

# FRIENDS OF PUKETOKI

## A BRIEF HISTORY

The group was formed by Terry Edwards, with support from Andrew Jenks from Wild About NZ [WANZ], in February 2006, and some initial surveys were done with rodent trackers to see what was happening in the area. The local school was involved with the initial set up, placing and recovering the tracker cards and analysing the prints. These cards showed over 50% of stations had rodent presence and almost exclusively ship rats. A decision was made to undertake a rodent poisoning programme in the Reserve. More volunteers were recruited to staff the project.

By May, six lines had been put in by WANZ staff and up to seven stations with rat bait tunnels per line initially established. These lines were baited with rodent poison blocks which kept disappearing at an alarming rate. Again Whakamarama Primary School students and parents were at times involved in the replacement of baits. Baits and tunnel stations were supplied through WANZ with support from EBOP and WBOPDC.

By April 07 it was felt that there was something other than rodents responsible for the amount of bait going. Further monitoring with trackers showed the presence of rodents almost down to 0% so we were suspicious that other pests were to blame – but we were having problems proving it! An array of cards were arranged around the opening to three particularly popular bait stations in an attempt to get prints of the bait raiders – and it worked. A few large foot prints and hairy shoulder smudges confirmed the fact that dextrous possums were to blame, leaning over and reaching into the stations to claw out bait! The bait is not designed to kill larger mammals (at the doses we use) so we had spent the latter part of the season fattening up our pests. This discovery meant there luck was about to run out.

After some consultation with a range of experts from EBOP and Connovation Ltd a start was made on stage two, possum eradication. A range of baits and traps were considered and in the end Connovation Warrior traps were selected, for ease of servicing and effectiveness. Steve Boot from Connovation demonstrated the set up, including how to select good trees and the use of lures. The initial traps were set up at the end of July. Within three days of the first ten traps being established four possum were killed, a week later there were 10 possums on fourteen traps. Over the next two weeks traps were established on all the other original six lines. By the end of the August 55 adult possums had been killed and 15 joeys had died too. Monthly totals then dropped off to 11, 13, 11, 6, 16, and 16 for Feb 08.

On different lines the number of traps has gradually been augmented and perimeter lines 0 and 7 have been established to create a first defence line. We now have from six to 15 bait stations per line totalling 70 in all, and a total of 59 traps on the 8 lines. Our current eight volunteers are getting together once a fortnight to service the traps and record the amount of baits eaten, and most are checking their lines in their own time once or twice in between to avoid the maggot ridden corpse syndrome!