

CASE STUDY

Feasibility study - eradicating feral cats from Tasman Island, Tasmania

The challenge

Tasman Island, located just off the south-eastern coast of Tasmania, is one of Australia's most significant seabird islands with fairy prions, sooty shearwaters and short-tailed shearwaters being the main breeding species.

It forms part of the Tasman National Park and is managed by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service. Feral cats originating from domestic cats brought in by light-keepers have flourished on the island. Cat predation is having a significant impact on breeding seabirds, with an estimated 54,000 fairy prions killed annually by cats.

An attempt to eradicate the cats in the early 1980s failed due to inadequate institutional support. A recent survey report included a recommendation to eradicate the cats as a conservation management priority in order to protect not only the seabirds, but also endemic reptiles, and to maintain the island as a wildlife refuge (Bryant & Shaw, 2006).

Considerable expertise has been developed in New Zealand and elsewhere in eradicating cats from islands (Nogales et.al, 2004). Landcare Research was engaged by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service to prepare a plan to eradicate the cats from Tasman Island using current best practice procedures.

(continued...)



An aerial view of Tasman Island with the Tasman Peninsula in the background

Our approach

Two Landcare Research eradication specialists visited the island in December 2008. They are now working alongside managers and specialists in Tasmania to prepare an eradication plan and to put in place associated biosecurity procedures to prevent the arrival of other invasive species.

A cooperative and integrated approach involving not only the Parks and Wildlife Service, but also scientific staff from the Department of Primary Industry and Water and other knowledgeable people is being employed. Involvement and support is being sought from stakeholder groups such as 'The Friends of Tasman Island'.

A combination of techniques has been proposed to eradicate the cats from the island including the use of toxic baits – sown from the air as well as from the ground, and trapping. Other techniques such as the use of trained detector dogs, infra-red cameras, spotlights, image intensifiers and other "high-tech" devices may be used to confirm that the last cat has been removed. Field research will be undertaken to refine some techniques and to address specific questions about cat behaviour and dispersal on Tasman Island.

Another objective is to build capacity within the Parks and Wildlife Service to undertake eradications of cats and other invasive species on additional islands around Tasmania.

The outcome

After input from agency specialists and managers, an eradication plan and an associated biosecurity strategy will be submitted to the Parks and Wildlife Service in March 2009.

This plan will support an application for funds for the preparation and ultimate eradication of cats from Tasman Island – perhaps in the winter of 2010.



A cache of cat-killed fairy prions, Tasman Island

References

- Bryant, S.L. and Shaw, J. (Editors) (2006). Tasman Island: 2005 flora and fauna survey. Hamish Saunders Memorial Trust, New Zealand and Biodiversity Conservation Branch, DPIW, Hobart, Nature Conservation Report Series 06/01.
- Nogales, M., Martin, A., Tershy, B.R., Donlan, J., Veitch, D., Puerta, N., Wood, B. & Alonso, J. 2004. A review of feral cat eradication on islands. *Conservation Biology* 18, 310–319.

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