



Well trained dog-handler teams have been successfully used for conservation for more than 40 years.

New Zealand was the first country to use dogs to benefit conservation as far back as the 1890s. Today, conservation dogs are used all over New Zealand, for example:

- › Helping monitor kiwi and pāteke in Northland
- › Protecting the Hauraki Gulf islands from introduced pests
- › Helping monitor kiwi, whio and kea on the West Coast

The dog-handler teams are trained to sniff out either:

- › Protected species (mainly birds) so they can be banded, monitored and/or moved to another place, or
- › Pest species (e.g. rodents, stoats, Argentine ants, weeds) that would destroy our native wildlife in pest-free areas.

International recognition

Globally, New Zealand is considered a leader in pest eradication programmes. Conservation dogs are a key tool in these programmes.

We have helped Australia use conservation dogs to find feral cats and rodents, and have supplied dogs to Japan to find mongooses.

A special breed

Certain dog breeds are more suited for this work – pointers are often used to find protected species, while terriers are usually used to find pests.

Dogs pose a serious risk to protected species if they are not trained and handled correctly.

Fast facts

- › There are 80 conservation dogs in New Zealand – 55 find protected species, 25 find pests
- › They play a major role in conserving kākāpō, kiwi, whio, pāteke, and takahē
- › A dog-handler team is usually trained to find just one species
- › Terriers are usually used to find pests
- › Pointers are often used to find protected species

Stoat detection dog **Crete** on Kapiti Island. Photo Scott Theobald



Rhys Jones, the world's first Argentine ant detection dog. Photo: Brian Shields



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Rodent detection dogs **Pai** and **Piri** checking gear bound for Raoul Island.
Photo: Carol Nanning



Kiwi detection dog **Jade** pointing at a kiwi. Photo: Rogan Colbourne



Kiwi and pāteke detection dog **Rua** in the Waikoha swamp.
Photo: Pete Graham

Neo the whio dog.
Photo: Andrew Glaser

Requirements and training

There are national standards and protocols for all conservation dogs and their handlers whether they work on DOC-administered land, work on private land where a DOC permit is required to handle protected species, or are looking for pests in areas where there are protected species.

To train a safe and successful dog, handlers must have:

- › Experience of working with the target protected or pest species
- › Dog-handling and training experience
- › Time and opportunity – it takes around 18 months of daily training to certify a handler and their dog. Once certified they will still need to train several times a week for the duration of the dog's working life (up to 10 years).

Support is available for handlers, including advice on dog selection and training, equipment, mentoring, and annual handler workshops.

For further information

Please visit:

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