

2. Tracking pests

Introduced animals upset the balance in native ecosystems (living communities).



Stoat Photo: DOC.



Ferret Photo: DOC.



Mouse
Photo: Rod Morris/DOC.



Weasel Photo: DOC.



Possum Photo: Rod Morris/DOC.



Ship rat Photo: Rod Morris/DOC.

Background: A rat attacks a fantail on its nest.
Photo: David Mudge.



2. Tracking pests

Possums eat leaves, berries, baby birds, eggs and large insects. Other animals that have been introduced to the forest also eat birds, eggs and plants. Watch out for signs of these pest animals.

- Try to spot the possums' favourite food. Look for scratches on tree trunks, leaf tips removed, bites out of leaves.
- Search for faecal pellets. Try to identify their owner using the information below.

Pest animal	Faecal pellet description
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Ferret	About 3 cm long, twisted, tapered at the end, generally black.
Stoat	Coiled and twisted, containing undigested remains of food, have a strong musty smell when fresh, varied in colour.
Rabbit	Droppings often in mounds in the open, round, usually black, slightly flattened, less than 1 cm across.
Mouse	Black, about 3 mm long.
Ship rat	Narrow, curved, 10 x 2–3 cm, vary in colour and dropped anywhere.

Red deer About 2 cm long, females' are elliptical, males' are pointed at one end and flattened at the other, dropped in groups.

Goat Almost cylindrical, about 1 cm long and flattened at the ends, dropped in groups.

Pig Vary greatly, cylindrical, brownish.

Possum Dark brown, about the size and shape of your little finger.

Hedgehog Droppings deposited at random, up to 1cm diameter and up to several cm long. Black, rounded at the ends and containing the remains of insect exoskeletons.

- Choose a pest animal and tell your group, or a partner, how it would affect the forest.
- Scientists have discovered that up to 12 possums live in each hectare of the forest. Watch out for signs of possum control (traps, metal bands around trees, poisoned pellets on the ground or poison attached to branches).

Every night possums in the New Zealand bush eat enough leaves to fill a container ship.

