

Protecting native forest birds in New Zealand beech forests

Date: Friday 16 June 2017

Time: 3.00pm – 4.00pm

Location: Room 208, Te Ao Marama Building

Presenter: Kelly Whitau

Abstract:

Predation is a leading cause of native bird declines in New Zealand forests. One of the key predators of native birds and their eggs is the introduced ship rat (*Rattus rattus*). There are many examples of successful predator control efforts in New Zealand that have benefitted native bird populations, yet the responses of birds and mammals to pest control are still difficult to predict because there are numerous interacting factors that affect control outcomes. Beech (*Nothofagus* spp.) masts in New Zealand forests are detrimental to bird populations because the mass seed production supports a large increase in predatory mammals, including ship rats. In recent years, aerial sodium fluoroacetate (1080) application has been used to combat the effects of beech masting events. The effects of pest control can also vary greatly with altitude where some species demonstrate significant increases or decreases within a particular altitudinal range. My research therefore investigated the effects of aerial 1080 application, beech mast events, altitude, and varying levels of ground control (i.e. trapping and poison bait stations) on ship rat and common forest bird populations. Using wildlife monitoring data collected by UC and DOC, the results from my study can be used to guide future pest management operations.

Biography:

I am a descendent of Kāi Tahu with whakapapa to Moeraki and I am passionate about conserving native species in New Zealand, particularly those in our native forests. My studies at UC have mainly focused on conservation ecology and, with the help of the NTRC, I have just completed my Master's thesis investigating the various effects of pest control on native birds and introduced mammals in Nelson beech forests. I am particularly interested in our native forest birds and believe that it is important to practice kaitiakitaka to conserve and protect these species however we can.