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Native species in Tiromoana Bush being protected from animal pests

Preventing animal pests from damaging fifteen years of successful bush regeneration, along with protecting native birds such as korimako and marsh crake, are priorities at Tiromoana Bush in Waipara's Kate Valley.

Transwaste Canterbury, who own the adjacent landfill and Tiromoana Bush, are launching an ambitious animal pest control programme to reduce and manage the impact of pests on the bush and the native species that inhabit it. Transwaste Board Chair Gill Cox says protecting the biodiversity of Tiromoana Bush is a top priority.

"A key part of our decision to restore Tiromoana Bush is to provide a habitat for native trees, birds and insects to thrive", says Cox. "We don't want the regenerating bush to be a habitat and food source for pests that could endanger the very native birds and insects we want to support."

Recent monitoring revealed a wide diversity of animal pests are living in Tiromoana Bush including mice and rats, rabbits and hares, hedgehogs, weasels, stoats and ferrets, possums and feral cats. Their presence in Tiromoana Bush is causing real damage to the restoration project says Dr David Norton, a professor from the University of Canterbury's Te Kura Ngahere | School of Forestry who wrote the *Tiromoana Bush Restoration Management Plan* in 2004 and provides ongoing advice on the bush restoration project to Transwaste Canterbury.

"Animal pests don't just live in the bush, they eat the plants which are an important habitat and food source for native birds and insects, and damage tree roots which can kill the trees", says Dr Norton. "Monitoring shows bird numbers are declining rather than increasing which is a clear indicator that animal pests are robbing the food sources birds need, and killing birds."

Dr Norton's *Plan* recommended removing wild animals to allow natural regeneration of the bush. A 16-kilometre deer fence is successfully preventing red deer from wandering into the bush, but smaller pests such as rabbits, possums, rats and feral cats require more intensive trapping to remove them from the bush. A comprehensive animal pest trap network is being set up by animal pest control expert Fraser Maddigan across 400 hectares of Tiromoana Bush, using kill traps, which are simple, humane, and safe compared to the use of toxins says Dr Norton.

"We're setting up 200 trap station sites spaced at approximately 200 metre intervals", says Dr Norton. "At each site there'll be two different types of traps for targetting different pests. We use wooden box traps for ferrets, stoats and weasels, rats and hedgehogs, and Trapinators for possums and feral cats. The sites are carefully chosen away from the walking tracks and out of public sight."

Once the traps are in place monthly monitoring of the traps, along with bird monitoring will indicate the success of the pest control work. Dr Norton says being pest free isn't a realistic goal.

"It's very difficult to eliminate all animal pests over such a big area, but we can reduce them to a low level where the few that remain no longer threaten the native fauna and flora. That will help Tiromoana Bush and be of benefit to the surrounding farms and regional biodiversity."

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