

HEDGEHOG INVESTIGATIONS UNDERWAY



They might seem cute, but hedgehogs can do a lot of damage to taonga species! That's why Predator Free Rakiura, with support from Manaaki Whenua, are looking for answers about how many of these predators are on Rakiura.

While they mostly eat insects, hedgehogs will eat almost anything interesting to them, including bird eggs, chicks, lizards, and other invertebrates. We want to make sure we can protect our precious species from these hungry predators.

We are fortunate that there have been lots of reports from residents about hedgehogs around Oban. There's also been some excellent hedgehog trapping work from Stewart Island Rakiura Community Environment Trust, which helps us to understand where hedgehogs are likely to be.

Earlier in May, up to 180 cameras were set up in a 13-square-kilometre area surrounding Oban. The pictures will be reviewed and the number of 'detections' will help us to begin to understand how many hedgehogs there may be in the area surveyed, as well as whether the population extends to, or perhaps beyond the camera boundaries.

This survey will help to check beyond the areas where sightings have been reported to date. We don't know how far beyond Oban and into the surrounding forest that hedgehogs may be established – the outcomes from this survey will help us design eradication plans for hedgehogs on Rakiura.

Predator Free Rakiura is employing local people to deliver the mahi, and we are collaborating with national and local organisations, too – our thanks goes out to landowners who have allowed us access, and to SIRCET, the Department of Conservation, and Manaaki Whenua for loaning us some of the equipment needed to deliver this work.

We hope to be able to report on some of the outcomes of this survey in late June/early July. Check out our website for more information about this project, and keep an eye out for future updates.



The camera deployment team getting ready to roll out. From left: Jack Dobbins, Sandi Van Leeuwen (front), James Ware, and Kevin Carter (front).



SAVE THE DATE!

The PFR team is excited to share our latest news and to answer your questions! Come along to join the conversation!

FUTURE RAKIURA COMMUNITY MEETING
Stewart Island Community Centre
Wednesday 31 May 2023 6.45pm - 9pm

MOUSE eDNA: What Next?

In late 2022, PFR Research & Operations Manager Kevin Carter waded into waterways to collect water samples, which were sent to Wellington to be tested for traces of eDNA.



PFR Operations & Research Manager Kevin Carter collects an eDNA sample in Oban

eDNA is short for environmental DNA, and it refers to small traces of genetic material left behind by living organisms in the environment. A sample of soil or water which is tested for traces of DNA can reveal the species that have lived in or travelled through the area.

We were looking for mouse eDNA - in an effort to understand whether these tiny predators have gained a stealthy foothold around Oban. This is important because if they are here, and we eradicate rats and feral cats, then we could see the mouse population explode - creating a new problem for our taonga species, and for residents - something we want to avoid!

Initial results were encouraging, with no mouse DNA detected. Even though mice weren't detected with this first survey round, more work is required to provide confidence in their presence or absence in various likely locations. A key principle in science is that "the absence of evidence does not necessarily provide evidence of absence".

However, we did learn that using eDNA sampling is straightforward and easily completed, and will be a handy tool, amongst others, for our kete in future. It was also very exciting to see the range of other species detected, including native fish and insects.

You can check out the results for yourself! Head to www.wilderlab.co.nz/explore - zoom in on Rakiura, and click on the sites to see what species were detected at each location!



KEEP IN TOUCH

Visit www.predatorfreerakiura.org.nz
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