



Kapiti Island — The Last Possum?

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Forest and Bird and Kapiti Island have had close links over the years. The public outcry over the state of this special sanctuary provided the impetus for the setting up of the Society, and Society founder Captain Val Sanderson took a keen interest in Kapiti. Today it is one of our most important island havens, partly because of its accessibility. Kapiti's regenerating forest gives one a sense of what New Zealand was like before Europeans arrived, before they brought with them animals such as possums, which have spread inexorably on the mainland and are now threatening the Far North. Unfortunately, there are still possums on Kapiti. The good news is they may not be there for much longer.

For the first time we have a chance of eradicating the last possum from Kapiti Island. Possum control began on the island before 1920 but varied in effort from year to year until 1968. Then followed a 12 year interval while the effects of possums on the island's plants were closely watched. (see *Forest and Bird*, 224:18) Trapping began again in February 1980 and over 15,000 possums had been killed by September 1982, about three quarters of the island's possums. Their numbers fell so low that the commercial trappers were no longer interested.

Eradication feasible

Inspired by the success of the Wildlife Service in eradicating cats from Little Barrier Island, Peter Daniel, the island's ranger, suggested that eradication of possums from Kapiti Island was now a feasible goal. After discussions between the Department of Lands and Survey, Forest Service, DSIR and Wildlife Service, an intensive control programme began in February 1983. A team of dedicated possum trappers, including Bob Cairns and leader Geoff Alexander, was employed by the Department of

Lands and Survey, Forest Service, and Wildlife Service and overseen by Peter Daniel. Starting at the southern tip of the island they gradually extended a network of narrow tracks northwards, covering the entire island, except the western cliffs, and trapping both along and between tracks. No possum could have been more than 50-100 m from the nearest trap, well within their nightly range of movements, and traps were left set for many weeks, even after they had ceased to catch possums.

Gin traps were set on slanting posts about a metre above the ground to pro-

