

Help keep our conservation islands pest free



Auckland



Hauraki Gulf conservation islands provide a safe haven for New Zealand's rare and endangered plants and animals. These Department of Conservation reserves are lifeboats for species such as tuatara, stitchbird (hihi), saddleback (tīeke) and wētāpunga (giant weta) whose mainland habitats are destroyed or predator-ridden. But these important native species are safe only as long as we can keep these islands free of animal pests such as rats, stoats and possums. Minimising human impacts in these island sanctuaries and keeping them pest-free is essential.

Boats anchoring near or landing on island sanctuaries increase the risk of rodent invasion. Norway rats have been observed to swim 400 metres across open water between one gulf island to another, and rats are known to have dispersed between land masses 1500 metres apart. One pregnant female rat getting ashore could devastate entire reptile, bird and insect populations. Cats and dogs let loose in a nature reserve could have equally disastrous results. Weeds are also damaging. Seeds carried ashore clinging to shoes and clothing can germinate quickly and overwhelm native plant communities.

Islands you can visit

Visitors are welcome on most publicly owned conservation islands in the Hauraki Gulf. These include Tiritiri Matangi, Rangitoto, Motutapu, Motuihe, Motuora, Motukorea (Browns), Burgess (in the Mokohinau group), Saddle, Beehive, and Motutara islands. Parts of Great Barrier, Kawau, and Waiheke are also public conservation land. These islands are protected to safeguard their natural and historic heritage. Some are free of animal pests or are in the process of becoming pest free. Many have programmes to control weeds.

Island nature reserves are closed to the public to protect the vulnerable habitats and native species there, and landing is not allowed without a permit. These include Hauturu or Little Barrier Island, the Mokohinau islands (except Burgess Island), Cuvier Island and the Mercury Islands (apart from Great Mercury).

S. Phillips





Kiwi chick being released on Motuora Island

F. Oliphant

Ship rat



The damage pests cause

Many species of rare birds on our conservation islands risk extinction if they are not protected against predators such as rats, stoats and possums. Birds such as stitchbird (hihi), little spotted kiwi and saddleback are extinct on the mainland and only present on islands because introduced predators are not present. Visitors to islands can help protect these endangered birds by ensuring they do not re-introduce these predators.

Once on an island, a single rat could devastate bird populations by climbing trees to eat eggs and chicks from the nest. They also consume plant seeds, slowing or preventing plant regeneration. Stoats are capable of climbing trees to attack chicks and take eggs, as well as killing young birds on the ground. A stoat can kill a young kiwi in its first year of life and are responsible for large numbers of kiwi deaths on the mainland.

Possums consume about half a kilo of tree leaves per night each, so the damage to vegetation from a small number of possums can be extensive. Possums also eat birds' eggs from nests, as well as chicks, and have been known to eat kiwi eggs on the ground.

Weeds are also a major problem on conservation islands, because they compete with native plant communities. Once established, weeds can take over areas of native vegetation, and slow or prevent native plant regeneration. The control of weeds on many conservation islands is an ongoing battle. Visitors can help by ensuring their backpacks, bags, clothing and shoes are free of weed seeds before they go ashore.

How you can help

You are welcome to explore and enjoy conservation islands in the Hauraki Gulf but please observe the following rules:

- Before you leave the mainland, check your boat for rats, mice and other unwanted stowaways
- Also, check bags, stores and gear for rodents and unwanted insects such as Argentine ants, and packs, clothes and shoes for weed seeds
- If part of your boat is enclosed, keep a bait station with fresh rat poison or a baited trap on board
- Be vigilant when travelling between islands to ensure that you are not transferring pests and weed seeds from one island to another
- Do not bring dogs, cats or other pets onto island reserves or their beaches

Further information

More detailed information on conservation islands in the Hauraki Gulf and how to avoid transporting stowaway pests and weeds is available from DOC offices in Auckland, Warkworth and Great Barrier, and the DOC Visitor Centre in the Ferry Building on Quay Street, downtown Auckland. Also check the DOC website – www.doc.govt.nz