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## Media Release

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# Pioneering trap study leads way for return of Kokako to East Taranaki forest

**Wellington, New Zealand** – An area of remote forest in East Taranaki, where the haunting melody of the kokako has been missing from the dawn chorus for over two decades, is the frontline in the battle to save New Zealand's endangered birds.

A ground-breaking large-scale field trial of automatic traps designed to kill possums humanely and with minimal labour costs is about to be undertaken by community-led conservation group the East Taranaki Environment Trust (ETET), with support from WWF-New Zealand.

The study of 218 automatic traps over 277 hectares of podocarp forest aims to reduce possum numbers to such low levels that endangered kokako can be successfully reintroduced. The grant from WWF, in partnership with the Tindall Foundation, is providing \$20,000 towards the purchase of the traps.

WWF's terrestrial conservation programme manager, Marc Slade, says New Zealand is facing a conservation crisis: "We need urgent action to protect our native birds and this begins with eradicating pest populations. The battle to reclaim our forests from these introduced predators will require ingenuity and innovation as well as ongoing commitment from land owners and community groups like ETET."

The humane traps, designed and manufactured by Wellington company Goodnature, are specially designed to kill only possums and to avoid the accidental killing of native birds or other animals. They can kill up to 12 animals before needing to be reset.

Karen Schumacher, founder of the East Taranaki Environment Trust that works to protect kiwi in the area said: "We are excited to be embarking on a year-long study of automatic possum traps. This new technology, used alongside current trapping and poisoning methods that control stoats and rats, could reduce predator numbers to a point where not only kiwi but the entire ecosystem flourishes. I look forward to the day when kokako sing again in this forest."

Possoms and other introduced mammals including rats and stoats are prolific killers of many of New Zealand's native birds, preying on eggs and nesting birds, and competing for food sources such as berries and flowers. Eradicating these pests is essential to conservation efforts to protect kiwi, kokako and other threatened or endangered bird species.

If the study is successful in reducing possum and other predator numbers below the known threshold at which kokako thrive, then a reintroduction of kokako is planned for 2013. They disappeared from the area in 1989.

Stu Barr from Goodnature said: "The potential for these traps is huge. They will take a lot of the leg

This press release and associated material can be found on [wwf.org.nz](http://wwf.org.nz)

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work out of pest control which is traditionally a very labour intensive job. In tough terrain like East Taranaki, just two people can lay 100 hectares of traps in a day that only need rechecking and servicing once a year. They could revolutionise pest control in New Zealand.“

Marc Slade said: “WWF is proud to support innovation in community conservation. We are supporting the East Taranaki Environment Trust to help them enable kokako and kiwi to flourish once again and also to develop new techniques for pest control that could benefit conservation efforts nationwide.”

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#### **Notes to editors**

- The Goodnature automatic possum traps meet A class humane standards set by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. This is the only trap to have ever achieved this standard.
- The automatic possum traps work by luring the animal with a sweet cinnamon scented bait, and then killing it instantly with a piston driven by compressed CO<sub>2</sub> that strikes the skull and crushes the brain. It is attached on the side of trees 70 cm from the ground.
- The automatic traps trial is taking place on 277 hectare and ground poison operations will be conducted in an adjacent block to compare results. In total, a 1,000 hectare area of private and publicly owned land is earmarked for the Kokako release.
- The project is endorsed by DOC and the Taranaki Regional Council and is the first study of automatic traps by a community-led conservation group. Two other DOC funded field trials will soon be undertaken on conservation managed land (Te Urewera mainland Island and Otanewainuku in the Bay of Plenty)
- This project is receiving the inaugural grant from WWF's Conservation Innovation Fund, which funds a range of activities that demonstrate innovation and which are potentially replicable in other projects. The fund is targeted at established community groups with a proven track record of delivering conservation projects. It offers donations of up to \$10,000 per annum, initially for up to two years (a maximum of \$20,000 over two years), although WWF can use its discretion to make larger donations.

#### **About WWF-New Zealand**

WWF-New Zealand is part of the WWF International Network, the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisation. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature. This is achieved by working on the ground with local communities, and in partnership with government and industry, using the best possible science to advocate change and effective conservation policy.

#### **About East Taranaki Environment Trust**

The East Taranaki Environment Trust was set up as a registered charitable trust in 2005. The trust was formed by group of local landowners dedicated to enhancing kiwi habitat through pest management. The main focus of the trust is their “saving kiwi in Taranaki” project, but they also support of the Whio (blue duck) programme. The trust aims to promote, facilitate and undertake protection work for the natural ecosystems and landscapes which will support the protection of native species in East Taranaki.



The East Taranaki Environment Trust's conservation project covers about 9,000 hectares of private land and 3,800 hectares of public land. Much of it is rugged mudstone country.

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