



Late Winter 2023

**Welcome to this late Winter newsletter from Pest Free Warkworth (PFWW) and a further special welcome to all the residents and volunteers who have joined the initiative over the past months.**

And what a winter it has been! Floods and foul weather have played havoc with our pest control equipment as well as our roads, sunshine has been a scarce commodity. No doubt we will soon have a drought to offset this season so won't complain too much 😊.

### **What has been going on since Autumn**

Where to start. Perhaps a key note to commence on is the sudden changes to the environmental and political landscape that occurred recently, when the SPCA and government ministers decided that it was time to address the issue of feral cats. If you'd not seen the news and its implications I've attached a small article I wrote for Mahurangi Matters recently for your consideration. Once various reviews are completed, feral cats are proposed to be brought into the Predator Free 2050 scope – which is a relief for our wildlife but no doubt concerning for pet owners. Once trapping of feral cats gets underway in earnest pet cats will need to be kept out of harms way.

Aside from that we've been keeping up a steady but small flow of traps to our Warkworth residents – we do need many more to take up the initiative and help ensure we have coverage of the town, to limit the prospect of pests sneaking through. Our main traplines have been working overtime and per our story below we've been getting some extraordinary results in some of our parks and reserves.

Aside from that we have been dodging the rain drops like everyone and striving to keep the mud at bay.

### **Our next new trap line – coming up shortly**

One significant challenge for our township trapping is the reinfestation risk of pests swimming across the river from the Mahurangi East peninsula bush reserves. We have been working alongside Council and DOC for several months to work through a detailed plan for getting traps into a 3km stretch of the riverside on the eastern side, from the town basin down to Duck Creek.

The great news is that DOC last week has signalled they are able to finalise the permit we require to get underway!

What this means is that soon we will safely deploy trapping equipment alongside the awa. Charlie Montgomery lives in the vicinity and will initiate and operate the trapline from his kayak, within the conditions of our Health and Safety plan.

We have many individuals, groups and agencies to thank for helping make this happen, and particularly we would like to thank Ngati Manuhiri for their input, support and ārahitanga.

## Volunteer Profile

In this newsletter we are providing an introduction to our most recent addition to our band of volunteers who take care of the traplines within our Warkworth parks and reserves.

Let me introduce **Peter “The Thrill is in the Chase” Melling!**



Peter joined our trapline volunteer team earlier this year and courageously took on the Kowhai Park line. Having spent over 30 years around the region Peter settled in Warkworth a few years back and declares he hadn't been too heavily involved in predator control before taking this on. And take it on he has! After initial forays with the trapline and an injection of knowledge and enthusiasm from local trapping master Roy Blackburn, Peter took this exercise to a new level.

Browsing back through recent statistics, in the space of just a few months Peter has captured in Kowhai Park:

- 118 rats - 55 in June alone!
- 72 mice since June
- Plus 4 possums, 2 stoats and 4 hedgehogs.

The back story is that for a period during June/July, Peter as a competitive sportsman and someone dedicated and keen enough to try a good theory, he was checking and re-baiting the traps every day there for a while. And of course the fact of the matter was that the pests were taking the bait very soon after it being refreshed – the next day after a run there was commonly another 3 or 4 rats captured. And the next day, rinse and repeat. Why does he do it? As Peter says, the thrill is in the chase!

On one hand it is worrisome that we have such large numbers of pests in a beautiful reserve such as Kowhai Park – but on the other having this degree of control applied will certainly help boost the prospects of our native wildlife coming into spring to nest and raise their young.

Thank you for your efforts Peter.

## Backyard Trapping Update

We are continuing a steady, but rather slower than we had wished, roll out of more traps into the Warkworth township. We have a significant stock of rat and possum traps waiting to find homes.

If you have a neighbour or friend with a Warkworth township residential address (the only requirement) who doesn't have a trap but would like to join the challenge then please put them in touch with us and we'll deliver the equipment, help them get setup and show them the ropes.

## Bait Stations Project

For landowners around the outer ring of Warkworth township, especially along Kaipara Flats road, down Carran Road and back to Warkworth along Woodcocks, and then along the ridge from the old SH1 through to the old cement works, we have bait stations and a long term supply of bait available for your deployment and use.

The key objective is to slow down & reduce reinfestation of pests from outside our area (and vice versa) – bait is highly effective at minimising populations of rats and other pests, and the bait we are using is safe against risk of secondary poisoning.

## Your Back Yard

Over and beyond our trapping and pest animal control initiatives we are continuing to find ways to control the weeds that have thrived in the wet and warm weather over the past 12 months. Privet and every other weed imaginable have leapt away – at PFWW in conjunction with Forest and Bird Warkworth Area Branch we are undertaking a number of weed control and planting initiatives to help improve our environment. Amongst many other projects, we have also commenced a project to eliminate the privet trees across the river from the town basin – you may have spotted dying trees at the upper reach of the town basin already? That project will accelerate once the weather improves – we can't take the risk of losing our beautiful bush reserves to these weeds.

If you need advice on controlling weeds please get in touch at our main email address: [info@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz](mailto:info@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz).

Again I would also ask everyone to keep an eye out at this time of year for hibernating common / German wasps. The queens will have been hiding away in woodsheds, within the folds of BBQ covers, or other places out of the weather and awaiting a chance to find new nesting opportunities in spring. If you can deal with these queens now it helps cut down on the numbers of nests to be formed, each of which can produce hundreds more queens (and workers) to plague our wildlife and picnics.

## Having trap troubles?

If you're finding your current trap too tricky to set, or the trap is getting old or rusty, please drop us a note and we'll deliver a new or different trap to suit.

There are two main traps we use in the backyard:

- The good old reliable Victor, which is a wooden "snap" trap. These are great traps and are very effective, but they do rust and some residents find them tricky to set.
- The T-Rex trap, which is a very easy to use and powerful alternative for home owners who would prefer not to use a Victor.



Contact us any time on [traps@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz](mailto:traps@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz) for a replacement.

## How you can help

The main ways you can assist with the pest free quest are:

1. Please keep setting your traps. Especially now as we come into spring and pest populations explode. They're there even if you don't see them about.
2. Volunteer to help Pest Free Warkworth as an organisation – we have many areas needing support, including helping to get more traps into our backyards, volunteering to walk a trapline, helping setup new projects... The list is long.
3. Become the paid coordinator for our project. We have funding to pay a coordinator for one day per week – if this would interest you please let me know on [info@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz](mailto:info@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz) or please give me a call direct on 021 322890
4. Talk to friends and neighbours about helping keep our town on track to pest free status – traps are free and we have various types of traps to choose from now to make setting them easy.

And if you are already trapping rats in your back yard but finding it hard to catch anything please don't be despondent – try changing your type of bait and perhaps move the trap to a different spot if you wish. Rats and mice will eat anything – literally! Chunky peanut butter is the mainstay of our trapping success but rats love fresh fruit, cheese, chocolate biscuits, horse feed.. the list is endless.

## Staying in Touch

Our key contacts are:

If you need more traps or know anyone who might be interested in helping out with the goal of meeting a 1:5 ratio of traps to homes, then please get in touch via [traps@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz](mailto:traps@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz) . Every extra trap helps us collectively to get to our pest free objective.

You can also visit and get in touch via our Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/people/Pest-Free-Warkworth/100087377840452/>

And check out our hints and tips, links and other useful information on our website:

<https://www.pestfreewarkworth.org.nz/>

Our big objectives and challenges are all progressing and we look forward to that great day when we see our korimako/bellbirds back:



Photo credit: Shellie Evans

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**As Always - Thank you!**

Thank you again and keep up the excellent work you are doing. Our native birds and animals really appreciate your ongoing involvement!

Cheers and here's to the imminent arrival of spring!!

Tim Armitage

PFWW: 021 322890 and [info@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz](mailto:info@pestfreewarkworth.org.nz)

Supported and assisted by:





It will be up to cat owners to keep their pet cats safe.

## Feral vs pets – traps won't know the difference

By **Tim Armitage**  
Chair, Restore Rodney East

There has been a lot of publicity around feral cats lately and the harm they do to the environment. It's estimated there are more than 2.5 million of them across NZ, decimating our wildlife. They can also carry disease, which they can pass onto domestic cats, native wildlife and humans.

As a result, there has been a rapid shift in attitudes towards the management of these cats, with the SPCA now stating they support them being controlled. The government is reviewing bringing feral cats within the Predator Free 2050 (PF2050) programme, with all major political parties supporting this change. New legislation may also lead to cats not being allowed to roam and, in time, society will see roaming cats as unacceptable as roaming dogs.

Once there is national legislation, Auckland Council may then bring in stronger controls on cats, such as limiting the numbers per house, creating a cat registry, or penalising

owners for bad cat behaviour. So what does this mean for NZ pet cat owners?

New rules around responsible cat ownership will be required to ensure pet cats are kept happy and healthy, while protecting native wildlife from feral cats. Such rules and legislation have been commonplace in Australia for some time.

Once the rules are in place, and feral cats are brought into the predator free initiative, active trapping of feral cats can start. Live capture traps will be needed to prevent pets from being harmed and traps will be set and inspected every day to ensure that if an animal is caught, it is handled humanely. The first step will be to establish whether the cat is feral by looking for a collar or scanning for a microchip. If it doesn't have a collar or chip, then it may be at risk of being identified as unowned/feral and possibly destroyed.

Although it is not yet a legal requirement to have cats microchipped, it is going to be in everyone's interest to have them done. In anticipation of the new rules, on behalf of our members, Restore Rodney East is

investigating whether or not more help could be provided, such as subsidies or grants, so pet owners can potentially get help meeting costs of microchipping and desexing.

With spring around the corner and the nesting season coming up, native birds (many of them in serious decline) are at particular risk from cats until they fly. Shorebirds such as dotterels, oystercatchers and terns are especially vulnerable. As a local example, in the last season, video camera footage was collected at Omaha and Snells Beach showing pet cats eating the eggs and chicks, and even a number of adult birds being taken by cats. Ideally, cats need to be kept indoors overnight (cats hunt mainly from evenings until dawn) and should be kept fed and pampered to encourage them not to roam.

We're encouraging cat owners to microchip their pets, keep them indoors at night, and take a look into the great range of cat containment options, such as catios and fence rollers, to keep your cat safe, happy and healthy.

Info: [biodiversity@rre.org.nz](mailto:biodiversity@rre.org.nz)