

wildlife-friendly areas



PHOTO: A Dawn

Opara Estate developers have acknowledged the need for nature protection in their subdivision project in the Hokianga Harbour.

Enhancing New Zealand's natural heritage by protecting it from pets and weeds

Exciting new initiatives around New Zealand ensure New Zealanders moving into rural subdivisions and lifestyle blocks near native forests, wetlands and sand dunes can enjoy the dawn chorus of bellbirds and tui, the antics of fantails, and kiwi or pukeko wandering through their backyard.

People aren't always aware that pets and exotic garden plants can be destructive to native habitats. Wildlife-friendly areas enable residents to preserve and enjoy New Zealand's unique natural heritage and environment.

What are wildlife-friendly areas?

Wildlife-friendly areas are places where landowners or developers are protecting indigenous environments – particularly wildlife – from the harmful impacts of introduced pests and weeds. Covenants over land can prevent domestic animals and pest plants, which are a particular threat to native species, from being brought into the area. This may mean that residents can't own cats, dogs or mustelids (ferrets and stoats) as pets, can't clear native vegetation or bring in invasive plants.

Why are pets a threat?

Cats and dogs have been kept as pets or companion animals for thousands of years around the world, and have become an accepted part of the New Zealand lifestyle. However, as an introduced species they prey upon native species, in particular flightless and ground-dwelling birds found only in New Zealand.

There are 595,000 dogs and more than 814,000 cats in New Zealand. Even if regularly fed by humans, free-ranging domestic cats and dogs still retain their hunting instinct, making them a serious threat to native birds – a 'tame' cat can kill up to 1000 animals a year. Researchers hold cats responsible for more bird species extinctions worldwide than any other cause except habitat destruction.

What's the impact of pets on native wildlife?

New Zealand's native bird populations are already under stress from habitat destruction as well as competition and predation from introduced species such as rats, stoats, ferrets and possums. New Zealanders moving to new subdivisions to be closer to nature may unwittingly be degrading the environment they wish to enjoy, by bringing with them predatory animals and invasive plants.

Don't cats just catch mice?

Domestic and feral cats kill birds as large as kereru (NZ pigeon), lizards, insects, moths and butterflies. Cats can push native birds to extinction. For example, New Zealand's only flightless perching bird, the Stephens Island Wren was eliminated by a lighthouse keeper's cat in the late 1800s, while on Stephens Island in the Marlborough Sounds.





Don't dogs just run and play?

Like cats, dogs have a natural instinct to chase and kill other animals and even though they may not eat them, they will kill as many animals as they can. Dogs in New Zealand are known to kill kiwi, weka, rail and penguins.

Unrestrained pet, farm and hunting dogs were responsible for more than 100 kiwi deaths reported in Northland from 1990 to 1995. The insatiable killer instinct of dogs was demonstrated when in 1987, over a six week period, a dog on the loose in Waitangi State Forest killed as many as 500 of the 900 kiwi living there.

Introduced plants

While introduced plants from around the world can provide attractive displays in the garden, some are invasive species. They can have serious impacts by spreading quickly into native habitats, out-competing native plants for resources and reducing the food supply for wildlife. Over 70% of invasive weeds were originally garden plants. In addition, removal, control and management of weeds can be difficult and expensive.

What is Forest and Bird doing?

Forest and Bird has been active at a national and branch level promoting wildlife-friendly areas. As well as offering advice to landowners and property developers on the creation of wildlife-friendly areas, the Society has been working with regional and district councils to ensure all new property development near vulnerable areas have appropriate protection.

What are the options?

There are a variety of ways of creating wildlife-friendly areas:

- Covenants on land under the QEII Trust
- Local and district rules for land use and subdivisions – these are reviewed regularly
- Conditions on subdivision consents under the Resource Management Act

What are some examples?

Council initiatives

A number of local authorities such as the Far North District Council and the Thames-Coromandel District Council are including wildlife-friendly concepts in their District Plans.

Mahakirau Private Forest Estate, Coromandel

When developers Terry Willigers and Larry Dye sought to subdivide a large area of native forest adjoining the Manaia Forest Sanctuary in 1995, Forest and Bird's Upper Coromandel branch objected because, despite the proposed QEII Trust Open Space Covenant, pets could still be brought into the area, threatening native birds and lizards. The developers agreed to include pest control measures and a ban on any introduced animals or fish and specific weed plants.

Wildlife-friendly areas can help protect the environment and preserve the habitat and wildlife in New Zealand. In these areas residents are living with nature – not in conflict with it. They enjoy increasing numbers of birds and other native species around their homes.

Opara Estate, Hokianga harbour

Developers independently sought to protect the property by limiting vegetation clearance and prohibiting cats, dogs and mustelids on 166ha, which includes mature lowland forest that is habitat for kiwi, kukupa, tui and morepork.

Kaiwharawhara, Wellington

Harbourside Development took up Forest and Bird's suggestion of making their subdivision wildlife-friendly by prohibiting cats and mustelids to protect a bird corridor close to the 'mainland island' Karori Sanctuary.

How can pet owners help?

- Have pets neutered or spayed, and don't dump unwanted animals.
- Bells and declawing don't reduce cats' instincts, so keep cats well-fed and indoors when wildlife is most active.
- Keep dogs fenced in, exercise only in designated areas, away from nesting areas, estuaries and reserves, and keep them on a leash.
- Don't take dogs to national parks.

In your garden

You can encourage native birds by planting native trees – check with your regional council about the best plants for your area.

For more information contact:

The Department of Conservation -
www.doc.govt.nz/Conservation/002~Animal-Pests/Pets.asp
Forest and Bird - www.forestandbird.org.nz

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