

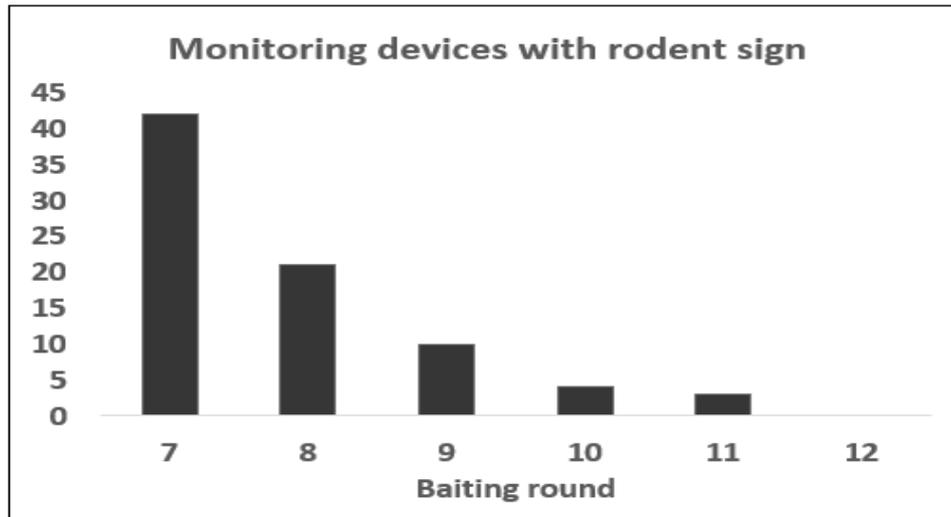
LORD HOWE ISLAND BOARD

REP UPDATE

Rodent activity update

The REP is now focusing on the removal of the final remaining rodents on Lord Howe. Monitoring equipment has been deployed since early August, with the below graph showing the decrease in the number of positive rodent 'hits' on the monitoring equipment since then. Although one hit does not necessarily equal one rodent (e.g. one individual may mark multiple devices, or conversely one marked device may reveal a pair or den), it does give us a very good measure of activity and helps us to direct our search and removal efforts.

Round 13 will be finishing 3rd October 2019.



Dogs

The biosecurity monitoring dogs have also been working hard. We have been prioritising those areas with known rodent activity or with previously high rodent activity whilst also searching other leases for rodent sign. This ensures that we are constantly, actively searching for rodents rather than waiting for any potential monitoring sign to reveal their location.

Roofs

Baiting of ceiling spaces that are not accessible by manhole is now well and truly underway with over 230 roofs completed thus far. The timing of baiting these roof spaces is important in that we only want to have need to undertake it once. This baiting needs to specifically target mice that have had no need to leave a roof space for the duration of the baiting program (due to cached food etc.). Any mice that have been coming and going from roof spaces will have now had more than ample time to access baits in either an external or internal ground based station. As we will not be replenishing roof baits, placing the bait in roof spaces too early may have seen bait take by transient mice meaning less or no bait would be available for those that stayed in the roof space.

Rodents

All rodent bodies found since August have been dissected and all have shown evidence of eating bait. Dissections also revealed that limited breeding was occurring over the winter months, generally in those females that were in very good body condition. It was not previously known if rodents on Lord Howe would breed across winter. Rodents are able to breed year round in the tropics, but are restricted to summer in temperate areas. As Lord Howe sits between these two extremes, the presence of some limited breeding over winter is not surprising.

Bird Release

The final checks for Non-target Species in the forests of the island are being completed. After over 500 person hours of searching, the number of recoveries of any dead birds has been very low. This shows minimal impact of the aerial baiting on wild birds.

The breakdown of distributed bait is ahead of expected rates thanks to timely rainfall.

Five pairs of Lord Howe Currawongs were released in early September and radio-tracked to monitor their behaviour as they returned to the forests after four months captivity. Four pairs returned to their previous territories and commenced breeding activities within days of release. One pair couldn't compete with a wild pair that had taken over their nesting area during their captivity. This pair split, with the female now breeding nearby.

In the last week, the remaining currawongs were released from the Captive Management Facility and are now returning to their former territories. A thorough survey will be made in October and November to determine total numbers and breeding activity.

Prior to release, Taronga Vet Frances Hulst undertook currawong health checks on all birds with results showing everything is going well and the birds remain healthy.

Settlement woodhens will remain in care until the baiting program concludes and all settlement bait stations are retrieved.



Image: Mitigation Management team releasing formally captive currawongs, near Soldiers Creek last week. Image by Michael Shields, Taronga Zoo.

Rat on a Rodent



Your vigilance and keen eyes are needed now more than ever to help remove the final rodents. All potential rodent sightings should be called though to **6563 2066** as soon as possible.

One positive rodent sighting has already led to the direct removal of an individual. A call was made to Rat on a Rodent which, following some questioning, led to the immediate deployment of a biosecurity dog, handler, and REP staff. An individual rat was then located and removed. Upon dissection, evidence was found that this individual had eaten bait but had not yet succumbed.

Final rounds of baiting

We are now heading into the final five weeks of baiting with the final bait deployment scheduled for Friday November 1st. Following this, a team of 10 REP staff will commence pack down procedures from North to South, collecting all bait stations and clearing the settlement area of any remaining REP equipment. We thank you for your understanding and cooperation throughout the REP – it has been a true community effort and we appreciate all of your continued support as we near the finish line!

Peter Adams
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
2nd October 2019