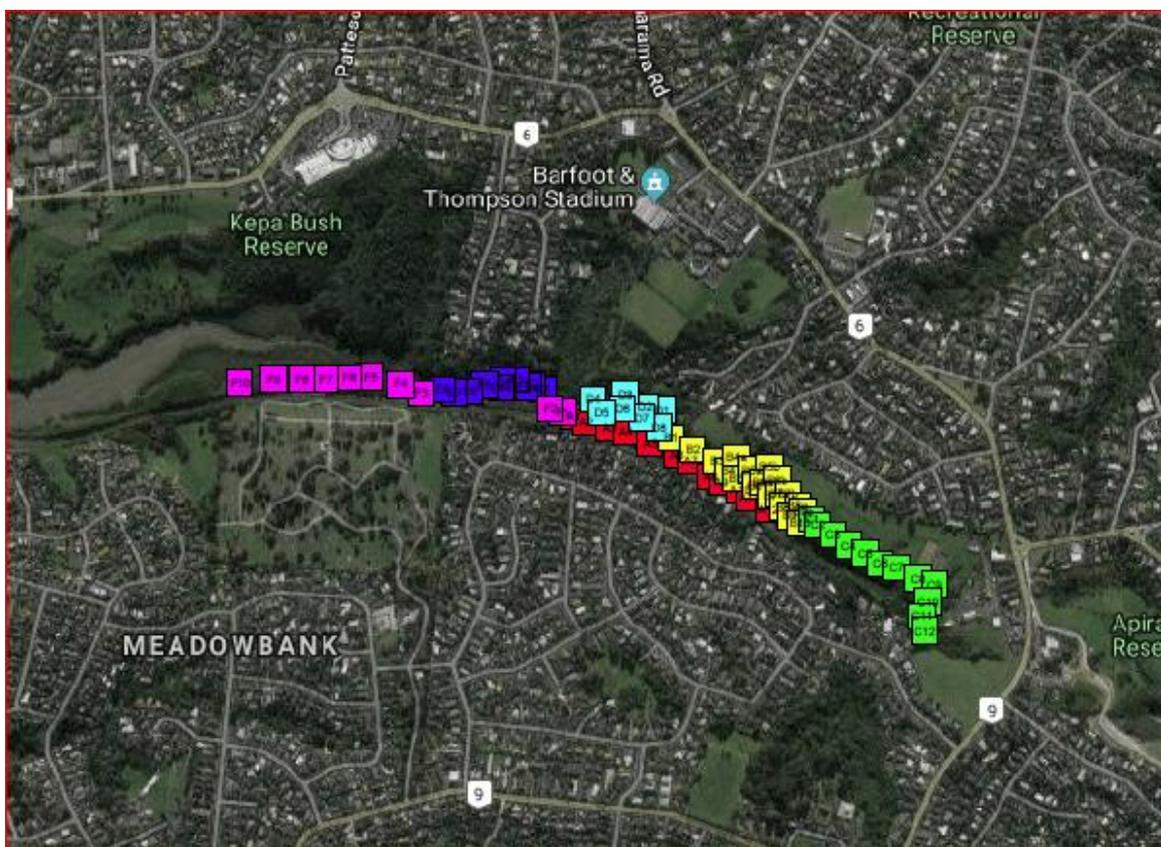


Report on Trapping Activities on NZ Transport Agency Land in Porewa Valley between July and November 2018

1 Trapping and Poison Baiting

Permission to enter from NZTA land was granted on 25 July 2018. As stated in our Songbird Project application, trapping and poison baiting has followed Auckland Council *"Pest Animal Control Guidelines 2018"* which recommend pulsing of poison baiting in August, November January and April.

From 1 August 2018, 71 bait stations for poison baiting have been checked at weekly intervals. For the first two weeks each station was loaded with eight 28 gram bait blocks of Bromadiolone (Contra) baits followed by two rounds of similar sized Diphacinone (Ditrac) baits. Following the August baiting period, there was a gap until 1 November when four more weekly rounds were commenced. Regular poison baiting finished on 1 December and will re-start in mid-January or early February depending on the availability of volunteers.



View over the valley showing the six bait lines with a total of 71 stations

Possum trapping commenced in September after sufficient Timms Traps had been delivered. Volunteers have continued re-bait each of the 37 Timms traps with cinnamon sprinkled apple bait until 1 December. All bait stations have now been disarmed and remaining apple baits removed. In accordance with Auckland Council Park practice it is planned to restart possum baiting March.

The results of baiting and trapping shown below have been extremely successful in significantly reducing the pest populations by 1,235 rats and 62 possums.

This has been reflected in reduced numbers of rats and possums caught in Council Reserves at Kepa Bush and Selwyn Bush between 1 September and 30 November when compared to the same period in 2017.

Equivalent Rat catches in Porewa Valley @ 1 bait = 1 rat killed

Bait Line	Baits eaten
A	161
B	370
C	264
D	73
E	199
F	168
Total	1,235 = Rats eliminated

Possum catches in Porewa Valley

Trap Line	Possums caught
A	8
B	17
C	12
D	8
E	4
F	13
Total	62 = possums caught

Kepa Bush catches 1 September – 30 November 2018 vs 2017

	2018 1/9 – 30/11	2017 1/9 – 30/11
Rats	2	9
Possums	5	8
Mice	15	3

Selwyn Bush catches 1 September – 30 November 2018 vs 2017

	2018 1/9 – 30/11	2017 1/9 – 30/11
Rats	2	8
Possums	1	2
Mice	1	18

2 Stoat Traps

Because a stoat was caught at Kepa Bush earlier this year, six DoC 200 stoat traps have recently been put out in the Valley using eggs as bait. There have been no catches to date.

3 Monitoring the Effects

To measure the effect of reduced predator numbers eleven tracker tunnels with ink pads have been

put out and the various types of footprints will be analyzed at about 3 monthly intervals. It is also proposed to install Weta Hotels to measure weta numbers as a measure of improved insect life.

At two sites in the Valley on 22 October three five minute bird counts were undertaken. There were 28 sightings of 11 types of bird at one site and 36 sightings of 16 types of bird at the other site. Similar bird counts will be repeated at six-monthly intervals.

4 Control and clearance of weeds

Almost every pest weed plant known to the region is thriving in the Valley, particularly the following;

- Wild Kahili Ginger and Yellow Ginger, everywhere, in the creek and up hillsides
- Tradescantia very general in large patches
- Pampas grass, very general everywhere
- Willows fallen into the creek
- Tree Privet and Chinese privet
- Climbing asparagus, widespread
- Woolly Nightshade
- Plectranthus – large areas near creek
- Jasmine vine smothering trees
- Gorse and blackberry
- Wattle
- Monkey Apple
- Moth plant.

On 20 August we were extremely grateful to receive an offer of \$15,000 worth of weed control services from Paul Geck of the Auckland Motorway Alliance. The first spraying was carried out by a team on 13 November and further sprayings are planned when conditions are right. Spraying has been carefully controlled to keep clear of the creek where native Eels and Kokopu have been seen.

Dealing with large infestations of wild ginger growing in the creek will be difficult. A scenic walkway through the bush at a lower level below the horse paddocks is envisaged for the future, but controlling and eliminating weed species will be a huge and continuing task. The advent of the new cycleway will allow users to see the needs of the area and hopefully more volunteers will come forward to help. It is hoped that during the cycleway construction there will be a determined effort to control and eliminate as many weeds as possible.



Plectranthus, Tradescantia and wild ginger growing beside the creek



Looking across the creek, totally clogged with Wild Ginger to Jasmine vine smothering trees on the far bank



Pampas, large Arum lilies and fallen willow in the creek

5 Rubbish

There was significant amount of rubbish throughout the area when we commenced comprising plastic containers, old buckets, glass bottles, old tyres, concrete, corrugated iron, other steel parts, and discarded timber etc. Our volunteers have regularly collected bags of rubbish and taken them away, but a more concerted effort will be required.

We have developed good relationships with the Meadowbank Pony Club through their President Sam (Samantha) Fowler who is keen to involve the Pony Club membership in cleaning up rubbish. Sam has suggested that a large skip bin could be arranged and that the club could assist with their tractor and trailer to collect the rubbish from various places. It is hoped that various working bees can be held in the summer months when the ground is firm enough to permit tractor and trailer access.



Old tyres dumped in the bush

6 Volunteers

We have 28 listed volunteers who have been assisting with many of the tasks, often bringing wives and friends into help. The main tasks that have been undertaken are;

- Clearing and marking routes for bait stations though gorse, blackberry, jasmine, pampas and other weeds
- Cutting steps to make access up steep slopes and across streams easier and safer
- Laying out and recording locations of bait stations and trap lines
- Regularly checking, rebaiting and recording the numbers of poison bait blocks taken
- Regularly rebaiting all Timms traps for possums with Cinnamon-sprinkled apple baits and recording catches
- Collecting rubbish such as plastic items, all of which was there when we commenced our work in the area.
- Undertaking 5 minute bird counts
- Setting out and checking Stoat traps
- Setting out and checking Tracking Tunnels

7 Supporting Groups and Individuals

Eastern Bays Songbird Project

The Porewa Valley project is being carried out under the umbrella of the Eastern Bays Songbird Project whose objectives are to:

- Significantly reduce mammal pests in the Eastern Bays, supporting the Pest Free Auckland 2050 and Predator Free NZ 2050 initiatives.
- Increase the numbers and diversity of birds and other native species in the Eastern Bays.
- Increase the planting of native plants and trees to provide suitable food sources and habitat for birds and other native species.

All bait stations and traps have been provided by The Songbird Project using funding from Orakei Local Board and Auckland Council Regional Environment and Natural Heritage Fund.

Auckland Council Parks

Sarah Peters, Auckland Council Park Ranger for Kepa Bush and Selwyn Bush provided 8 pails of poison baits which have been particularly effective in eliminating rats.

Auckland Motorway Alliance

Paul Geck, Principal Asset Manager Integrator has provided a team of contractors with funding to the value of \$15,000 to control pest weeds.

Auckland University CatchIT Website

Auckland University Statistics Department Professor Rachel Fewster and her husband David Gauld (also a volunteer) have provided enormous assistance in establishing the on—line digital records base and bait line maps that have enabled all our catches to be recorded in various forms all readily accessible as tables, graphs or summaries.

Meadowbank Pony Club

Samantha Fowler has offered the support of her club members to assist with rubbish clean up and weed control.

Our 28 plus Volunteers

Our many volunteers have turned out in all weather conditions to regularly assist the many tasks that have been necessary to achieve our success. In particular I would like to name Ms Turfa Chowdhury, a young Ecological Science graduate from Auckland University who is seeking practical work experience. She regularly travels by bus from Mt Roskill at any time and whatever the weather. She has shouldered a major work load of recording, checking traps, providing her knowledge and helpful advice on many aspects of our activities.

8 The Plan for 2019 and onwards

Total elimination of predators is the goal of the Songbird Project. Although we have had significant success in reducing the rat and possum populations in Porewa Valley, because these pests can breed very quickly it is essential that our trapping and poison baiting programme should continue well into the future. This will cost money in terms of the supplies of bait, and on-going weed control, but with an enthusiastic team of volunteers prospects look good for the Porewa Valley project to be a very successful long-term undertaking.

There are questions about who will own and be responsible for the land once the cycleway is completed. We have no doubt that this relatively unknown area has great potential to become a major ecological and scenic attraction for Auckland. Our volunteers can't do it all, so the agencies and other organisations responsible for the area must develop a long-term plan for its restoration and assist with on-going maintenance.

Since NZ Transport Agency is responsible for the land where these unwanted animal predators and weeds are thriving, it is hoped that the Agency will re-consider its initial rejection of our request for funding assistance.

Report prepared by John La Roche 3 December 2018