



Possums

Recreational hunting in Nelson/Marlborough

History and dispersal

Possums were introduced to New Zealand in 1837 to establish an export fur trade.

They were first released in this area at Wakapuaka in 1891. Six pair were liberated at this time and other releases followed in the area up to 1938.

Possums were fully protected up to 1921 and then limited trapping was permitted. It wasn't until the late 1940s it was realised possums were significantly altering native forests. In 1946 all restrictions on the taking of possums were cancelled.

By 1960 most of Nelson/Marlborough was occupied except the central Tasman mountains, central Marlborough, the area around Kahurangi Point and Mt Misery in Nelson Lakes National Park. Fourteen years later central Marlborough was completely occupied by the pests.

Current distribution and habits

Possums are still dispersing and extending their range north and south throughout the country. They can be found in a diverse range of habitats: all types of native forest, montane scrublands, exotic forest, tussock grasslands, thermal areas, swamp, pakihī, sand dunes, shelter belts, orchards and urban and city areas.

They are nocturnal. In summer they usually emerge from their dens about 30 minutes after sunset and return just before dawn. In winter they return to their dens several hours earlier.

Possums are found throughout Nelson and Marlborough, except for offshore islands.

Environmental impact

Possums are a major problem in native forests. They eat all parts of most plants and they also eat invertebrates, small birds and mice.

Possums browse foliage of main canopy trees, eventually killing them. Browsing of canopy and understorey species and threatened plants, eliminate some species resulting in a change in forest composition and loss of biodiversity. They compete with native birds for seasonal food, severely depleting particularly mistletoe, rata and fuchsia which are important food sources for kaka.

They also compete with hole-nesting birds for nest sites. Possums prey upon kaka, kiwi and kokako eggs and chicks and they are a major predator of Powelliphanta, Wainuia and Rhytida land snails in the Nelson/Marlborough area.

They are carriers of leptospirosis and bovine TB which are both infective to people and livestock.

Hunting opportunities

Kahurangi National Park

Good numbers in the back country; most of the front country is under AHB and DOC control programmes.

Mt Richmond Forest Park

Most areas in the park, except adjoining the Wairau Northbank.

Nelson Lakes National Park

Moderate numbers throughout.

Marlborough Sounds

Most areas except on offshore islands and where DOC control programmes occur.

Kaikoura

Most areas.

Marlborough

Most areas except where AHB control programmes occur.

