

Zoological Surprises (a short summary)

VUW MSc student Olivia Carson has completed her study of animal intruders within a portion of Trelissick Park. Over a month-long period in September and October her 12 cameras 'caught' surprising numbers of animal interlopers.

Cameras were motion detecting, at 10 or 20 metres off-tracks, at the locations shown. They were unbaited, to allow animals to act naturally. She had to evaluate about 40,000 pictures, many triggered by wind and birds (especially ground-foraging blackbirds). (The numbers below may include several appearances of the same animal at different times.)



337 Dogs – All of these dogs were off leash and off track with no owners in sight – many were 20m off the closest track. This is alarming because fledglings, such as kākā, spend time on the ground before they can fly. Olivia says she "saw kākā on the forest floor on two cameras, which is encouraging as nesting season begins." However, their fledglings will be vulnerable to these roaming dogs.

The Park is off-leash for dogs but Olivia recommends "keeping dogs on leash until coming to an area which allows owners to clearly observe their pet. Wandering off track shouldn't be okay." The WCC dog policy¹ requires dogs to be under control at all times.

68 Rabbits - For years we have cursed about rabbits eating new plants. Now we have confirmation that the more dense rabbit-zones lie in the north and below Trelissick Crescent.

30 Cats - Most were patrolling from 10 PM to 4 AM. Olivia says: "...keeping them indoors overnight would be ideal".

Raging debates continue^{2,3,4,5}. We worry about birds, lizards, geckos and insects. We wonder what would happen if cats were not there to catch rodents and rabbits.

Olivia says: "Camera data monitoring domestic cats is so rare in New Zealand. I wish there was more evidence that could show what cats are up

to during the night."

56 Hedgehogs - They might look cute, but each night they consume 10% of their body weight, feasting on bugs, beetles, wetas, skinks, geckos and the eggs of ground-nesting birds⁶. Our canny hedgehogs must know about traps. We have only caught 17 since 2008.

9 Rodents - Despite the low number captured on camera, VUW students David Munro and Holly Chapman report high numbers of rats and mice along the Forest Remnant Track area, using tracking tunnels and chew cards. Bill Hester also says consumption of block bait by rats is high in some areas.

Stoats remain elusive (17 trapped since 2008). Well, at least their diet includes rats, mice and rabbits...

References

1. <https://wellington.govt.nz/~media/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/plans-and-policies/a-to-z/dogs/files/dogpolicy.pdf?la=en>
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4. <https://i.stuff.co.nz/science/97845877/bob-brockie-birds-pests-and-the-hunting-habits-of-dr-fluxs-cats>
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