

Pest elimination in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park

Te Manahuna Aoraki Project is working to eliminate possums, rats, rabbits, hares, ferrets, stoats, hedgehogs and feral cats from approximately 50,000 hectares within Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park.



Kea over Aoraki / Mount Cook (Douglas Rands, ZIP)

Why eliminate these pests?

Introduced pests are widespread throughout Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park. Their ongoing presence has put the native plants and animals that inhabit this area under threat of local extinction, and diminishes the mauri (life force) of this iconic alpine environment.

Predators such as possums, rats, hedgehogs, ferrets, stoats and feral cats prey upon native birds like kea and tūke (rock wren), along with lizards and invertebrates such as scree wētā.

Browsers such as possums damage alpine shrublands and herb fields.

Rabbits and hares degrade alpine and dryland habitats and provide a food source for predators, keeping their populations high and increasing the risk to native species.

Our progress so far

Due to the size of the project area, elimination is being completed in sections (see map):

- **Malte Brun Range:** Pest removal was completed in autumn 2022. We're now carrying out small, localised aerial 1080 spot treatments to prevent pests from re-establishing.

Liebig Range: The first phase of pest removal was completed in autumn 2025.

Next steps

Building on our success in the Malte Brun Range, we are now working to:

- complete the **Liebig Range** pest removal, and
- remove pests from the adjacent **Kirikirikatata / Mount Cook Range**.

The Liebig and Kirikirikatata Ranges are naturally bounded by glaciers, high mountains, and fast-flowing rivers—barriers that reduce reinvasion risk and make biodiversity gains easier to protect.

Developing and refining approaches here will inform future elimination programmes across Te Manahuna Aoraki Project, ultimately reducing the need for widespread aerial predator control to protect native species in this iconic place.

The approach

The pest elimination uses a combination of aerial and ground-based methods to target all pest species within the site.

Aerial operations will be delivered in two phases, each comprising two pre-feed applications of non-toxic prefeed baits followed by one aerial application of toxic baits.

This method has been proven effective for eliminating possums and rats elsewhere in Aotearoa and is expected to significantly reduce other pest populations as a first step toward elimination.

Helicopters with under-slung bait sowing buckets and GPS navigation technology will be used to ‘trickle-feed’ bait along boundaries and broadcast bait within the interior of the operational area.

Protecting kea: The best opportunity to help kea recover in Aoraki National Park is to remove pests, and long-term benefits to the population are expected to be significant. To minimise risk to kea during aerial operations, tahr carcasses (a natural food source for kea in this environment) will be placed at high elevation sites outside the treatment area to attract kea away from bait.

Ground-based follow-up: To prevent reinvasion, any pests detected will be removed using targeted tools, depending on the species. These may include traps, pindone, cyanide, magtoxin, hand-laid 1080 carrot or toxic rodent baits, diphacinone with cholecalciferol, PAPP, and localised aerial 1080 spot treatments.

Aerial baiting area

The aerial treatment area consists of:

- approximately 9,000 hectares within the Liebig Range, and
- approximately 6,500 hectares within Kirikirikatata / Mount Cook Range

(All within Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park—see attached map.)

Operational approval

We have applied to the Department of Conservation and Te Whatu Ora—Health New Zealand for consent to undertake this work.

Proposed timeframe

From **November 2025**, we plan to:

- carry out Phase One of the Kirikirikatata pest removal

Alongside this work, we may also undertake a localised spot-treatment in the Malte Brun Range in response to recent pest detections.

From **January 2026**, we plan to:

- complete Phase Two of the Kirikirikatata pest removal
- complete Phase Two of the Liebig Range pest removal

The precise timing will depend on suitable weather. The planned timing has been chosen to:

- Avoid winter snow conditions that would reduce effectiveness, and
- Enable delivery of the operation to coincide with the partial closure of the Hooker Valley Track, minimising disruption to visitors. This alignment reflects long-term planning to ensure the work proceeds with minimal public impact.

Additional targeted methods will be used across the wider area as needed.

What this means for you

An existing partial closure of the Hooker Track provides a great opportunity for ZIP to carry out operations safely, with minimal disruption to visitors.

Where possible, aerial operations in high-visitation areas will occur outside peak visitor times. Visitors to the park may need to be prepared to adapt their plans when operations are underway.

- **Public notices** will be placed in local newspapers at least two weeks before aerial operations begin.
- **Warning signs** will be posted at public access points.
- **Tasman Valley Road:** During aerial operations, road closures will be in place overnight and until mid-morning. Once opened, traffic management will be in place and short delays may occur.
- **Blue Lakes Track and Ball Hut Track** will be inaccessible during the Tasman Valley Road closure.

Hooker Valley Track: During aerial operations, the track between the first and second swing bridge will be closed for a short period of time to allow sowing to occur.

Precautions

Sodium fluoroacetate (1080):

- Cereal-based green-dyed pellets (aerial and hand-laid) for rats and possums
- Carrots dyed green (aerial or hand-laid) for rabbits
- Dead rodents (hand-laid) for stoats and feral cats

Pindone:

- Cereal-based green-dyed pellets (aerial and hand-laid) for rabbits

Cyanide:

- Feratox 'strikers' stapled to trees or poles to target possums

Other ground-based toxins:

- Toxins to target rats (brodifacoum, and diphacinone with cholecalciferol), stoats and feral cats (PAPP) will be contained in bait stations.

All toxins will be clearly signposted in treated areas.

When these toxins are being used here, everyone visiting the area is advised:

1. **Do not touch any baits or carcasses.** Toxic baits and carcasses can pose a significant risk to human health.
2. **Keep children under strict supervision**, to ensure that they do not touch or consume baits.
3. **Dogs are not permitted within the National Park.** Dogs are particularly susceptible to 1080 baits and poisoned carcasses.
4. **Do not consume meat taken from wild animals** within or adjacent to the block, until the caution period has expired.
5. **Follow all instructions on warning signs**, which will be placed at all public access points to inform the public about where the toxins have been used.

If you suspect poisoning at any time

- Seek medical attention from your local doctor or hospital.
- Contact the National Poisons Centre: 0800 764 766 (urgent calls) or 03 479 7248 (non-urgent and general enquiries), for advice.
- In an emergency dial 111.
- In the case of a domestic animal suspected of being poisoned, contact your local veterinarian.

The DOC Pesticide Summaries page is kept updated with any **locations** where toxins are used on public conservation land. **Caution periods** for these areas are also outlined here.

doc.govt.nz/pesticide-summaries/

About Te Manahuna Aoraki Project

Te Manahuna Aoraki Project is a partnership between the Department of Conservation, mana whenua, high country landowners, philanthropists, and other Crown agencies.

Zero Invasive Predators (ZIP) has pioneered landscape scale pest removal in New Zealand and is leading the work on the ground.

Together, we are protecting and revitalising a vast 310,000 hectare area in the Upper Mackenzie Basin and Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park, so that native plants and animals can thrive.

For more information

If you need more information about the upcoming pest elimination, please don't hesitate to contact Te Manahuna Aoraki Project:

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