



Kahurangi Kokako Trust founder and hunter **Peter Davey**.
“I’m definitely a supporter of 1080; it’s a simple tool that does the job. We’re not interested in saving the deer in our block; we just want the birds saved in the most efficient way possible.”

Affirmative Action

Sceptical of the claims from both sides of the argument, Peter Davey, Rotorua hunting guide, decided the truth about 1080 was out there somewhere. So he picked up a tape recorder and went looking. Oh, and he saved some threatened birds as well.

Peter Davey picked up his first rifle around age eight and has hardly put it down since.

“I think I shot my first pig at eight years old,” he recalls. “I was running round the bush by myself as a kid, so I learnt to become independent early on in life.”

He still has that independence. When he finally tired of anti-1080 rhetoric in his favourite hunting magazines, he decided to find out the truth about the toxin for himself.

“I could see that the debate had become unbalanced. You have the hunting lobby on one side, saying 1080 kills birds, and the environmentalists on the other, claiming it saves them.

“I call myself a hunter, and an environmentalist as well, so I saw myself as being in a unique situation, where I could do my own survey and judge. No one could accuse me of being one or the other.”

So armed with permits and a tape recorder, he listened

in on bird populations before and after an aerial 1080 operation at Maungawhakamana, a remnant and regenerating area in Rotoma Forest, near Rotorua.

“I wanted to do it for myself more than anything,” he says, “because I was worried that birds might be dying. I needed to know, and to document it properly.”

Davey set up two survey lines, each over a kilometre long, then stopped every 250m to record bird calls for precisely five minutes at each station. He also noted any sightings.

This Five Minute Bird Count is a standard method for gauging the “conspicuousness” of birds, though some still doubt its usefulness in assessing actual numbers.

Davey was encouraged by what he heard. “The verdict was that I heard more birds directly after the drop than before,” he says. “I didn’t see so many tomtits when I first went back in, but I surveyed again 10 months later, and

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there they were, so I stopped worrying about them.”

Davey says he found no dead birds and that bird “activity” had doubled by the time he did his last check.

He’s convinced most people simply don’t remain still and quiet for long enough when they’re in the forest. “It’s amazing how many birds you hear in that last minute.

“For a hunter, five minutes is a long time to stand still. They stop for 30 seconds and decide the bush is dead. It’s amazing what they miss.”

And so is born what Davey calls “the silent forest syndrome.”

“It’s just hype – DOC-bashing. It’s a figment of people’s fears and imagination all mixed together.”

When he heard that pest control in another forest block, nearby Kaharoa, was about to end, he decided to find a way to keep it going to protect the small remnant population of kokako that lived there so he set up the Kaharoa Kokako Trust.

Typically, Davey figured he would do it all by himself if he had to, but “it turned into a huge community effort. We

got the right people, with the right vision.”

In 1998, the Kaharoa Kokako Trust threw its first punch, with a knockdown 1080 operation in bait stations. Since then, volunteers have put in hundreds more bait stations and taken on an extra 600 hours of work, all for the birds.

“Since we began,” says Davey, “we’ve had a minimum of 50 per cent breeding success. We started with 26 birds. Five years later, we have over 100.”

Anxious to avoid bait-shyness, the Trust alternates toxins regularly; cholecalciferol one operation, Feratox® the next, but Davey’s belief in 1080 is implicit. “I’m definitely a supporter of 1080; it’s a simple tool that does the job.”

He understands why people are uncomfortable about poison being spread about the land. He wishes he didn’t have to do it himself, “but until we find something else, it’s the only efficient tool we’ve got for the kind of steep country we have.

“Either you want the pests dead, or you don’t. It’s a Catch-22 and we’re stuck with it.”

