[redacted]

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Ref: OIAD-5736

07 November 2025

Tēnā koe[redacted]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 09 October 2025, in which you asked:

1. *"Why are stoats and possums often associated together in predation claims on the DOC website (e.g. "possums and stoats are known to eat kea"), given that stoats, as carnivorous mammals in the weasel family, have a well-documented history of preying on birds, including kea, in New Zealand, and in contrast, possums, being herbivorous/omnivorous marsupials, have limited evidence of predation, with my research finding primarily instances of egg consumption or scavenging, consistent with opportunistic feeding rather than predatory behavior?*
2. *Why does the DOC website claim that "possums are known to prey on kea" when evidence of possum predation is limited to a single, unconfirmed case from 2010?*
3. *Will DOC consider revising the website's wording to reflect the evidence, such as clarifying that possums primarily cause nest disturbance rather than predation, and distinguishing their impact from that of stoats?"*

You also requested:

4. *"Any documented evidence of possums actively preying on or killing live birds of any species in New Zealand, excluding cases based on assumptions and/or cases of egg consumption or scavenging dead birds.*
5. *The total number of documented instances where possums have been recorded actively killing live birds of any species, across all studies or records known to DOC.*
6. *Detailed descriptions of each documented instance, including:*
   - *The bird species involved.*
   - *The date, location, and method of documentation.*
   - *Evidence confirming the bird was alive when killed by the possum.*
   - *Any relevant reports, images, or footage.*
   - *Copies of or links to any research studies, reports, or datasets that specifically document confirmed possum predation (i.e., actively killing live birds) on any bird species in New Zealand."*

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA).

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. *Why are stoats and possums often associated together in predation claims on the DOC website?*

Although possums are omnivorous and stoats are carnivorous, both are recognised as predators. In New Zealand, possums have been documented preying on a wide range of species, including arthropods, molluscs, and native birds. This includes eggs, nestlings, and adults of at least six native bird species: kōkako, brown kiwi, kāhu (*Circus approximans*), fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*), North Island saddleback (*Philesturnus carunculatus rufusater*), and kererū/kūkupa (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*)[1]. Possums have also been observed preying on kākā and kea. In their native Australia, brushtail possums are recognised predators of Gang-gang and Glossy Black Cockatoos.

There is also extensive published research showing possum predation on live birds. Some examples are listed in Appendix 1 to this letter.

We get the best results for biodiversity when all introduced predators are removed or controlled to low levels.

2. *Why does the DOC website claim that "possums are known to prey on kea" when evidence of possum predation is limited to a single, unconfirmed case from 2010?*

Your previous request asked for the number of instances where researchers using nest cameras have documented possums killing or eating kea. Whilst there is one record captured on camera, relatively few kea nests are closely monitored and we have limited footage of *any* predator directly consuming kea.

The nest monitoring information that we do have for kea, and previously provided you with, showed 49 kea nest cavities where possums were detected, 48 of which failed to produce any young. Given the predatory behaviour of possums on the eggs and nestlings of other New Zealand birds, we strongly suspect possums are preying on the eggs and nestlings of kea opportunistically when encountering them during the nesting season.

3. *Will DOC consider revising the website's wording to reflect the evidence, such as clarifying that possums primarily cause nest disturbance rather than predation, and distinguishing their impact from that of stoats?*

We regularly review and maintain website content to reflect the most current understanding.

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[1] [1] Innes, J. 1994. The impacts of possums on native fauna in Proceedings of a Workshop on Possums as Conservation Pests. Possum and Bovine TB Control NSS Committee, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237734677_Proceedings_of_a_Workshop_on_Possums_as_Conservation_Pests_organised_by_the_Possum_and_Bovine_Tuberculosis_Control_National_Science_Strategy_Committee

4. *Any documented evidence of possums actively preying on or killing live birds of any species in New Zealand, excluding cases based on assumptions and/or cases of egg consumption or scavenging dead birds.*
5. *The total number of documented instances where possums have been recorded actively killing live birds of any species, across all studies or records known to DOC.*
6. *Detailed descriptions of each documented instance*

While the Department holds evidence of possum predation on live birds, this information is not stored in a format that allows for easy collation. Relevant material is dispersed across various sources, including trail camera footage, handwritten field notes from monitoring surveys, autopsy reports, and other documentation held in offices throughout the country.

Collating all relevant information would require a significant amount of time and effort to locate, review, and compile the material. As such, these aspects of your request are refused under section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

You are entitled to seek an investigation and review of my decision by writing to an Ombudsman as provided by section 28(3) of the OIA.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on DOC's website.

Nāku noa, nā

Tim Bamford
Director Terrestrial Biodiversity
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Appendix 1 - Examples of published research showing possum predation on live birds.

Berris, K. K., Michael Barth, Trish Mooney, David Paton, Martine Kinloch, Peter Copley, Anthony Maguire, Gabriel Crowley, and Stephen T. Garnett. 2018. "From the brink of extinction: Successful recovery of the glossy black-cockatoo on Kangaroo Island. "*Recovering Australian threatened species: A book of hope*: 75-84.

Brown, K., Innes, J., Shorten, R., 1993. Evidence that possums prey on and scavenge birds' eggs, birds and mammals. *Notornis*, 40 (3), 169-177

Brown, K.P., Moller, H. and Innes, J., 1996. Sign left by brushtail possums after feeding on bird eggs and chicks. *New Zealand journal of Ecology*, 20 (2), 277-284.

Davey, C.C., Mulvaney, M., Tyrrell, T., Rayner, L. 2025. Breeding success of the Gang-gang cockatoo in peri urban Canberra for three breeding seasons: 2021 to 2023. *Canberra Bird Notes*, *50*(1), 31-44.

Garnett, S.T., Pedler, L.P., Crowley, G.M.1999. The breeding biology of the glossy black-cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*) on Kangaroo Island, South Australia. *Emu* 99, no. 4: 262-279.

Innes, J. 1995. The impacts of possums on native fauna. In *Possums as Conservation* Pests (ed CFJ O'Donnell) pp. 11-15. Department of Conservation, Wellington

Innes, J., King, C., Bartlam, S., Forrester, G., Howitt, R. 2015. Predator control improves nesting success in Waikato forest fragments. *New Zealand Journal of Ecology* 39, 245-253

Innes, J., Bradfield, P., Brown, K., Bryden, D., Burns, R., Carpenter, J., Corkery, I., Flux, I., Jansen, P., Parker, K.A. and Rogers, A., 2024. North Island kokako (*Callaeas wilsoni*) recovery update: 2000 to 2023. *Notornis*, *71*, pp.129-145.

Moorhouse R.J., Greene T., Dilks P., Powlesland R., Moran L., Taylor G., Jones A., Knegtmans J., Wills D., Pryde M., Fraser I., August A., August C. 2003. Control of mammalian predators improves kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) breeding success: reversing the decline of a threatened New Zealand parrot. Biological Conservation 110: 33–44

Powlesland, R.G., Greene, T.C., Dilks, P.J., Moorhouse, R.J., Moran, L.R., Taylor, G., Jones, A., Wills, D.E., August, C.K., August, A.C.L. 2009. Breeding biology of the new Zealand kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) (Psittacidae, Nestorinae). *Notornis* 56, 11-33

Sadleir, R. 2000: Evidence of possums as predators of native animals. Pp. 126–131 Iin: Montague, T. (Ed.): The brushtail possum: biology, impact and management of an introduced marsupial. Lincoln, New Zealand, Manaaki Whenua Press, Lincoln. Pp. 126-131.

Walker, K., Walton, K., Edwards, E., Hitchmough, R., Payton, I., Barker, G. and Michel, P., 2022. Conservation status of New Zealand indigenous terrestrial Gastropoda (slugs and snails). *New Zealand Threat Classification Series*, *42*.

The Brushtail possum chapter in The Handbook of New Zealand Mammals is highly recommended as a review of available knowledge on possum biology. The sections ‘Food’ and ‘Significance to the New Zealand environment’ are of particular relevance to your queries. See: Cowan P.E., Glen A.S. 2021 *Trichosurus vulpecula.* In *The Handbook of New Zealand Mammals.* 3rd edn. (Eds C.M. King and D.M. Forsyth) Family Phalangeridae, pp. 43-77. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.