

REPORT

Meeting Date: 20th November 2018

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Subject: Operations Report

Biodiversity

- **Rakitū Rodent Eradication Project:** The second and final bait application took place on 13 September 2018. The operation was carried out as planned.

DOC's first post-operational trip to the island was completed in October and included bait monitoring, five-minute bird counts, lizard transects and rodent monitoring.

The Biodiversity team installed the tracking tunnel network and completed the first tracking tunnel run. Tracking tunnel cards were set with peanut butter for three nights with results showing rodent prints in zero out of 48 tunnels. Five of the tunnels showed skink prints.

While these results are positive, ongoing monitoring will be required. The island will not be able to be officially declared rodent free for another two years.

Biosecurity is now the top priority for the team, with strict measures in place for both DOC staff and the island's bach owners to prevent a rodent incursion, including collaboration with Auckland Council's "Treasure Island" programme to spread the message to visitors to the island this summer.



Copper Skink found during Rakitū Island lizard monitoring in October

- **Marine monitoring for Rakitū Project:** The ten sampling bait holders containing live mussels anchored around Rakitū and on the east coast of Aotea were collected after the final brodifacoum application. Testing has yet to be completed.

- **Weka for Rakitū Project:** The weka captured from Rakitū prior to the operation continue to be housed at Pukaha/Mt Bruce.

Of the original 64 transferred, there were two losses in captivity shortly after translocation, and a further two losses due to aggressive behaviour as breeding began. DOC continues to monitor bait breakdown on Rakitū and are aiming to relocate the weka in the coming months.

Seven dead weka were collected from Rakitū after the first bait application and presented at DOC Aotea by members of Aotea Poison Free in August. DOC has always acknowledged the potential loss of weka during the operation due to their susceptibility to brodifacoum. The carcasses have been sent for post-mortem to confirm cause of death and we are awaiting the results.

- **Pāteke Protection:** Cat trapping around the margins of the Whangapoua estuary has finished for the season. A further knock down of cat numbers is planned for December, before the programme starts up again in full in January. The report for the 2017-18 season has been completed and is available on request. The report shows a rise in flock count numbers for the first time in several years. However, pāteke numbers are still relatively low island wide.
- **Dotterel breeding season has begun:** Dotterel nests are particularly vulnerable to disturbance by people and dogs. Nests will be identified with signage and fenced off in high risk areas.
- **Hirakimatā rat trapping:** Auckland Council and the Local Board have confirmed the availability of 300 GoodNature self-resetting rat traps for use on Hirakimatā. We will be investigating the potential implementation of a trapping network ready for the summer of 2019/20.
- **Takotetai/Black Petrel protection:** The cat-trapping contract work for Hirakimatā is due to begin from November, running through to the end December. This aims to protect the black petrel as they arrive home from migration to re-establish their burrows and are particularly vulnerable to cat predation. Further trapping will be required April-May when chicks are fledging.
- **Rabbit Control:** Intermittent control continues around the Okiwi Basin area by the DOC Biodiversity Ranger. Nonetheless, we are seeing rabbit numbers starting to increase. Following on from May's successful intensive cull, further control is planned for April 2019.
- **Weed Control:** The summer weeding programme contract is currently being finalised, with work commencing in the coming weeks. There are several noxious weeds to be targeted at specific sites, including wild ginger, woolly nightshade and madeira.
- **Myrtle Rust:** Myrtle Rust has not been confirmed on Aotea/GBI. Current work aims to prepare for seed collection. Surveillance on vulnerable species will be as required.
- **Plague Skink Project:** This year's work is underway to further develop methodologies and hopefully ensure eradication is still an option in twelve months' time. If eradication is still an option, this will likely need considerable financial investment. Concern is being shown about the second incursion on Omanawa Lane in Tryphena. Considerable resourcing will be needed to attempt eradication.

Recreation/Historic

- **Tracks and huts:** Further confusion has been experienced by users with the lack of directional signage, particularly for users of the Aotea track. Some people have missed connections because of this. The team are doing their best to replace the missing signs and hope to have them all back in place for the summer months.

Preparation for the upcoming summer months also includes emptying toilet vaults

- **Campgrounds:** Preparation for the upcoming season continues. The campgrounds will have hosts from 22 December to the end of January.
- **Kauri Dieback:** The Whangaparapara Peak Track, Whangaparapara Pack Track and a section of the Old Lady Track were closed as part of a track closure program where the risk of Kauri Dieback was assessed. This was done after a public consultation process. A small number of submissions were received opposing the closures. The decision to close the tracks was based on visitor numbers compared to the cost to upgrade, as well as the fact that the tracks traversed kauri root systems. The Whangaparapara pack track has been closed since it was damaged in the 2014 storm.

Further capital upgrade work for tracks is planned for the upcoming summer on the South Fork track.

Further work is planned for the presence of a track ambassador for messaging and advocacy. There are also plans for community workshops to further understand the risk of spreading Kauri Dieback.

Community

- **Conservation Week 15-23 September:** The DOC team invited Te kura ō Okiwi to attend a planting day on Okiwi Station. All tamariki from the school participated alongside teachers and DOC rangers, followed by a sausage sizzle hosted at the DOC office. Around 300 eco-sourced natives were planted, to provide further habitat for native birds, including our taonga species pāteke which has its stronghold in the Okiwi Basin.
- **Wharf2wharf Sporting Event:** DOC staff provided kauri dieback wash stations and advocacy for the event on the day. Two DOC staff also competed: Ian McNickle (Supervisor) in the 42K MTB and George Taylor (Operations Manager) in the Half Marathon. As in past years, this was a great event to be involved in, run well by the organisers Kaitoke School.
- **Te Pukenga Atawhai:** the final week of October saw Kawa Marae host around 20 DOC staff from across the Auckland region for Te Pukenga Atawhai DOC training course. The four-day course, run by the Department's Kahui Kaupapa Atawhai staff and hosted by Kawa Marae included taking DOC staff through tikanga or protocol on marae, interacting with Māori, te Ao Māori and DOC's responsibilities under the Conservation Act to uphold the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. The intensive course is held up to eight times a year at different marae around Aotearoa. This was the second Pukenga for Kawa Marae and Aotea, and despite the wintery weather staff enjoyed the island, the highlight being the hospitality received at Kawa.

Staffing and Infrastructure

- The team is settled now with all vacancies filled and several casual staff in place should they be needed. Most staff housing is also occupied leaving limited space for visitors.