



moehau environment group
kiwi sanctuary: 2007/08 report



MEG track cutters and trappers Fabian Uhl, Erle Williams and Peter Bayliss

Photo: Wayne Todd

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Introduction

The Moehau Environment Group is an incorporated society of around 160 members established in 2000. The Group aims to improve conservation values in the northern Coromandel by carrying out pest control, species recovery work and advocacy. For more on the group visit www.meg.org.nz.

In July of 2004 the Moehau Environment Group received funding from the Bank of New Zealand Save the Kiwi Trust and Environment Waikato to establish a predator control operation between Waitete Bay, Whanga Ahei (Big Bay), Waikawau Bay and Kennedy Bay, including the townships of Colville, Little Bay and Tuatēawa.

The Moehau Environment Group Kiwi Sanctuary is immediately south of the Department of Conservation's Moehau Kiwi Sanctuary which covers 16,745 hectares from the northern tip of the Coromandel southward, and therefore complements work there. It is bounded to the south by trapping programmes in Kennedy Bay (Harataunga Kiwi Project) and the Papa Aroha Environment Group. The committee decided early on to integrate operations between the Moehau Environment Group and DOC, and have signed a Memorandum of Understanding which outlines the respective roles of each.

During the early part of 2007 a campaign against the Regional Council's proposed Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) affected the MEG Kiwi Sanctuary. Members of the lobby group 'Upper Coromandel Landcare Association' objected to the way in which 'kiwi sanctuaries' were singled out by the proposed RPMS for more intensive animal pest control measures, particularly larger species. The UCLA wrote to individual landowners within the sanctuaries (not just the one we look after) and encouraged them to withdraw their permission for the conservation work in protest at the proposed RPMS. As a result of this publicity Environment Waikato changed the proposed RPMS, and landowners did not withdraw their consent for our trapping operation. However, the issue exposed just how vulnerable projects like this can be to changes in the socio-political climate.

The local community continue to play an incredibly important role in the successful maintenance of the kiwi sanctuary by allowing trappers to access their land, by assisting with the kiwi survey and by reporting predator sightings. MEG is appreciative of both the level of interest and cooperation of landowners north of Coromandel Town.

Predator control

This report details catches between January 2005 when MEG trappers started work, and 15 February 2008. To date 396 stoats and 369 weasels have been caught – approximately one per trap or 10 per month. Catches are presented by year (in Table 1), by month (Figure 1), and by trap line (Figure 2). As has been demonstrated throughout New Zealand, predators were more frequently captured in summer and autumn than at other times of year, as shown in Figure 1. The number of traps placed in the MEG Kiwi Sanctuary and the area that they cover has increased over time. There were about 200 traps covering 2000 hectares when the sanctuary opened, and these figures increased steadily to over 700 traps covering 7,900 hectares in April 2006 (see Appendix 1). Since then there has been no expansion.

Table 1: Species caught in traps within the MEG Kiwi Sanctuary, 2005 – 2007.

	2005	2006	2007 Total	
Stoat	128	133	113	374
Weasel	129	140	88	357
Rat	612	807	815	2234
Cat	2	3	0	5
Hedgehog	17	22	15	54
Rabbit	5	5	6	16
Sprung trap	62	46	5	113
Total	959	1160	1043	

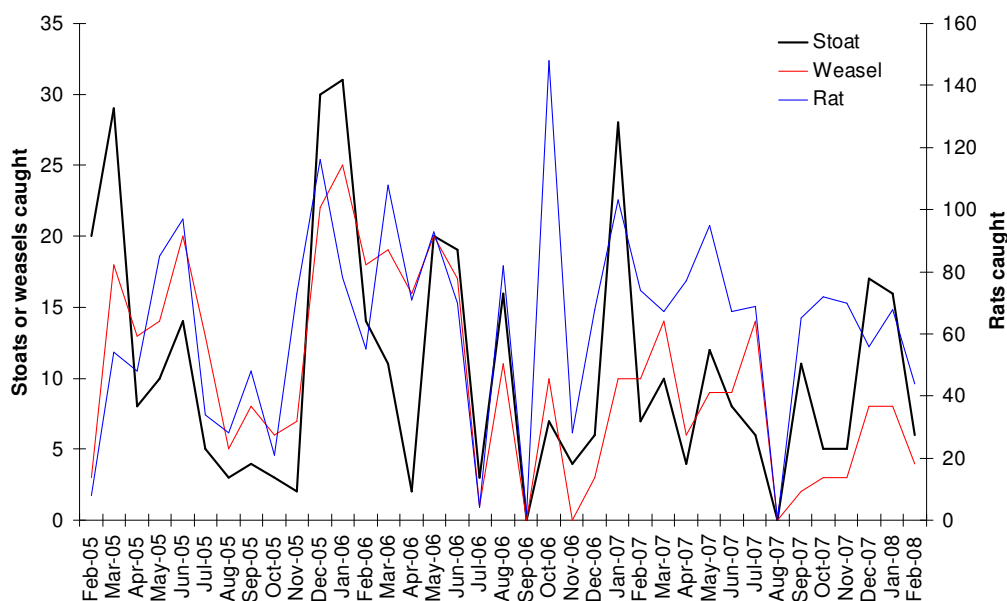


Figure 1: Predator catch rates at the Moehau Environment Group Kiwi Sanctuary, Feb 2005 – Feb 2008.

The Moehau Environment Group decided to follow a similar trapping regime to that used by DOC in the area. Two types of trap were selected for use in approximately equal numbers: the Mark VI Fenn and the DOC 200, housed in 500mm long wooden boxes made from rough sawn 25mm thick timber with mesh at each end. All boxes contained a single set trap. Traps were spaced approximately 180m apart using a GPS to determine point-to-point distance. Trap lines were spaced approximately 1,000m apart on existing tracks, ridges, roads and valley floors. A map of all trap lines is in Appendix 1.

Ron Peters and Erle Williams were hired in mid October 2004 to cut the tracks and carry out the trapping. They made excellent progress with the dry weather during the early part of 2005 and cut or reopened about 120km of track and installed 670 traps. The MEG Kiwi Sanctuary trapping team now includes Erle Williams, Kathi Parr, Karl Evans, Leo Campbell, Lisa Kearney and Dave Small.

Stoats and weasels have been caught throughout the Moehau Environment Group Kiwi Sanctuary, although some lines had significantly higher catch rates than others as shown in Figure 2.

Further analysis of the 'hot traps' – defined here as sites where at least four mustelids have been caught – shows an interestingly wide geographic distribution. There was little to suggest a preferred habitat type or gradient in the data – mustelids were caught throughout the area seemingly at random. The maximum number at any site was nine at POL 140.

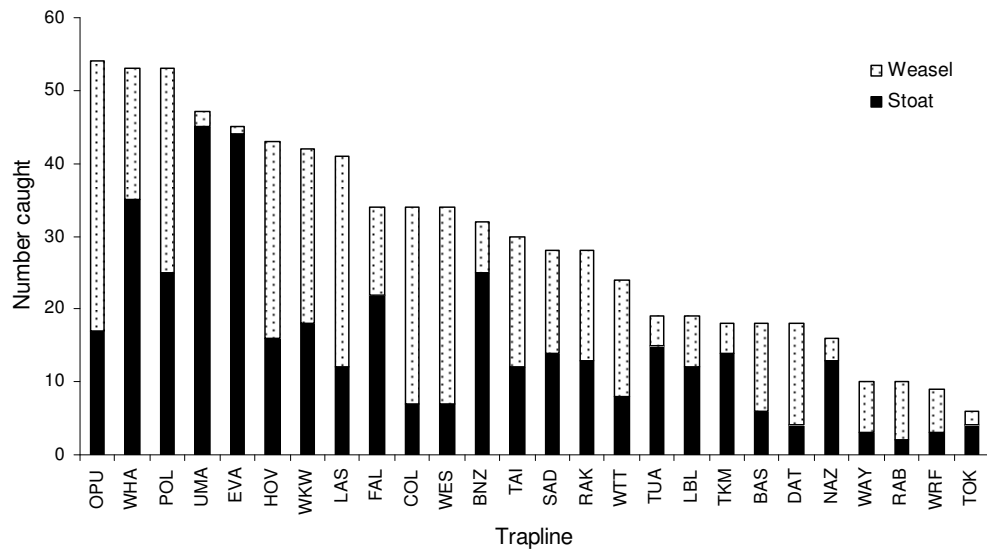


Figure 2: Predator catch rates according to trap line.

Table 2: Hot traps at the MEG Kiwi Sanctuary (those where at least four mustelids were caught between January 2005 and February 2008).

Trap	Stoat	Weasel	Rat
POL 140	3	6	4
TAI 130	2	6	4
OPU 150	5	1	3
WHA 50	4	2	4
POL 30	2	4	0
WES 100	1	5	4
COL 210	0	6	8
RAK 210	2	3	4
LAS 90	1	4	2
OPU 70	1	4	2
OPU 80	1	4	10
LAS 220	0	5	2
BNZ 80	4	0	5
UMA 250	4	0	2
WHA 100	4	0	3
SAD 150	3	1	4
WKW 40	3	1	5
WTT 60	2	2	4
HOV 300	1	3	3
LAS 210	1	3	2
POL 130	1	3	3
POL 220	1	3	5
WAY 12	1	3	1
WES 10	1	3	2
WES 170	1	3	5
DAT 20	0	4	5
LAS 153	0	4	4
LAS 160	0	4	5
OPU 100	0	4	1
OPU 130	0	4	9
RAB 40	0	4	0
TAI 170	0	4	4
WKW 240	0	4	6
WTT 90	0	4	1

Kiwi monitoring

Our baseline call count census in 2005 estimated that about 160 kiwi were present in the 7,900 hectare sanctuary. Annual call count monitoring since then has not shown any significant changes. The group intends to continue this monitoring at five sites annually, and repeat the census in 2010.

Population modelling in the nearby DOC Moehau Kiwi Sanctuary estimated an annual increase in kiwi of over 10% in 2005, based on the previous five years worth of radio-tagged kiwi survival data. Given that kiwi are present at similar densities in the MEG Kiwi Sanctuary, and that the predator control programme has been similar, we could expect the current kiwi population to be around 210 in total. If true, this would mean each kiwi has cost a shade under \$2,000 to produce.

Future plans

The Moehau Environment Group Kiwi Sanctuary has been funded by the Bank of New Zealand Save the Kiwi Trust to continue operations into the foreseeable future. Although the trap grid is now complete, the important work of trapping those predators which are a threat to kiwi will keep the Moehau Environment Group workers and volunteers busy for a long time yet.

If you would like to help the Moehau Environment Group's conservation work please don't hesitate to contact any member of the committee. Lettecia Williams can be reached at 07 866 6626, or check out our website at www.meg.org.nz ☺

Further down the peninsula from the Moehau Environment Group Kiwi Sanctuary the people from Ngati Porou ki Harataunga in Kennedy Bay are busy trapping predators too, as are locals at Papa Aroha on the west coast of the Coromandel. The total trapped area is almost 30,000 hectares, reaching south to Waitete Bay and Kennedy Bay.



Future conservationists of the northern Coromandel enjoying a day in the bush

Photo: K. Langenberger

Acknowledgments

Thanks to all the local landowners and residents who have provided support and voluntary assistance so far, and to Wayne Todd for liaising with them. In addition, we have been kindly sponsored by the Bank of New Zealand Save the Kiwi Trust, Environment Waikato, Fortress Fasteners, Gallie Miles Solicitors, New Zealand Landcare Trust and the Department of Conservation.

Appendix 1: Stoat traps in the Moehau Environment Group Kiwi Sanctuary

