

Cats are eating NZ's critically endangered bats

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Short-tailed bat. Credit: Colin O'Donnell/Wikimedia Commons, [CC BY 4.0](#)

New research by Department of Conservation staff confirms what has long been suspected—feral and domestic cats are repeatedly hunting and eating New Zealand's native bats, or pekapeka.

In a recently published research paper in the *NZ Journal of Zoology*, DOC Science Advisor Dr. Kerry Borkin examined the gut contents of a feral cat trapped in Pureora Forest Park and found the remains of a lesser short-tailed bat. She also recorded the reoccurring hunting of long-tailed bats by a pet cat owned by an Ōtorohanga household living on a rural property, who discovered pekapeka remains around their home.

Publication of the research comes as a pekapeka is being rehabilitated at Hamilton Zoo, after it was caught by a cat in the city over the weekend of 30–31 July. Efforts are being made to rehabilitate the pekapeka.

"We've known for some time cats have been attacking pekapeka," Kerry Borkin says. "The two cases we report on are just the tip of the iceberg."

"What we found is it's not just [feral cats](#) killing and eating our precious pekapeka—[pet cats](#) are killing and injuring them too.

"We've now got conclusive evidence a pet cat will attack and kill native bats over several years, and that's important to know when protecting New Zealand's only native land mammals."

Kerry Borkin says a crucial part of the research was the quick response from two DOC rangers when they found cat droppings near a known lesser short-tailed bat maternity roost in Pureora Forest. Soon after two cats were trapped, and the numerous pekapeka body parts were found in one cat's gut.

The research also included reports from the Ōtorohanga household, whose pet cat had been preying on native bats near their rural property for at least two years—an indication of the repeated predation cats will undertake if near bat habitat.

"The Ōtorohanga household's pet cat was a serial pekapeka killer, with

seven dead or injured bats discovered on their property over the course of two years."

Kerry Borkin says the two cases explored in the research demonstrate how a single cat—feral or domesticated—can impact on a local bat population.

"Although not all cat attacks on pekapeka will result in its death, they will reduce the overall likelihood of survival for individual bats and populations. That's a real concern when our pekapeka are under significant threat.

"Native bats can be found in towns, cities, farms, and forests—if cats are there too, then bats are at risk of being killed."

Domestic cat owners who live in areas with bats and other [native wildlife](#) can make their pets more conservation friendly with a number of approaches outlined on this page of the DOC website.

DOC has a legislated mandate to control feral cats on public conservation land and does so where [native species](#)—including pekapeka—are under threat. DOC supports responsible domestic cat management and undertakes advocacy work about [domestic cats](#) and the threat they pose to New Zealand's wildlife.

More information: Kerry M. Borkin et al, Bats attacked by companion and feral cats: evidence from indigenous forest and rural landscapes in New Zealand, *New Zealand Journal of Zoology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/03014223.2022.2098782](https://doi.org/10.1080/03014223.2022.2098782)

Provided by Department of Conservation

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