



## Media release

23 December 2015

### **“DON’T BLAME US FOR THE RABBITS” SAYS THE WHAKATĀNE KIWI TRUST - PREDATOR CONTROL DOES NOT LEAD TO GREATER RABBIT ABUNDANCE**

Rabbits ravaging your roses? Bunnies burrowing in the lawn? A plague of rabbits has hit the Eastern Bay of Plenty and many other regions around the country this summer. Trail walkers and golfers are noticing increasing amounts of rabbit activity. Rabbits are even being seen in the bush within the Ōhope Scenic Reserve.

Suggestions are being made that predator trapping, targeting stoats that kill our native wildlife, including kiwi, is the cause for this rabbit explosion.

This is not the case according to studies undertaken by Landcare Research scientists for the Hawkes Bay Regional Council to determine whether control of introduced predators in New Zealand leads to greater abundance of rabbits. Predators appear to have relatively little effect on rabbit numbers compared with other forms of mortality such as disease, drowning in burrows, or collapse of burrows. Increases are influenced by the effects of climate, food, disease and habitat. Last summer the high production of seed (mast) in our beech forests triggered a rodent and stoat explosion and there was a lot of national publicity around the work done to protect native birds from these predators. Rabbits also benefited from this general increase in the food supply. Recent mild winter weather has also enabled more rabbits to survive to breed the following spring.

So what can affected landowners do to control the rabbit population? Rabbits are classified as a restricted pest animal within the Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC) Pest Control Plan. Landowners are not required to control rabbits on their property, but are encouraged to do so. BOPRC can provide advice on control methods, and has also produced a helpful guide that is available from their website. Control is best carried out in winter when rabbit numbers are at their lowest, and there are a range of methods that can be used.

Stoats are one of the greatest threats to young kiwi. The Whakatāne Kiwi Trust carries out predator control in the Ōhope Scenic Reserve, Mokorua Reserve and in the Kohi Point Reserve to protect kiwi and other native species, and there are private landowners and other community groups who

are also trapping stoats. It is important that these activities are not endangered by misinformation.

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### **Contacts**

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### **Background information**

Whakatāne Kiwi Trust website: [www.whakatanekiwi.org.nz](http://www.whakatanekiwi.org.nz)

Bay of Plenty Regional Council website:

<https://www.boprc.govt.nz/media/395489/rabbit-control-options-a4-booklet-web-.pdf>