

REPORT

Meeting Date: 15 April 2019

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Subject: Operations Report

Work programme highlights for DOC Aotea/Great Barrier Island since the last meeting include:

Biodiversity

- **Takoketai/Black Petrel protection:** The cat trapping contract work for Hirakimatā began again at the start of April to coincide with the chicks fledging. Cat trapping will continue until June. The team from Wildlife Management International Ltd are due back at the start of May for their final visit of the season. The trip will be banding chicks and potentially fitting more transmitters after the success of last year's programme.

Monitoring from Wildlife Management's January/February field trip below shows 28 GPS tracks retrieved from adult birds during the two-month trip. Some birds went as far west as Lord Howe Island, and up to 2500km east past the Chatham Islands. These are only 10-20 day foraging trips, in between periods sitting on eggs, so are remarkably long, given that the bird had an egg in a burrow to return to.



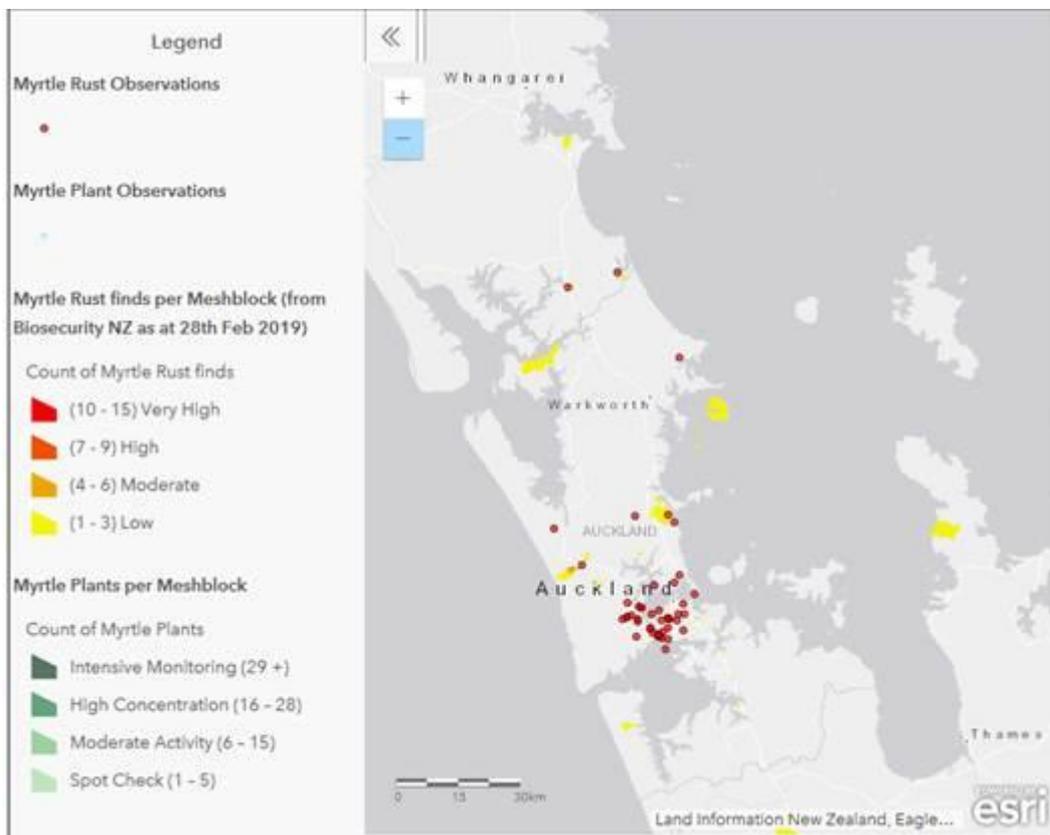
- **Pateke Protection:** Flock counts were undertaken island wide with preliminary results showing another small increase in numbers from last season's counts. Initial totals show the highest total flock count number to be 639 with one site still to come in, up from 570 in 2018.
- **Rabbit Control:** 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 successful intensive cull last year, further control is planned for April 2019.
- **Myrtle Rust** has not been confirmed present on Aotea/GBI. However, myrtle rust has been found in multiple locations in Auckland, Coromandel and also on other islands within the Hauraki Gulf so the potential for it to arrive (or already be here!) is high.

Look out for symptoms of myrtle rust including:

- bright yellow powdery eruptions appearing on the underside of the leaf (young infection)
- bright yellow powdery eruptions on both sides of the leaf (mature infection)
- brown/grey rust pustules (older spores) on older lesions
- grey, 'fuzzy' spore growth on undersides of leaves
- some leaves may become buckled or twisted and die off

Myrtle rust will only infect trees from the myrtle family so trees and vines like rata, pohutukawa, mānuka, kānuka, feijoa, eucalypts and ramarama.

The map below from the MPI website shows all of the places close to us that it is located. (red dots and yellow)



For more information about Myrtle rust head to the MPI website which has useful hints about how to identify it as well as lots of pictures. <http://myrtlerust.org.nz/>

- **Stoat Sighting:** On Friday 4th January DOC Okiwi received a call reporting a stoat sighting. The informant had witnessed a stoat crossing Medland road between the quarry and Mason road, this was followed closely by another stoat.

The joint DOC and Auckland Council operation had stoat detection dogs on site within a day of the report, and established a network of trail cameras, tracking tunnels and traps over a 200ha area which aimed to confirm the sighting. Surveillance was carried out until 15 February and showed no evidence of stoat presence.

This was a positive outcome for Aotea, and the effective operation carried out collaboratively by the two agencies showed an excellent response and system readiness for potential future incursions.

- **Rakitū Rodent Eradication Project:** All the bait stations have been removed from in and around the buildings after two months of no bait taken. A second round of tracking tunnel monitoring was undertaken in February. No prints were found in any of the tunnels, but three suspicious droppings were found during the monitoring of the tunnels. This initiated an incursion response while the droppings were investigated, and a trap network was set out on the island as a precaution. The droppings were analysed by Chris Green, Technical Advisor and invertebrate specialist. His findings indicated the droppings were from wētā. A follow up visit using a rodent dog and handler also found no indications of fresh rodent sign.



Marine monitoring: Ten sampling bait holders containing live mussels anchored around Rakitū and on the east coast of Aotea were collected after the final brodifacoum application. Test results for traces of brodifacoum are pending.

Weka: The weka captured from Rakitū prior to the operation were returned to the island on 5 February. The weka were captured in the early hours of the morning at Pukaha (Mount Bruce), transported to Masterton airstrip and flown to Okiwi airstrip. From there they were transported by boat to Rakitū Island. All weka were biosecurity inspected and checked that they had not become unwell on the journey. All were fit and healthy and released.

- **Mokohinau Islands:** Tracking tunnels were run in March. Cards have been analysed and no sign of rodents detected.

Recreation/Historic

- **Tracks and huts:** All of the directional signs removed by unknown members of the public over the winter months have now been replaced. There have been no ongoing issues with this.
- **Campgrounds:** Numbers of visitors at campgrounds have reduced substantially since February. There are still some campers utilising the facilities however this is mainly at Medlands.
- **Kauri Dieback:** Further capital upgrade work for tracks is planned for the upcoming summer on the Whitheys, Maungapiko (lookout track), Kiwiriki, Tramline (partial), South Fork, Old Lady, Old Mill and Bridle tracks. Kiwiriki and South Fork tracks will be significant in terms of scale. This contract has been awarded and the contract manager is in the planning phase of this work. This work is to be completed before the calendar year end. Throughout this period temporary track closures will be required. A plan will be put in place to ensure multiple tracks are not closed at one time.
- **Kauri Dieback Maintenance:** Maintenance to track upgrade work carried out over the last two years is currently taking place on the Forest Road and Palmers track.

Community

- **Kauri dieback track ambassador:** In March another Kauri Dieback ambassador was taken on. Jade Williams joined the programme and has been working alongside Amy Bullough. They have been out on the tracks and visiting campgrounds, talking to visitors 2-3 days a week. As anticipated, high-use tracks like Windy Canyon and the Hot Springs have provided the most opportunity for interactions, but there have still been steady numbers on other kauri tracks such as Kaiaraara and Bush's Beach. Through February and March, the ambassadors have encountered a number of school groups one of which was as large as 70 students.

Staffing and Infrastructure

- The team said goodbye to administration officer and community ranger Fenella Christian in March, who has retired after eight years with DOC Aotea.
- **Administration vacancy:** Recruitment is underway for the administration position based at Okiwi. Applications have closed and interviews will take place over the coming month. In the interim, the position is being filled by a casual staff member.