

December 2023

HEDGEHOG SURVEY YIELDS INTERESTING RESULTS



Predator Free Rakiura's search for hedgehogs has yielded some interesting results - despite few of the spiky mammals being spotted!

With support from landowners, local contractors, SIRCET, and the Rakiura DOC office, 147 cameras were set up in a 13-square-kilometre area surrounding Oban in May 2023. The idea of the camera survey was to see if we could find a boundary for the population of hedgehogs – so that we can start to understand how big the hedgehog problem might be. A further six cameras were used as a 'control', within the township, where hedgehogs have previously been known to be present.

Each camera was baited with wet meat cat food, and the cameras were in place for at least 10 nights. More than 30,000 images were captured by the cameras! No hedgehogs were detected in the survey area, while one was detected in the control area. Lots of other species were detected across the grid, including possums, rats, cats, deer, and many birds.

There was one animal detected which may have been a mouse. Further review of the images by PFR's research partner Manaaki Whenua was unable to confirm whether this was the case - it's possible the animal was a small rat - potentially kiore. We know that mice arrive on Rakiura but don't seem to set up an established population. So this possible sighting is helpful information not only for Predator Free Rakiura but others interested in mice sightings. We've passed on the images to Department of Conservation and Environment Southland.

There could be several reasons why hedgehogs weren't found within the survey area:

- Hedgehogs were already hibernating at the time – we know that hedgehogs hibernate in winter, and we were searching for them close to hibernation time.
- Baited cameras weren't an effective method for detecting them.
- Hedgehog density (the number of hedgehogs out and about) was too low to detect them.
- Hedgehogs are absent from the survey area.

'No detections' of hedgehogs doesn't mean that the work hasn't been valuable, nor that hedgehogs aren't out there. There hasn't been any other recent data available on hedgehog distribution, so this work creates a baseline for us to work from. It was also a great opportunity to test baited cameras as a tool for hedgehog detection, and we're keen to build from that with other techniques and at a different time of year.

The results could mean that hedgehogs are limited to the township, but we will need to do more research into hedgehogs on Rakiura - including where they are and how many there may be. The results from the survey have also helped us to begin building a data set on other species in the area, which is beneficial to PFR, too! We will keep you posted with what will come next for our hedgehog investigations!

In the meantime, a big thankyou from PFR to landowners and local contractors for their support in delivering this important research!



A couple of the interesting shots picked up by the cameras!

MĀ TE WĀ, CAMPBELL & BRIDGET!

There are changes afoot in the Predator Free Rakiura Project Team, as we say farewell to Project Director Campbell Leckie and Assistant Project Director Bridget Carter.

Bridget is most certainly a familiar face about town on Rakiura as a resident, and Campbell will be familiar to many of you as he spent lots of time on the island during his 18 months with the project.

Bridget finishes up with PFR this December, while Campbell is on deck until mid January. In the meantime, Te Puka Rakiura Trust is fast-tracking the recruitment process for new project leadership, and we hope to be able to share more on that in the new year.



CAMPBELL SAYS:

I have enjoyed my time with PFR immensely! To work on a project of this transformational scale has been an absolute privilege and I have enjoyed working with you all.

During my time in the role, we:

- Built some significant partnerships such as with Manaaki Whenua for research;
- Made substantial progress in our critical project funding conversation;
- Developed much greater project profile nationally and, in some cases, internationally;
- Laid the foundation for the critical next phase which, once funding is secured, is about getting operations underway to eradicate our six predator species!

I look forward to seeing what happens next with Predator Free Rakiura, and to visiting the island and reconnecting again with those of you I have met on Rakiura - a truly beautiful part of New Zealand.



BRIDGET SAYS:

Wishing the Predator Free Rakiura team all the best for what lies ahead. I remain deeply passionate about this vision and look forward to progress. Only together, will this be possible.

IN 2024, LOOK OUR FOR...

Work starting on biosecurity options
Increasing connections with the Rakiura Community
Identifying tools and techniques

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