



MEDIA RELEASE

NEXT FOUNDATION AND ZERO INVASIVE PREDATORS INVEST IN CACOPHONY PROJECT

An innovative new research and development conservation project using technology to help eliminate predators has been given a financial boost.

The NEXT Foundation and Zero Invasive Predators (ZIP) have announced they are investing in the Cacophony Project.

The Cacophony Project is the brain child of Cantabrian engineer, inventor and entrepreneur Grant Ryan. The project began as a way to record and analyse birdsong (hence “Cacophony”) as a measure of predator control success. It has developed into an open-sourced conservation initiative developing sound lures – like a possum mating call – and artificial intelligence to help completely remove predators.

Cacophony proposes to use thermal cameras to detect the presence of elusive predators – and then entice them into a trap using social lures. The concept will potentially help find predators and outsmart those that ignore food baits.

NEXT CEO Bill Kermode said the Foundation is delighted to invest in the project, which aligns with its focus supporting Predator Free New Zealand 2050.

“Cacophony is an example of classic Kiwi ingenuity. Applying information technology to conservation in a way that hasn’t been done before, it has the potential to be an important tool to help save the 25 million birds a year that New Zealand currently loses to predators like rats, stoats and possums, and stop the rapid decline of our biodiversity.”

“Cacophony is an open sourced model where anyone can use and adapt the technology developed – or offer up any relevant suggestions for improvements – all for the betterment of the New Zealand environment.”

ZIP CEO Al Bramley said the artificial intelligence Cacophony is developing could be crucial in the mission to make mainland New Zealand Predator Free.

“These are super sensitive software tools that could provide us with vital information of what predators are left in any particular area.

“It could work very much like a border patrol – where anyone who goes through passport control has facial recognition – although in this case, it will be done with stoats and possums. These technological advancements will be critical especially when we get to the stage of finding the last few predators in any one area or detecting an incursion.”

“We are also delighted to invest in this project, and we look forward to working closely with Cacophony towards the common goal of making New Zealand Predator Free.”

Grant Ryan founded Cacophony after he moved to Akaroa following the Christchurch earthquakes and discovered his new home was infested with rats and possums. He got rid of the unwanted predators – and noticed an increase in the bird volume.

Grant developed an app so he could measure the increase in bird song – which led him to wonder how else technology could be applied to conservation. He began developing artificial intelligence and experimenting with social audio lures – like the mating cry of a possum – after his cameras showed predators were walking past food traps because they weren't hungry.

“We are thrilled to have NEXT and ZIP invest in the Project – which will allow us to boost resources – and ultimately develop a super-trap to help rid New Zealand of predators.”

“With open sourced learning and Moore's Law – which means that technology becomes either half the price or twice as good every 18 months, I think we have a real chance of this being a game changer for the environment. We believe we can make trapping tens of thousands of times better.”

“Predator Free New Zealand by 2050 could be a little crazy. With this new innovation I think we could get to that goal a lot sooner.”

To view a short (three minute) NEXT video on the Cacophony project and an interview with Grant Ryan [click here](#)

About NEXT Foundation

NEXT is a strategic philanthropic foundation launched three years ago. NEXT is investing \$100 million over 10 years to create a legacy of environmental and educational excellence for the benefit of future generations of New Zealanders. For more information please visit our website - www.nextfoundation.org.nz

About ZIP

ZIP was established in February 2015 as a charitable research and development entity focused on developing the tools and techniques to enable an ambitious and exciting vision for New Zealand:

The complete removal of rats, stoats, and possums from large mainland areas for the long term, sustainable protection of native biodiversity. For more information visit the website www.zip.org.nz

For further information please contact: Polly Hudson, Communications Director NEXT Foundation 021 772 482