

# Predator Free SOUTH WESTLAND

Restoring nature and sustaining community – from the mountains to the sea

Nau mai, haere mai! Welcome to the fourth Predator Free South Westland newsletter.



Credit: Stewart Nimmo

## A word from Katie Milne (Project Chair)

Since our last update, the Predator Free South Westland project has achieved a major milestone: the completion of the South Ōkārito predator elimination operation! This means that we are now focused on the long-term protection of the site against predator reinvasion, to help rowi (like the two above) and other taonga species to thrive.

As with all our mahi, this achievement would not have been possible without your continued support and encouragement. We also greatly appreciate your patience, as we waited... and waited... for the multitude of variables to align that ensure the best chance of success.

Our work in the Perth River Valley has given us a local example of how quickly native species can begin to recover when invasive predators are removed, as you'll learn more about below. I'm very excited that we can now expect to see a similar trend in South Ōkārito, and eventually across all of South Westland.

Mauri ora ki a koutou, Katie.



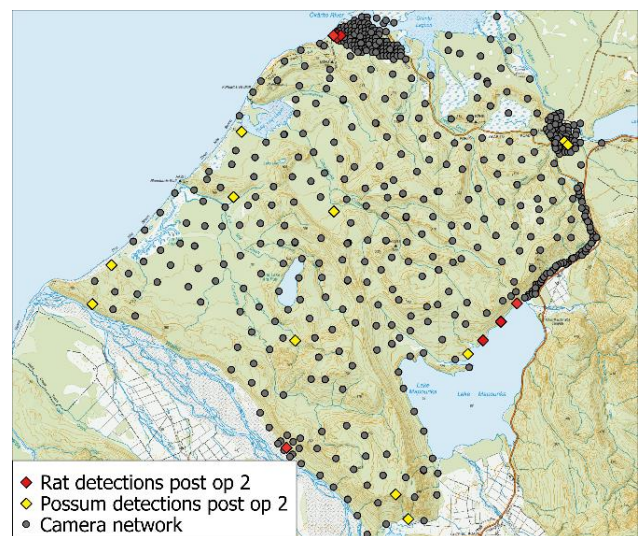
Rowi and chick in South Ōkārito, March 2022

## Project Update

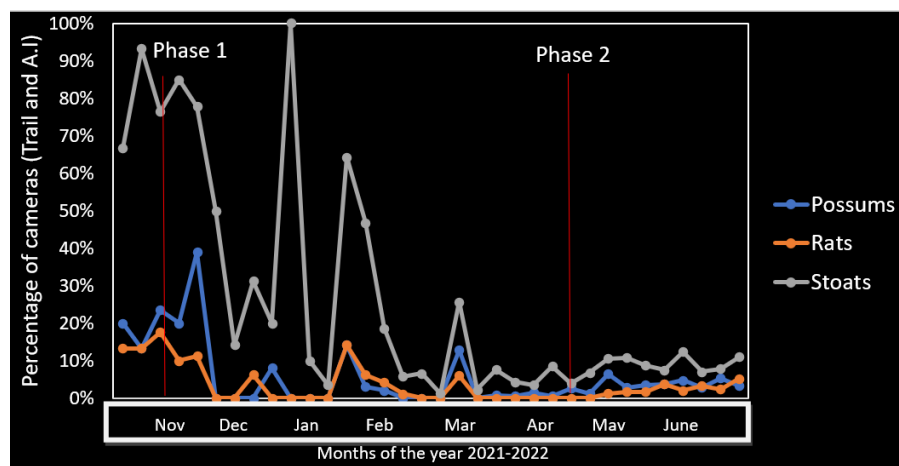
The second phase of the predator elimination mahi in South Ōkārito sanctuary and surrounds is now complete. This is a major milestone for the project. The work to protect the site against predator re-establishment is now underway.

The first phase of the operation was completed in November 2021, and substantially reduced possums, rats and stoats – but, as is expected, some survivors remained. After four months of detection and targeted ground-based response, the second phase of the operation was undertaken, with toxin applied on 10-13 April. This removed almost all remaining predators, along with any new young and arrivals from outside the site. This two-phase approach helps make elimination more achievable. Fortunately, measures taken since the first phase substantially mitigated the risk to karoro, and, pleasingly, there have been no reports of affected dogs or livestock.

In the approximately three months since the operation was completed, a small number of isolated possum and rat detections have occurred within the sanctuary (see map, right). This is to be expected, and our team is responding to these detections using a range of targeted aerial and ground-based techniques. Once these last survivors are removed, reinvasion from the edges will be managed to prevent predators re-establishing in the site.



Possum and rat detections in South Ōkārito



Possum, rat and stoat detections in South Ōkārito, Oct 2021-May 2022

The methodology for eliminating stoats is slightly different, and a higher degree of survivorship and reinvasion is expected. As with possums and rats, any individuals detected after the operation are removed using highly targeted methods.

The Predator Free South Westland team has greatly appreciated the ongoing support and patience of the local community during our work to eliminate invasive predators from South Ōkārito. We are now looking forward to protecting the site and watching the native taonga respond! We are now beginning to turn our attention to engaging with landowners about the next phase of the ground-based predator elimination within the project area.

## Safety Reminders

It has been nearly three months since toxin was applied in South Ōkārito, and we expect cereal bait to have broken down. However, due to scavenging risk, we still advise that you please **do not** let your dogs roam. ZIP has muzzles available, if you would like one. It is also important to take note of all warning signs and follow the guidance provided.



## Tools & Technology

We know that kea populations thrive when predators are removed, but they are also naturally curious creatures. It is therefore of vital importance to us that we mitigate the risks to kea associated with predator elimination activities. In conjunction with DOC we have been developing a multifaceted approach to 'train' kea to avoid toxic bait.



In the South Ōkārito sanctuary, we have been using special 'kea aversion stations' (pictured above) to expose kea to non-toxic cereal baits laced with a bird repellent. These baits are the same colour and size as both the pre-feed and toxin used in operations. Research with captive kea indicates that when kea learn to avoid cereal baits through exposure to the repellent, this aversion can last for up to two years! Aversion baits have been used to help protect kea in the Perth River Valley, with promising results, and are now being used to help protect kea during all Predator Free South Westland aerial operations.

Did you know you can report kea sightings? To do so, go to: [keadatabase.nz/report](https://keadatabase.nz/report)

## Who are we?

Predator Free South Westland (PFSW) is an ambitious five-year project to eliminate possums, rats and stoats from 100,000 hectares of land between the Whataroa and Waiou (Waiou) Rivers, the crest of the Southern Alps / Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, and the shores of the Tasman Sea / Te Tai-o-Rēhua. The mountains, rivers and lakes that surround the project area will be used to help protect the area against predator reinvasion.

Between 2020 and 2025, PFSW will build on the success of Zero Invasive Predators (ZIP) in the Perth River Valley, and work with the community to remove predators from the back country, rural areas and townships of South Westland.

## Science Bulletin

One of the bonuses of the extensive on-ground camera network used to detect predators is the insight we can glean from incidental photos of birds.

Every photo that is taken by a trail camera is identified by a team member - be it predator, bird, or waving blade of grass. In the 3 years since the beginning of the Perth River Valley project, we have amassed and classified over 2.5 million images!

With these images we have been able to follow recovery trends of three species in particular: kea, robin, and tomtits. For all three species, detections have at least doubled between 2019 (prior to predator elimination operations) and 2021.

To read more about the methodology behind these conclusions and other birds we're watching for, check out the full report here: <https://bit.ly/PerthBirds>.



Top: Kakarua/robin, May 2021  
Bottom: Ngirungiru/tomtit, Sep 2021

## Keeping in touch

Your ongoing input and support is critical to the success of Predator Free South Westland. Within the last few months we have added two members to the Community team, Wendy Rakete-Stones and Rhianna Hughes Eddy. Expect to hear more from them soon and say hi when you see them around.

To get in touch, drop us a line at [communitysupport@zip.org.nz](mailto:communitysupport@zip.org.nz).

**Thanks to the people of South Westland, our partners and funders. We couldn't do this without you.**



Department of Conservation  
Te Papa Atawhai

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