

# 'Magic trap' stops stoats

Back in 2017 island conservation groups buried past differences to pursue the lofty goal of a predator-free Waiheke. The lure of government funding helped to galvanize groups and the Waiheke Collective formed. Now, community groups, organisations and volunteers are monitoring traps and working cohesively towards a shared ambition. One such group, supported by the Regional Environment and Natural Heritage (RENH) programme, were over the moon in December after catching six stoats in nine days, all in the same trap.

Sally Horwood, who runs Ratbusters and is the RENH Stoat Project Coordinator says many local volunteers are doing an incredible, and often unsung job.

"This excellent run started with volunteer trapper Judy Woodcock catching an adult female stoat on 9 December.

"Then amazingly Anne Woodley, also a volunteer trapper on the project, pulled out a juvenile stoat every day for four days straight, from the same wonder trap in the Rangihoua area."

Sally says yet another stoat was caught by Judy two days later, "all in the magic trap".

The stoats were sent to Auckland for DNA testing, and Sally says she presumes hungry juvenile offspring followed their mother's scent trail into the same bait trap.

"This exciting run of catches was preceded by stoat trapper, Mike Hall catching three stoats in November."

Whakanewha ranger Natasha Beletzky and her team of volunteers also experienced success catching seven stoats in a week right by a dotterel nesting ground.

Volunteer Anne Woodley has been trapping on Waiheke for a year, and says she sets up traps in areas where people observe stoats fighting in order to protect vulnerable bird populations.

"It's really lucky because Sally and Hue Ross have set up this amazing programme which will be assisted by Te Korowai o Waiheke. It's a great thing to be part of a team of people with years of experience. There is a lot of luck involved but with this knowledge we are working to look after



Judy Woodcock checks one of the traps during the volunteers' amazing run of catching six stoats in nine days.

birds like the dotterel."

Anne says she is positive Waiheke will achieve its predator-free ambition.

"You just need good people, working together."

"Conservation projects such as this cannot operate at this level of success without passionate volunteers that give up their own time to check traps," says Sally.

"Mustelids are notoriously tricky to catch, and Hue Ross, the RENH team leader and myself are looking on in awe at volunteers like Anne, Judy, Jacqueline Joseph, Tracy Steel and Reid Falconer, many who also volunteer on other conservation projects around the island.

"A huge thanks to the project volunteers, Mike our trapper, the Waiheke Collective, Forest and Bird, Hauraki Gulf Conservation Trust and Te Korowai o Waiheke."

The RENH stoat project has been operating for more than two years and is funded by Auckland Council through

## Join the dots...

The Waiheke branch of Forest and Bird is hosting a unique guided walk to learn more about New Zealand dotterels. The event takes place this Sunday 5 January at Whakanewha Regional Park and will be led by dotterel expert John Dowding accompanied by park ranger and Forest and Bird committee member Natasha Beletzky.

"This is a family-friendly event and we will be viewing the birds from a safe distance through binoculars," says organizer Julian Watts. "Please bring binoculars if you have them."

Natasha will also lead a circular walk to Rocky Bay looking at the natural features and processes, which have shaped the stretch of coastline.

Meet at the Gordon's Road Car Park area at 2.30pm. For further information, contact Julian ruahines@hotmail.com. •

the Regional Environment and Natural Heritage Grants Programme. It's a community project that's part of the Waiheke Collective. Project coordinator Sally Horwood says 75 DOC 200 traps are in operation around the island's northern coastline, Hekerua, Onetangi and in the Rangihoua wetland.

"Trapping and monitoring protect Waiheke's taonga species such as kororā, grey-faced petrel, nesting kākā and our wetland birds like pāteke, banded-rail, spotless crane and more recently spoonbills."

Sally says the RENH stoat project team is looking forward to working with Te Korowai o Waiheke on wider stoat eradication from early 2020 "and gradually catching every last stoat!" •

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