



Birds New Zealand

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Supporting the science behind ‘Battle for our Birds’

Birds New Zealand congratulates the Department of Conservation for the considerable efforts it is making to defuse an impending plague of rats and stoats in New Zealand’s beech forests. “This campaign will benefit many threatened native bird species, and we hope that it will lead to support and funding for more extensive predator control in the future” says Birds New Zealand president David Lawrie.

The recognition of the links between summer temperatures, heavy beech seedfall, rodent and stoat population peaks, and the threat that ship rats and stoats pose to hole-nesting and ground-nesting native birds is based on decades of detailed ecological studies. Fortunately this threat can be met by wise use of aerially-applied baits laced with the toxin 1080 – specifically through using an initial drop of non-toxic baits to overcome bait shyness by rats, and timing the two drops just before the birds’ breeding season. This ensures high bird breeding success at the very time when an unprotected forest would be suffering devastating losses of breeding female birds and their eggs and chicks through rat and stoat predation.

Understanding the effectiveness of 1080 for rat and stoat control is relatively new information, derived from monitoring the outcomes of possum control operations. The toxin has long been used to control slow-breeding possums (which can produce only 1-2 young per breeding female per year). Use of 1080 to control fast-breeding rats and stoats requires more precise timing of application – it needs to be applied in those years when the predators are predicted to be reaching plague levels, and just before birds start to breed, to ensure that the predators don’t have time to re-invade.

“Many of our society’s professional members have contributed to the underlying science as scientists, field workers and advisors” says Lawrie. “Bringing all the strands of this research and analysis together into effective management offers real hope for the long-term survival of threatened bird species in mainland forests. We challenge DOC to ensure adequate monitoring of both managed and unmanaged forests and their birdlife. The community is exposed to much misinformation about the risks of 1080 use. The best way to overcome this is to show how effective the wise use of 1080 is at maintaining healthy bird populations.”

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Birds New Zealand is the popular name for
The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc