

Rakitū Rodent Eradication



Key Facts

As the first step in restoring the natural values and taonga of Rakitū (Arid) Island, the Department of Conservation plans to eradicate ship rats from the island

Background

Rakitu, also known as Arid Island, is a 313ha island located 2.5km off the east coast of Aotea Great Barrier Island. Rakitū is of great significance to Ngāti Rehua Ngāti Wai ki Aotea as it was the home of Rehua, the eponymous ancestor. Rakitū was once permanently occupied by Māori.

Rakitū became a Scenic Reserve administered by the DOC following purchase with assistance from the Natural Heritage Fund in 1994.

Why do we want to eradicate rodents from Rakitu?

After being on Rakitū for approximately 150 years, ship rats have been a major factor in the local extinction of three bird species: the pied tit, korimako/ bell birds and pōpokatea/whiteheads have been lost from the island. Rats have had significant adverse effects on the ecosystem.

The removal of ship rats will be an important step toward the ecological restoration of Rakitū for Mana Whenua, the wider Aotea Great Barrier Island community and the people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Consultation Process

Consultation with affected parties began in July 2014 and recommenced during 2017.

Information about the project is also being made available to all other interested members of the community.

How it is happening?

Rat eradication requires every individual to be targeted so ground based techniques such as bait stations or traps would be impossible to place on the many steep cliffs. There is only one method likely to successfully eradicate rats from an island the size of Rakitu. This is by two aerial application of cereal rat baits (Pestoff 20R™ containing 0.02gm/kg brodifacoum). by helicopter using an under-slung bucket guided by accurate navigational technology. This method is well proven having been successfully used over 50 islands around NZ.

Timeframes and notification

Bait application will occur in the winter (June to October) of 2018 during a period of fine weather. Each baiting would be completed in a single day and separated by approximately 10 days. Indicative dates will be confirmed closer to the operation. Stakeholders and interested groups will be informed prior to the operation commencing. Public notification will be given and signs will be installed on the island prior to the operation starting.

Weka

North Island weka were introduced to Rakitu in 1961 to create a backstop population as the mainland population was undergoing decline at the time. The role of the island as security for NI Weka is an objective within the Weka Recovery Plan. Their retention on the island is also considered a limiting factor to restoring a seabird driven ecosystem on the island because weka are essentially a predatory species.

Alternative locations for this weka population have previously been considered, although no suitable alternative has been found to date.

A further review regarding the best long term location for the weka has been initiated this year. In the meantime even though weka have survived on islands where similar successful rat eradications have occurred, they are susceptible to the rat bait being used. In order to retain the weka population on the island at least in the short term, some weka will be taken into captivity on the mainland prior to commencing the operation and returned when safe to do so. Should a decision be taken in the intervening period to re-establish an equivalent population elsewhere, the captive birds would be translocated there and project funding sought to commence eradication of remnant weka from Rakitū.

Public access

The public have full access to the island and that will continue in future. However, the public will be asked to stay off the island during the 2- part days that the helicopter is applying bait. A DOC vessel will be present at the island to ensure any boaties present are well informed on the day. Ngati Rehua Ngati Wai ki Aotea also wish to place a short term Rahui on and around the island immediately following the bait application.

Important information

Brodifacoum rodent bait can be bought in hardware stores however poisoning can occur from eating the green bait or poisoned animals. These risks can be eliminated by: Not touching the bait and remembering poison bait or carcasses are deadly to dogs.

For more information

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