

# A forest is more than trees

A forest, large or small, native or exotic, is home to countless varieties of plant and animal life, many of which cannot survive outside the forest environment. It protects the ground from the effects of heavy rains, which cause soil erosion, provides attractive scenic backdrops in the countryside, and gives wide scope for recreation pursuits.



*Mustelids*

In New Zealand this group of animals is represented by ferrets, stoats and weasels, which were introduced between 1867 and 1912 to control rabbits, but this was largely unsuccessful.

The largest of these animals is the ferret, or polecat, which is nearly as big as a small cat. It has creamy-white underfur with long black guard hairs and a black tail.

The second largest — the stoat or ermine — is about 35cm in length. It has a light brown coat with off-white underparts, and a bushy black-tipped tail. Stoats are the most common of the three. In cold climates its fur turns white in

winter and was highly regarded as a trim for royal robes.

The weasel is the smallest and least common of the three measuring only about 22cm in length. It is mostly brown and has a short tapering tail. It is a fierce little hunter and will catch a rabbit many times bigger than itself.

All three species are now widely distributed throughout New Zealand's forest and farmlands.

Mustelids feed on rabbits, rats, mice, insects and even frogs and fish. They also prey on birds and their eggs which has made them most unpopular.



New Zealand Forest Service