



# The Pig's Back

DAVE HANSFORD finds wild pig numbers are on the rise again, and no one knows what to do about it.

Wild pigs are posing a growing problem for conservation projects in several parts of New Zealand. Community objections to their control by poisons, and illegal releases by hunters, are blamed for the surge in population.

Rising pig numbers are a serious concern to conservation scientists trying to bring back several native animals from the brink of extinction.

On the Chatham Islands, Graham Taylor recently tracked a typical incident by radio signal as he followed the return to the land of a critically endangered taiko, or magenta petrel. The signal came from one of his oldest charges, a bird first caught in 1982. The radio signal faded and surged as he

pursued it through the scrubby margin of the island. As a Department of Conservation scientist, Graham Taylor knew every taiko burrow by heart, and he realised the transmitter was drawing him to a new nesting attempt. But the signal peaked at a scene of devastation.

'The burrow had been rooted up; the ground all around it was bare . . . big, folded-over chunks of soil. I found the transmitter and some feathers amid what looked to be the remains of the burrow, which been completely destroyed. We think the tracked bird may have survived, but we don't know whether it lost its partner.'

Only one predator leaves such a catastrophic signature. Linnaeus called it

*Sus scrofa*. We call it razorback, te poaka, the porker, kuhukuhu or Captain Cooker — the wild boar.

As omnivores, pigs will devour pretty much anything they find. On the main Auckland Island, says Graham Taylor, they've been seen to walk up to nesting white-capped albatrosses and kill and eat them where they sit.

Last decade, he had an entire shearwater colony — 20 to 30 burrows — destroyed by pigs on the Chathams, an attrition that continues.

'We're still losing bird colonies to pigs, and blue penguins are suffering too.'

There's good evidence that pigs exterminated six of the known Hutton's