

Waiheke's War on pests: Trap catches

Traps are one of Waiheke's best weapons against stoats and Rob Morton has been vigilant in his efforts to keep numbers down – his best trap clocked 72 of his total 96 kills.

On Tuesday, Rob experienced a first when he lifted the lid to find two stoats inside – one male, one female.

The trap in question is located on a narrow bridge over water at Awaawaroa's Eco Village and Rob believes it works so well because stoats prefer to keep their feet dry.

"Its situation is perfect because we have a river here and most mammals prefer not to get their feet wet if they have a choice, they can swim for kilometres, but if they have a choice they prefer dry feet over wet feet," he told *Gulf News*. "So they are directed to this pinch-point on the bridge."

For five months every year, for the past 25 years, Rob has worked on his predator control plan, checking his traps daily.

"The stoat is a super-predator, fearless, savage and energetic, they have to eat continually to stay alive."

- Rob Morton

He says stoats are definitely a problem, particularly on the nearby shell spit where they prey on birdlife.

"You catch a stoat and the numbers of shorebirds shoots up," he says. "They really respond to predator control."

"The stoat is a super-predator, fearless, savage and energetic, they have to eat continually to stay alive. The male stoat needs to eat a quarter of its body weight to stay alive and it's half the body weight for



Rob Morton with a stoat trap at Awaawaroa's Eco Village. Photo Liza Hamilton

the female stoat. After 24 hours of no food they will die of starvation; they really are high energy, high performance."

For others trapping pests, Rob says it pays to be strategic.

"The placement of the trap is so important," he says. "You have to be smart with stoats, you've got to think like them

and try and outwit them, they are clever."

Clearly passionate about conservation, Rob considers himself lucky to live on Waiheke and says it is a privilege to look after the land at Awaawaroa.

It's also heartening for him to see an increase in numbers of some rare birds.

"One I can think of is the banded rail



Jenny Holmes is Te Korowai o Waiheke Engagement Manager at Te Korowai o Waiheke Trust.

Why eradicate stoats?

Jenny Holmes explains how these killers' instincts make them a deadly visitor to Waiheke.

Stoats are a huge risk to the native birdlife on Waiheke Island. Ground-nesting birds like the dotterel, ōi (grey faced petrel) and kororā (little blue penguin) and hole-nesting birds such as kākā, have very limited means of escaping stoat predation.

Stoats are very agile and fast and require regular refuelling – males must eat a quarter of their body weight every day, while lactating females need to devour

half of their body weight every day! Stoats unable to catch sufficient prey will starve within 24 hours.

Despite being introduced to New Zealand to control rabbits, the major part of a stoat's diet is native birds, followed by insects, mice, rabbits, and then rats. They can have very large home ranges and are excellent tree climbers. Stoats are fast-breeding with highly developed reproductive systems – female stoats are almost always pregnant. Males mate with the mother of a litter soon after she has given birth, then also impregnate the baby female stoats in the litter.

Stoats are part of the mustelid family,

72 stoats



(little weka) – there were virtually none when we came here, now they are coming onto people’s lawns and into their houses, eating the tomatoes in their gardens. It’s such a success story, they are almost flightless, they can fly but in a clumsy way.”


Rob has also noticed more spotless crakes, a wetland bird about half the size of a rail, which he describes as a ‘beautiful, secretive little bird’. • *Liza Hamilton*

along with ferrets and weasels. Stoats are the most common species of mustelid on Waiheke, but there have been sightings of ferrets and weasels. The first part of the Te Korowai o Waiheke; Towards a Predator Free Waiheke programme is a mustelid eradication, because of the significant damage they do to our wildlife and a low risk that they will be able to return to Waiheke once eradicated.

Mustelids are extremely nervous, aggressive and secretive, so many people on the island may not have seen one. If you do see a stoat, ferret or weasel please email us as soon as possible on info@tekorowaiwaiheke.org • *Jenny Holmes*



Tuesday’s two-stoat surprise at Rob’s top trap. Photo Rob Morton



Te Korowai o Waiheke
TOWARDS PREDATOR FREE WAIHEKE

Which birds are attacked by stoats and rats?

Waiheke Birdlife

- Kākā
- Ruru (Morepork)
- Kororā (Little Blue Penguin)
- Ōi (Grey Faced Petrel)
- Kererū (Wood Pigeon)
- Kākāriki (Red Crowned Parakeet)
- Piwakawaka (Fantail)
- Tūi
- Pūweto (Spotless Crane)
- Tūturiwhatu (NZ Dotterel)

Waiheke Predators

- Stoats
- Ship Rat
- Norway Rat

Restoring our island song together

The birds listed are the Te Korowai o Waiheke indicator species.
Other birds are also targets for these predators.

For more information see www.tekorowaiwaiheke.org