



BIRDLIFE - WHAT WILL BRODIFACOLUM DO?

FACT SHEET 4

Q & A THIS PROGRAM WILL END LONG-TERM POISONING ON LORD HOWE ISLAND

Will brodifacoum devastate the birdlife during a rodent eradication program on Lord Howe Island?

No, the purpose of eradicating rodents from Lord Howe Island is to provide long-term benefit to all native wildlife including the birds. With careful planning the potential risk to any bird species is minimised. After rodent eradication, numbers of most bird species will increase. While rodents remain on Lord Howe Island, numbers of most bird species are suppressed by continual predation and competition for food.

Will brodifacoum kill our birds?

The pellets are deliberately coloured green to deter birds from eating them as most birds cue into the colours of ripe fruit and seeds and ignore green fruits. Those birds that ingest enough pellets can die. The number of pellets needed to cause mortality varies from one species to another. Trials on Lord Howe Island have shown most bird species are not interested in this type of cereal pellet.

Does secondary poisoning occur with brodifacoum?

Some birds may die from eating rodents poisoned by brodifacoum. Already on Lord Howe Island, Talon containing brodifacoum is used to control rodents, presenting an existing risk of secondary poisoning to birds that eat poisoned rodents. Continued long-term use of Talon on Lord Howe Island is potentially a more serious problem than a one-off eradication program, which will put an end to any long-term poisoning.

Will an eradication project place any of our birds at risk? What steps will be taken to protect them?

Research undertaken on Lord Howe Island and knowledge gained from other eradications identified those bird species that may be at risk from an eradication program using brodifacoum - Woodhens, Currawongs, Buff-banded rails, Purple swamphens, hybrid ducks, feral pigeons, feral chickens, Masked owls, blackbirds and Sacred kingfishers. Those endemic birds identified as being at risk would be protected by having substantial numbers caught and maintained in captivity on the Island until the bait pellets disintegrate.

Would any of our birds be removed from Lord Howe Island during a rodent eradication program?

Viable populations of the endemic birds considered at risk during a rodent eradication program will be kept in captivity on Lord Howe Island. Consistent with best practice captive management, a small population of Woodhens would also be established on the mainland.

Q

Rodents threaten the World Heritage values of Lord Howe Island

A

Will seabirds be affected by a rodent eradication operation?

No. Seabirds eat marine food and do not feed on land. Small numbers of pellets may fall into the sea adjacent to the cliffs, but will sink and dissipate rapidly (see also fact sheet 7). The proposed eradication would take place in winter when most seabirds are away from Lord Howe Island. Helicopter operations on Mt Gower will take place in the morning when few Providence petrels are airborne.

What other non-target species does brodifacoum affect?

Brodifacoum can affect all vertebrate animals. Eradication programs carried out on other islands show that some individual lizards have been affected, but populations rapidly recovered to exceed pre-eradication numbers following the removal of rats.

Are invertebrates affected by brodifacoum?

Invertebrates have a different blood clotting mechanism from vertebrates and are generally not affected by brodifacoum. One species of land snail (in Mauritius) has been affected, and tests are being carried out on the Lord Howe Island Placostylus to test its susceptibility to brodifacoum. If susceptible, captive populations will be held during a rodent eradication program.

What impact have rodents had on the birdlife of Lord Howe Island?

Rats are responsible for the extinction of five of our endemic species of birds. These disappeared within ten years of arrival of rats in 1918. Also two seabird species - White-bellied storm-petrel and Kermadec petrel were forced off the main island by rats and now nest only on offshore islets.

Are rodents still impacting on the birdlife of Lord Howe Island?

Yes, both rats and mice continue to eat the eggs, chicks and adults of many of our land bird and seabird species. This causes suffering to our birds, and limits the numbers of all species surviving on the Island. This will continue until rodents are eradicated.

What have other island eradication programs shown?

On every island where rodents have been eradicated there has been a dramatic increase in birds, lizards, invertebrates and plant regeneration. Such returns to abundance are expected for Lord Howe Island. View the DVDs of rodent eradications on Anacapa, Little Barrier and Campbell islands available at the LHI Board office.



Rat attack on Masked booby chick

What is the likely outcome for our birds of a rodent eradication program on Lord Howe Island?

With the community working together to achieve eradication of rodents from Lord Howe Island, all of the Island's birdlife will benefit. Within several years our land bird numbers will dramatically increase; seabird numbers will increase; and White bellied storm-petrels and Kermadec petrels may recolonise the main island (just as Black noddies and Little shearwaters did after removal of cats). With rodents gone it may be possible to consider reintroduction of subspecies of land birds similar to those wiped out by the rats.