



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

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### Rotopounamu Rat Target Hit

The birds are singing praises for the achievement of the Department of Conservation and Project Tongariro hitting their target of reducing rodents below 5% at Lake Rotopounamu this summer. A low rodent population enables bird species the chance to breed successfully, and means less competition for food. This season's success is thought to be due to the trial of a new bait product.

The new bait Pest Off 50D comes in what proves to be a popular form of cereal pellets. The bait was laid in one thousand ground bait stations over 540ha around Lake Pounamu, which is a popular track 11km from Turangi off SH47. This summer the lowest rat densities of eight seasons was achieved with rat numbers sitting as low as 1%, where previously the numbers have never been below 12%. The bait has the added bonus of coming at a cheaper cost.

Project Tongariro are actively involved with monitoring rodent numbers throughout the season and are thrilled with the results. Project Tongariro intern Kaitlin Morrison commented, "The rodents seem to just love this new bait. In January we recorded a 0% footprint indicator of mice at Rotopounamu." Volunteers also check weekly the last line of defence against predators, being 49 traps for rats and stoats which are distributed throughout the forest.

Bird monitoring also showed significant increases in bird life at Rotopounamu this summer. Higher numbers of birds such as the North Island robin and fantails can be associated with the successful rodent control, as rats have the greatest impact for these species through direct predation on nests, and competition for fruit, seeds and invertebrates. This data is collected through Project Tongariro interns and DOC staff completing 500 five minute bird counts during January. Biodiversity ranger Joanna Nash said, "It was very rewarding to see so many tiny riflemen chicks flitting amongst the trees." It is protecting such small, vulnerable bird species that makes all the hard work worthwhile.

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**Background information** The Rotopounamu restoration project started in 2003/2004, a joint initiative between The Department of Conservation, and Project Tongariro (previously called the Tongariro Natural History Society).