

Will Predator-Free New Zealand result in perverse ecological outcomes?

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¹*Nz's Biological Heritage National Science Challenge*

In July 2016 the government announced a bold initiative: the eradication of possums, rats and mustelids from the New Zealand mainland by 2050. Much has been made of the new technologies required to achieve such an ambitious goal, and the research required to deliver such technologies. The desired 'outcomes' are implied or assumed: these are mostly focussed on 'more birds' or providing an income from the tourist dollar. The social dimension has also been mentioned: public opposition to new technologies could slow progress towards the goal; conversely, Predator-Free NZ 2050 has the potential to connect people with place, improving wellbeing and providing incomes in regional New Zealand.

The ecological dimensions of Predator-Free New Zealand 2050 have barely - as yet - been mentioned, except by one politician. Specifically, what might the 'perverse' or unwanted ecological outcomes be? Will native birds spread weed seeds? Will mesopredators such as mice wreak havoc on our cryptic fauna? In this talk I canvass what is known about the possible perverse ecological outcomes of the ambitious Predator-Free New Zealand 2050 goal, and seek options for maximising the benefits and mitigating any negative ecological consequences.