

Predator Control:

Trapping:

2020 has been another good year for the predator control team with a good amount of pests being removed from the forest and buffer area. Over this time, we have reviewed the vast majority of our trapping network which looked to be in good shape especially considering the age of some of these traps! Of course, there are always places we can improve, and we have planned to do just that. These plans include the addition of different traps such as Fenn's to the network as well as a large increase in traps on our buffer zone in the very near future.

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 lockdown no trapping was done over the month of April and early May which means we have had less trap checks than we normally would within any given year. This may have affected our trap data slightly and has likely played a part in why we see a reduction of overall pest numbers.

This year to date we have caught a total of 27 pests less than this time last year. This includes 18 less rats, 2 less cats, 15 less hedgehogs and 1 less ferret. We have however had an equal number of weasels caught at 4 both years and 9 more stoats than this time last year which can be a good or bad thing depending on how you look at it.

Thanks to our amazing predator control team for another year of fantastic work!

Trap data summary 2020:

Table 1: Trap data to date. (some data still coming)

MONTH	WEASEL	STOAT	RAT	CAT	HEDGEHOG	FERRET
JANUARY	0	9	55	0	3	0
FEBRUARY	2	3	43	0	10	0
MARCH	0	1	37	0	1	0
APRIL	0	0	0	0	0	0
MAY	0	11	52	0	8	0
JUNE	1	1	31	0	4	0
JULY	0	2	35	0	0	1
AUGUST	1	7	20	0	1	0
SEPTEMBER	0	0	10	0	0	0
YTD	4	34	283	0	27	1

Comparison to this time last year:

Table 2: 2020-2019 data comparison.

PEST	THIS YTD	LAST YEAR
WEASEL	4	4
STOAT	34	25
RAT	283	301
CAT	0	2
HEDGEHOG	27	42
FERRET	1	2
TOTAL PESTS	349	376

Toxin:

We have completed two toxin operations this year. The first in March and the second more recently in September. Both went magnificently with the most recent operation being completed in a very timely fashion due to the additional help from volunteers and the Northtec Pest Operations team headed by tutor Michael Ramsbottom. We have a third operation planned for December that will hopefully go as well as these did, it's always a good feeling to see possums littering the forest floor after these operations!

Our bait station network expansion into the Whau Valley catchment has continued to progress slowly this year but we are getting there! This area is full of challenging terrain but we are enjoying traversing it as we are seeing parts of the forest we have never seen before. We are aiming to have at least four blocks cut in by the end of 2020 which we are well on track to achieving.

Kiwi:

We had a rather unpleasant beginning on the kiwi front this year when a young chick was found beheaded on a walking track near the Mangere stream. We knew there was a nest belonging to Purehu close by which we investigated. Upon our arrival our worst fears were

realised when we discovered the nest had been visited by a predator... The chick was sent for necropsy which confirmed this was the work of a mustelid. An unfortunate beginning to be sure.

Shortly after this we begun the removal of transmitters from the birds that came during our second translocation, we were doing well until the Covid-19 lockdown stopped us in our tracks. This resulted in 7 weeks without being able to go in the forest which slowed our efforts drastically. Since we have been back in the forest, we have looked unsuccessfully for the last two birds Austin and Muhammad and now fear the transmitters batteries have gone flat. Strangely we are still picking up a bouncing signal for Muhammad but unfortunately it gives us no information on his whereabouts.

Soon after our return to the forest another spanner was thrown in the works with an unplanned emergency translocation to Pukenui taking place. The emergency was a result of a drought on Motuora Island which meant the kiwi residing there were malnourished due to both a lack of water and being unable to feed adequately as the ground was too hard for their bills to penetrate. During this translocation, a total of 17 birds were caught and brought back to the mainland with 6 being taken to Maranui Forest and the remaining 11 coming back to Pukenui Forest.

We monitored these kiwi closely post release and fortunately they all survived and put on considerable weight rather quickly. As the birds settled we began removing the transmitters of birds we were confident would remain in the forest, those closer to the forest edges however we have continued to monitor to insure they don't wander into the surrounding areas where they may be at risk of dog attack or being hit by traffic. We plan to remove the rest of these before the end of January if we can catch up with them all in time!

Our birds from the emergency location are yet to begin breeding most likely due to the condition they were in when brought back from Motuora Island. We are sure that they will be feeling a bit healthier by now and all going well will give breeding a go by the end of this breeding season. While these birds have shown no sign of breeding, we have continued to monitor Waimarie and Sayyad from the first and second translocations respectively and they have both had a crack at breeding this season.

Unfortunately, Sayyad's nest failed as he abandoned his post. While we cannot be certain why this happened, we do wonder if the severe flooding experienced in the region played a part in this as he left directly following this event. Waimarie on the other hand successfully hatched his two eggs in late August. We went in to investigate early September and were happy to see two chicks snuggled up within the burrow. With the help of Pete Graham (NRC) the older of the two chicks was microchipped and the second was microchipped a few days later once it was safe to do so. Both weighed in at a mere 260g at the time of microchipping, but it will only go up from there!

We also conducted kiwi listening during the month of June with the help of several volunteers. As usual we attempted to do 4 nights of listening at each of our 8 sites but unfortunately fell a little short. We were right on track but unfortunately bad weather towards the end of the listening window prevented the last few nights of monitoring.

Nonetheless it was a fantastic effort by all involved especially considering it was all accomplished over just a single listening window. This will be done every year going forward and will be used as an indicator of how our kiwi population is doing.

Other:

Other events throughout the year have included rat and possum monitoring and providing work experience for a couple of practicum students from Northtec's Environmental Management programme. The pest monitoring was completed within the forest prior to our September toxin operation and will be done again in October. The data gained via the pest monitoring is great for giving us a glimpse at what pest numbers look like within the forest and when done before and after a toxin operation we can also get an idea of how well the toxin operation has worked. Both our practicum students Evan Thom and Phoenix Gale continue to impress as they help us with a wide variety of jobs throughout the forest. Hopefully, we can keep them as volunteers after their time with us comes to an end.