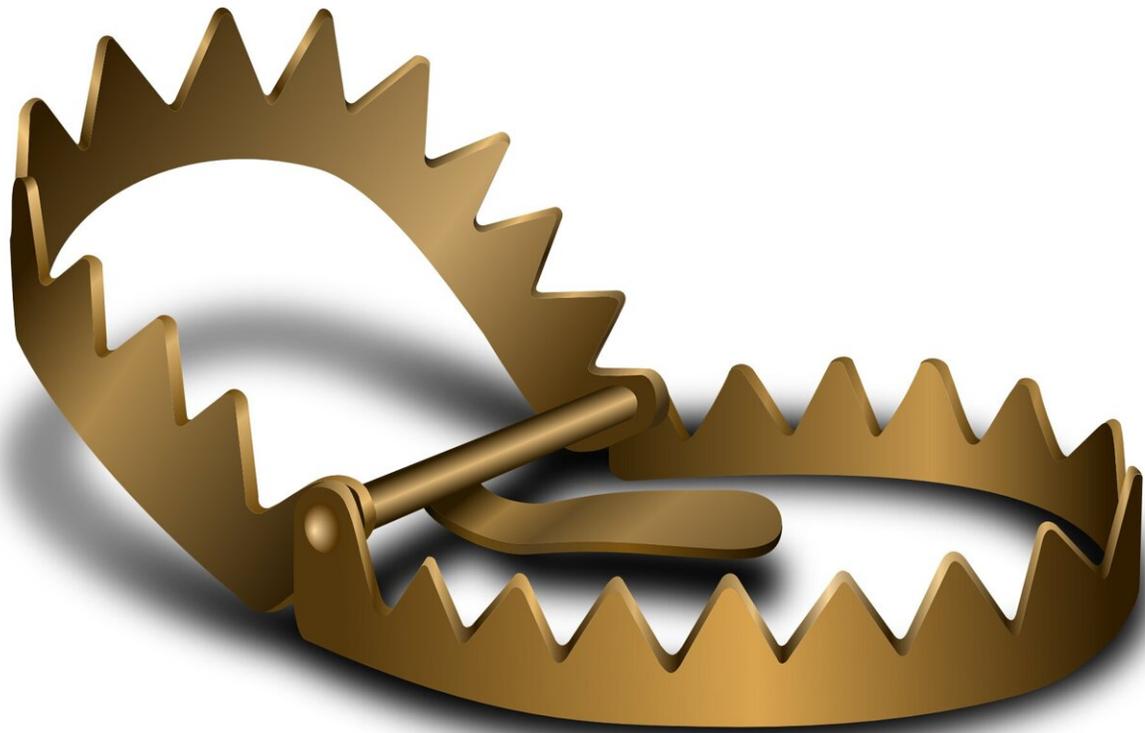


Trapping is city-dwellers' preferred form of backyard conservation

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Backyard trapping of rats and other pests is by far more popular as a conservation activity in urban areas than monitoring pests or native wildlife, according to Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington research just published in the journal *People and Nature*.

"We were interested in whether different backyard [conservation](#) activities appealed to different sorts of people in Aotearoa New Zealand and what motivated them to take part," says lead author Dr. Chris Woolley, a postdoctoral researcher at Zealanda—Centre for People and Nature in Wellington and a member of the team from the University's Te Tumu Whakaoho Mauri o te Ao Koiora—Centre for Biodiversity and Restoration Ecology (CBRE) that conducted the study.

Understanding what makes people want to take part in different nature-based activities is important for understanding how to get them involved and the sort of projects most likely to interest them, says Dr. Woolley.

Undertaken for the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment-funded People, Cities and Nature program, to which the CBRE contributes, the study investigated three main activities: pest mammal trapping and recording sightings of both native and pest species—all common ways in which urban-dwelling New Zealanders engage in backyard conservation.

"But there are some important differences," says Dr. Woolley. "Pest mammal trapping is a concrete action done to achieve a goal that will directly benefit native biodiversity. Monitoring activities, however, are examples of conservation citizen science—one (native biodiversity [monitoring](#)) collecting data to measure positive outcomes achieved; the other (pest mammal monitoring) measuring the presence or absence of a barrier to the former. Because of these differences, we wondered if the activities might appeal to different types of people."

In the study, 264 people—some self-selected and others reached by door knocking—responded to questions about how willing they would be to undertake the three activities.

"We wanted to know what motivated backyard conservation action and

what barriers people felt prevented them from taking part," says Dr. Woolley.

Just over half the people said they had at some time taken part in native biodiversity monitoring, pest mammal monitoring and/or pest mammal trapping. Backyard pest trapping was by far the most commonly reported of the three activities.

People with a higher level of connection to nature were more willing to take part in all the activities. The link between connection to nature and a willingness to engage suggests that, in New Zealand, investing in programs that help improve people's connection to nature in [urban areas](#) might increase participation in conservation activities.

"People cited a number of different barriers to participation, including lack of knowledge and motivation," says Dr. Woolley. "Concern for the safety of children and pets was reported as a barrier more frequently for pest trapping than pest monitoring—and animal welfare concerns, cost and dealing with dead animals were an issue."

Lack of time and of a suitable environment were also seen as barriers to participation in each of the conservation activities.

"What this suggests is that—when developing conservation activities involving public participation—the ways in which you communicate the outcomes of the activity will be important in encouraging participation. Monitoring might be for people with an interest in natural history who can then get feedback on their observations," says Dr. Woolley.

The [survey results](#) also suggested a pro-environmental attitude has less influence on people's willingness to trap than for the other activities, indicating the popularity of trapping may be driven by other factors—perhaps a perception of rodents as household pests.

"We expected that community and social motivations might be positively associated with pest trapping, as, anecdotally, this activity seems to provide opportunities for the community to get to know one another," write the authors, who also include CBRE director Associate Professor Stephen Hartley, Professor Nicola Nelson, head of the University's Te Kura Mātauranga Koiora—School of Biological Sciences, of which the CBRE is part, and Zealandia conservation manager Dr. Danielle Shanahan.

"Instead, these relationships existed for the monitoring activities but not for trapping. This indicates that although people who engage in [pest](#) trapping may enjoy social opportunities as a result of taking part, this is unlikely to be a factor motivating their initial participation."

"Ironically," says Dr. Woolley, "for those who prefer trapping, success from a conservation point of view is when you're not trapping anything because there's nothing to be trapped! That's where you need the monitoring and in a large project ideally you'd do all three methods."

Providing easy-to-use traps and more information and publicity about trapping will also help get people involved, say the researchers, who think these sorts of activities may act as a gateway, encouraging people with low conservation values to begin a path towards greater environmental stewardship.

More information: Christopher K. Woolley et al, Public willingness to engage in backyard conservation in New Zealand: Exploring motivations and barriers for participation, *People and Nature* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10243](https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10243)

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