

Mainland kiwi 'could be gone in 50 years'

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LAST CHANCE: Aria Scott, 4, and Ruby Scott, 5, meet seven-month-old Parawera as she is released into the Maungatautari enclosure in Waikato last month.

A dire picture for kiwi in the wild has been painted for new Conservation Minister Maggie Barry, with predictions they face extinction from mainland New Zealand within two generations.

"Without intervention, New Zealand's national symbol, the kiwi, could die out within 50 years," the Department of Conservation briefing to the incoming minister says.

Possums, rats and stoats were wreaking havoc on forests, plants and native species. "These introduced predators are the greatest threat to the continued survival of many of our native birds. Without active management, many of New Zealand's iconic species cannot survive in the wild and are in danger of extinction."

The kiwi population was dwindling by 2 per cent a year, with 95 per cent of chicks not reaching their first birthday in those areas that were not protected, the briefing says. A DOC spokesman said survival rates rose to between 50 and 60 per cent of birds in protected areas.

"Despite a significant proportion of the country being public conservation land, New Zealand has one of the highest proportions of threatened species and one of the highest extinction rates in the world," the briefing says. As a result, conservation relied on trapping and poisoning introduced animals, by means including the controversial poison 1080, which was the most cost-effective method for possums and rats, particularly over steep and remote terrain.

Forest & Bird advocacy and campaigns group manager Kevin Hackwell said the briefing's predictions about the extinction of kiwi in the wild in 50 years were alarming but true.

"Sadly, a lot of other species might beat them to extinction."

Hackwell, who is on the National Kiwi Recovery Group, called for DOC to increase its use of 1080, as was also proposed in an investigation by Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Jan Wright.

Barry was in Europe for World War I commemoration services and unavailable to comment on the briefing report. She has publicly backed increased 1080 use in the past.

"The use of 1080 by the Department of Conservation is effective in tackling predators such as possums, rats, and stoats, which threaten New Zealand's birdlife and biodiversity," she has said.

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