



# Taonga of an island nation: **Saving New Zealand's birds**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is this report about?**

This investigation is aimed at shining a light on the desperate state of New Zealand's native birds, the challenges they face, and what it might take to restore them in large numbers back on to the mainland

### **Why did the Commissioner decide to undertake this investigation?**

Across the country, many New Zealanders are working hard to save our natural heritage, but despite their best efforts, many native birds are in trouble and some are in danger of extinction. The Commissioner decided to investigate what can be done to restore abundant, diverse, and resilient birdlife to the mainland.

### **What are the report's main findings?**

Of our 168 native bird species, just 20% are doing OK, 48% are in some trouble, and 32% are in serious trouble. Many birds are in small isolated populations – on offshore islands, in mainland sanctuaries, and in remnants of habitat – and thus at risk of inbreeding. We need sustained control of predators over large areas of habitat, so that bigger populations of birds can thrive.

### **What can we do to bring back the birds?**

Birds need safety from predators, somewhere to live and thrive, and a degree of genetic diversity. Much good work is already being done, but a plan of action is required. It is possible to restore abundant birdlife on the mainland, but it will take clear thinking and planning, significant investment, and the energy and ingenuity of many New Zealanders.

### **Do we need more funding for conservation?**

New Zealand's native birds are in a desperate situation, and it will take a lot more money to turn this around. The Commissioner has recommended the Government look at new sources of funding, such as a Nature border levy payable by tourists.

### **Why tourists?**

Two million tourists visited New Zealand last year and almost all would have come because they saw photographs of national parks. Other countries charge tourists for visiting national parks and other natural attractions. The money New Zealand could raise by doing the same would go some way to saving our special and unique birds.

### **What is being done to protect our birds?**

The Government's 'Battle for our Birds' has been critically important in protecting birds from epidemics of rats and stoats during mast years when trees produce far more seeds than usual. The announcement of the Predator Free 2050 goal is focusing attention on predators. Across New Zealand, hundreds of community groups are working hard on conservation. And the number of covenants and eco-sanctuaries continues to grow, with many on private land.

## **Is 'Predator Free 2050' enough?**

Predator Free 2050 is a commendable goal, and draws attention to that fact that predators remain the biggest threat to our native birds. However, little detail has been provided as to how we are going to get there from here. There is no plan of action, and this is what is now needed.

## **What is the role of 1080?**

Ridding New Zealand of predators would be a great achievement, but until then keeping predators down to low levels – suppression – is the name of the game. Aerial 1080 is essential for knocking down predators in most years. It is also the best way of controlling predators over large areas, especially when they are rugged and difficult to access.

## **What about trapping and ground baiting?**

There is a wave of innovation underway developing new kinds of traps, poisons, and lures. These have very important roles to play, including slowing down rat reinvasion after a 1080 drop. One example is traps that reset themselves, thus saving on labour costs. A long-lasting lure for stoats would be a major breakthrough.

## **What about cats?**

Wild feral cats are skilled killers of our birds, and almost certainly number in the millions in the countryside and along forest margins. The Commissioner has called for the development of new baits and lures for the control of feral cats.

## **Can we rely on scientific breakthroughs to save our birds?**

Some research that would potentially use genetic techniques to suppress or even eradicate predators is underway. Approaches that rely on some kind of genetic modification are likely to encounter strong opposition from some. The Commissioner has called for a programme of staged engagement with the general public on the possible uses of genetic techniques to control predators.

## **Aren't we already protecting birds on the conservation estate?**

Putting land into national parks does not guarantee protection for the birds within – the predators that eat birds are oblivious to lines on maps. The 2014 Battle for our Birds covered just 16% of the area under attack from surging predator numbers – at a cost of \$20 million. We need to control predators over much bigger areas of the conservation estate.

## **What about land outside of our conservation estate?**

Many of New Zealand's native birds spend all or part of their lives on farmland, along rivers and around lakes, and along the coast. Our birds need just as much protection and habitat on land outside national parks and other reserves.

## **Can we leave it all to the Department of Conservation?**

The Department of Conservation has a crucial role to play in protecting our birds. However, restoring abundant, diverse, resilient birdlife to the mainland will require the efforts of many others, including private land owners, councils, iwi, and community groups. This is a battle for all New Zealand.