

Pukenui Forest Ranger Report January 2023

Happy New Year all! I hope everyone has had a good break and is feeling rejuvenated for the new year. We're already back in the thick of it in the Forest and have been busy finishing off last years toxin operation and a slew of other jobs including our regular trapping, track maintenance, invertebrate monitoring and inducting a new volunteer to our ranks. We've also welcomed Peter Luke to the team whom will be doing one days field work per week for us which is great! Read on for more detail.



A puriri moth found on the ground trying to dry its wings. Was moved to a safer spot to finish the job.



Sidymella sp. Found during the invertebrate monitoring. Very cool colour!



An interesting slime mold.

Trapping:

Our trap catch has been quite low over the last few months since the September toxin operation in fact. A handful of mustelids and a couple of cats have turned up in traps but other than that we've just been catching relatively low numbers of rats. The lower rat numbers we presume is due to the both the toxin operations which should have lowered their numbers considerably and we wonder if the foul weather has played a part also.

This year to date we have caught a total of 58 pests although we are expecting more data to be handed to us soon. This is 49 pests less than this time last year. The totals include 3 less stoats, 2 less ferrets, 3 less hedgehogs, and 43 less rats. On the other side of the coin, we have caught 2 more possums than this time last year and an equal number of weasels at 0 both years.

Trap data summary 2023:

Table 1: Trap data totals 2023. More data to be added.

MONTH	WEASEL	STOAT	RAT	CAT	HEDGEHOG	POSSUM	FERRET
JANUARY	0	2	16	2	4	1	0
FEBRUARY	0	3	23	0	5	2	0
TOTAL	0	5	39	2	9	3	0

Table 2: YTD data comparison 2022-2023. More data to be added.

PEST	2022 TOTALS	2023 TOTALS
WEASEL	0	0
STOAT	8	5
RAT	82	39
CAT	2	2
HEDGEHOG	12	9
POSSUM	1	3
FERRET	2	0
TOTAL PESTS	107	58

Toxin/bait stations:

Last year's December toxin operation dragged through into the new year, being completed around mid-January. Our last few operations have been a little more drawn out than those of the past with the wet weather, increase in the area treated and less volunteer interest all contributing heavily to this. We're happy to have this one out of the way! We have seen a good amount of take from the previous operation and are sure our native biota is better for it! A big thank you to DOC and NRC as usual for their contributions. Our next operation will be in March which will likely only be a toxin removal at this point.

Volunteers

We've had another keen volunteer added to our team this month! A big welcome to Bruce McGregor whom has come along a couple days now to help out with stoat trap checks. Bruce will be looking after the traps along the Coronation reserve tracks going forward and is super keen to get stuck in, go get 'em Bruce!

Other:

Ben and I have begun maintenance on the walking track particularly focused on retagging which has needed to be done for quite a while now. Thus far we have completed the Pukenui Loop track with tags now visible from both directions and looking much tidier. What amazed us was the number of old tags that came out around 4-5 times the amount we put in! One tree had 8 tags in it, which is bonkers! We have no explanation for this and ourselves are wondering what the rationale was that led to that. We hope to continue doing this with the Taraire ridge track next in our sights.

More interestingly Ben, Peter, and I spent a day last week monitoring invertebrates with the tree beating method. This involves setting up short transect lines, placing a white "sheet" underneath several small trees along these transects and shaking the trees into the "sheet". You then capture as many of the creepy crawlies as you can, place them in containers and use a microscope to identify what you have found once you have collected all your samples.

The results are still pending on this, but thus far Ben tells me spider crabs make up the majority of what has been found, very interesting!