

Rats no longer rule

September 10 2014

The University of Auckland is holding a celebration to mark 50 years since the first confirmed island rodent eradication in 1964, an effort that helped inspire a whole new generation of scientists and conservationists.

Starting work with a grant of just £5 pounds from the Wildlife Service, the Forest and Bird Protection Society and renowned conservationist Don Merton pioneered creating pest-free [islands](#) to protect native species. The project on tiny Maria (Ruapuke) Island, part of the Noises group, took four years before they were willing to confirm rat eradication.

"We have come a long way over the past 50 years, especially in the area of technology," says senior lecturer and quantitative ecologist Dr James Russell.

"Today we can keep islands rat free, with a one hundred per cent success rate in the Hauraki Gulf which is a significant achievement given its proximity to our largest city.

"But we still face major challenges in the protection of our native birds and animals, especially in finding the best ways for humans and [native species](#) to live together in protected areas."

Today 10 percent of New Zealand's islands are predator-free, compared to one half of one per cent in 1964. With Great Barrier and Stewart Islands being discussed as potential future sites for pest eradication programmes, this figure could eventually reach 50 percent.

The Symposium, which is free and open to media and the public, will feature speakers from the University of Auckland, Auckland Council, Landcare Research and the Department of Conservation. Sir Michael Fay will also talk about the recent eradication of pests from Great Mercury Island off the coast of Coromandel Peninsula and Dr Andrea Byrom will talk about the Predator Free New Zealand concept.

Dr James Russell and his team at the Centre for Biodiversity and Biosecurity use a combination of ecology, statistics, genetics and social science in their work on pest management. Dr Russell is a recipient of the Prime Minister's MacDiarmid Emerging Scientist Prize for his pioneering research on the ability of rats to reinvade islands.

More information: More information: www.auckland.ac.nz/rat-eradication

Provided by University of Auckland

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