

HAERE MAI :: NAU MAI :: HAERE MAI

WELCOME TO THE AWHITU PENINSULA: Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula: Animal Pests

protecting our past :: planning our presence :: feeding our future

Coming to live here? Looking for land or a home here? Just visiting?



Awhitu Peninsula Landcare welcomes you, and invites you to use the information in this, and the other broadsheets available:

What is the Awhitu Peninsula?
Land, Wind and Water
Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula: Plant Pests

Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula: Animal Pests

The Awhitu Peninsula Landcare group has, since its beginnings in 1994, been involved in pest control, by lending traps for unwanted animals and by identifying and advising on control methods for weeds. From late 2004 till early 2008 we ran a very successful pest control project, aimed particularly at reducing the possum population because of the harmful effect of possums on the biodiversity of the region. This project was supported by the Auckland Regional Council, and special additional funding was provided for four years by Biodiversity Condition and Advice grants from the Department of Conservation.

We hope all newcomers, as well as present residents, will join the ongoing campaign against pests, and help to create new ways of making the environment healthier and more productive and sustainable, for everyone on the Awhitu Peninsula.

In the next section, Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula: Plant Pests, we deal with weeds on the Peninsula.

Here we describe some of the major animal pests that need to be controlled on the Awhitu Peninsula and the ways of dealing with them. For more detailed information and support see our website: www.awhиту.org.nz, or contact the **Awhitu Information Office** at Matakawau: (09) 235-1551

1. Brush tailed possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*)

Introduced from Australia in the 19th century, possums continue to devastate native bush throughout New Zealand, and to be a major vector in spreading disease, especially TB, to farmed cattle and deer. They are also known, along with rats, ferrets and stoats, to eat birds' eggs and kill baby birds.

Large numbers of possums have been killed on the Peninsula since 2004. The ARC initially provided contractors to place bait stations on land throughout the Peninsula, working from north to south over a four-year period. Awhitu Peninsula Landcare gained support from the Department of Conservation's Biosecurity Condition and Advice fund to employ a Pest Control Project Manager for four years. He worked with landowners to keep bait stations replenished and to install new ones as needed.



As a result, the Residual Trap Catch (a measure used to determine possum numbers) has gone from as high as 40% in some parts of the Peninsula and an average of 20%, to an average of 3%, with many areas now showing zero populations.

The Pest Control Project Manager also installed, with the cooperation of the landowners concerned, a line of bait stations and traps across the southern boundary of the Peninsula to try and prevent re-infestation, as well as to monitor movements and numbers. This is particularly important, because TB has been found in cattle south of Waiuku, and it is imperative that we prevent its spread to the Peninsula, which has been TB-free for some years.



Awhitu Peninsula is now a designated Possum Control Area. This means landowners have voted to pay a small special rate for possum control, and in return receive substantial support from the Auckland Regional Council for ongoing control, education and monitoring to ensure the progress made in the last four years is maintained.

The poison used in possum bait at present on the Peninsula is broadifocoum, considered to be the least toxic of the chemicals able effectively to kill possums and rats. Ferrets and other mustelids (stoats, weasels) or wild cats and wild dogs which eat poisoned possums or rats may also be killed, which is helpful as they are all pests. Bait stations are placed out of reach of grazing animals. If any other animal is affected by the poison (eg. a farm dog which eats a possum carcass) it can be treated with vitamin injections from the Waiuku Veterinary Clinic – but we have had no reported accidental poisonings in the four years the programme has been operating.

Some landowners prefer to control numbers by trapping and/or shooting. The Pest Control Project will continue to organise traps and ammunition for them, as well as on-going supplies of bait. The Landcare group is also working to encourage commercial contractors who can assist any landowners unable to put adequate time into pest control themselves, and hopes to keep running the pest control project long-term with support from the ARC.

2. Mustelids (*Mustelidae spp.*)- ferrets (*M. furo*), stoats (*M. erminea*), weasels (*M. nivalis vulgar*)



There are ferrets on the Peninsula – and probably stoats as well. At least one weasel has been seen recently. These vicious little creatures were originally introduced to catch rabbits, but quickly found that native birds and their eggs were much easier prey. Ferrets and stoats will kill your hens as well as wild birds. If you see one, or the evidence that one has been around (dead birds with their throats bitten out are a key sign), contact the Awhitu Information Office for a trap.



3. Deer (*Cervidae spp.*)

Landowners are asked to be very careful about trying to farm deer on the Peninsula. The fragile sand country erodes very easily, and if deer escape they cause great damage to native bush. Deer must be held within fences as specified in the national Deer Farming Regulations, and it is an offence to release any deer into the wild anywhere in the Auckland region.



Anyone considering deer farming is invited to talk first to local farmers who have a successful and environmentally-friendly deer farm (one local couple have won New Zealand's top awards for their efforts).

There are both fallow deer (*Dama dama dama*) and red deer (*Cervus elaphus scoticus*) on the Peninsula, which damage native bush by eating and trampling new growth, or by browsing on older shrubs and trees.

The original Pollok fallow herd, steely-grey in colour, has built up from two animals released at Te Toro in 1909. The other whitish-coloured fallow deer, usually found in small groups from Pollok north, descend from some released in 1990.

Red deer, which are escapees from poorly fenced commercial deer farms, are larger and a reddish-tan colour. They are seriously destructive, and theoretically could even swim across the Manukau at a narrow point, posing a threat to the protected Waitakere Ranges bush. If you see any red deer on or near your land, please either shoot them yourself, or call the Awhitu Information Office or a Landcare group member immediately for help in arranging extermination.

Some landowners like to have a few fallow deer grazing on their land, but if numbers increase, they must be culled, or the Department of Conservation will step in. If you are trying to protect native bush you can arrange for a shooter to come and kill them – ring the Awhitu Information Office to arrange this.



4. Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus cuniculus*) and hares (*Lepus europaeus occidentalis*)

Since they were introduced to New Zealand, rabbits in particular have been a major pest. They love Peninsula sand country – easy burrowing, good drainage, plenty of grass (and vegetables too), and a warm climate – three litters a year are common here. Rabbit Calicivirus disease has been introduced on two occasions but has had little impact on overall numbers.



They are not “beautiful bunnies” here – they need to be treated as either a useful food supply (rabbit casserole is healthy and delicious), or annoying and destructive pests. If you cannot shoot or trap them yourself, ring the Information Office for help.



Hares are less common – but if you are planting trees and shrubs, you may need to spray them with Trepel or something similar (an egg powder and acrylic paint mix is useful) because hares are extremely territorial and will bite your new plants off near the ground if your plants are in their way.

5. Cats (*Felis catus*) and dogs (*Canis familiaris*)

Tim Lovegrove, of the ARC, sees cats as less of a problem here than in some parts of the country, because there are few ground-dwelling native birds left. Well-trained hunting cats may help to keep rabbits, rats and mice under control, while leaving birds alone. However, anyone living near the coast, wetlands or bush blocks should avoid keeping domestic cats, because of the likelihood they will kill rare native birds such as dotterels and banded rail, and because they will certainly catch the lizards, frogs and invertebrates which are vital to the health of the bush and its bird-life.

Dogs need to be kept under control, and excluded as far as possible from bush or wetland areas. However, some breeds can be useful allies in the fight against rabbits and possums.

If you want help with trapping wild cats or dogs, please ring the Awhitu Information Office.



6. Pigs (*Sus scrofa*) and goats (*Capra hircus*)



Anyone who wants to farm pigs must get a resource consent from the Franklin District Council. Even a few pigs for home use must be securely controlled, as feral pigs are a pest in the Auckland region, and it is an offence to release pigs, or allow them to escape.

Goats must be registered under the Animal Identification Act, and again, must be securely managed, as they can, like pigs, cause considerable damage to native bush and commercial plantings if they escape.

At present, neither is a major problem on the Peninsula – please keep it that way! A goat farm is *not* a good idea here, because of erosion and escapes; and pig effluent seeping into streams or

underground water systems could have disastrous effects.



7. Hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus occidentalis*)

You may think these cute creatures are helpful snail and slug eaters. However, they also eat native insects and other invertebrates, the eggs of ground-laying birds such as the rare dotterels and other coastal natives, and they carry fleas and lice, and transmit diseases such as ringworm and TB. Don't encourage them (and make them sick) by feeding them saucers of milk. If you see one wandering drunkenly about in daylight, it is ill – put it out of its misery, and bury it.



Further information

- Native bats: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/TheBush/NativeBirdsAndBats/Bats/1/en>
<http://www.mtbruce.org.nz/Battalk.pdf>
(not a pest – sometimes found locally)
- Possums: <http://www.kcc.org.nz/pests/possum.asp>
<http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/podcover.aspx?id=33422>
- Hedgehogs: http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/news/release.asp?Ne_ID=86
- Deer: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/1966/M/MammalsIntroduced/Deer/en>
<http://www.nrc.govt.nz/upload/2724/Feral%20Deer.pdf>



**We welcome newcomers to join us in
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This broadsheet, **Welcome to the Awhitu Peninsula: What is the Awhitu Peninsula**, has been supported by the Department of Conservation and the Auckland Regional Council, and by local Real Estate agent Lyn Peacock, of Barfoot and Thompson.



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