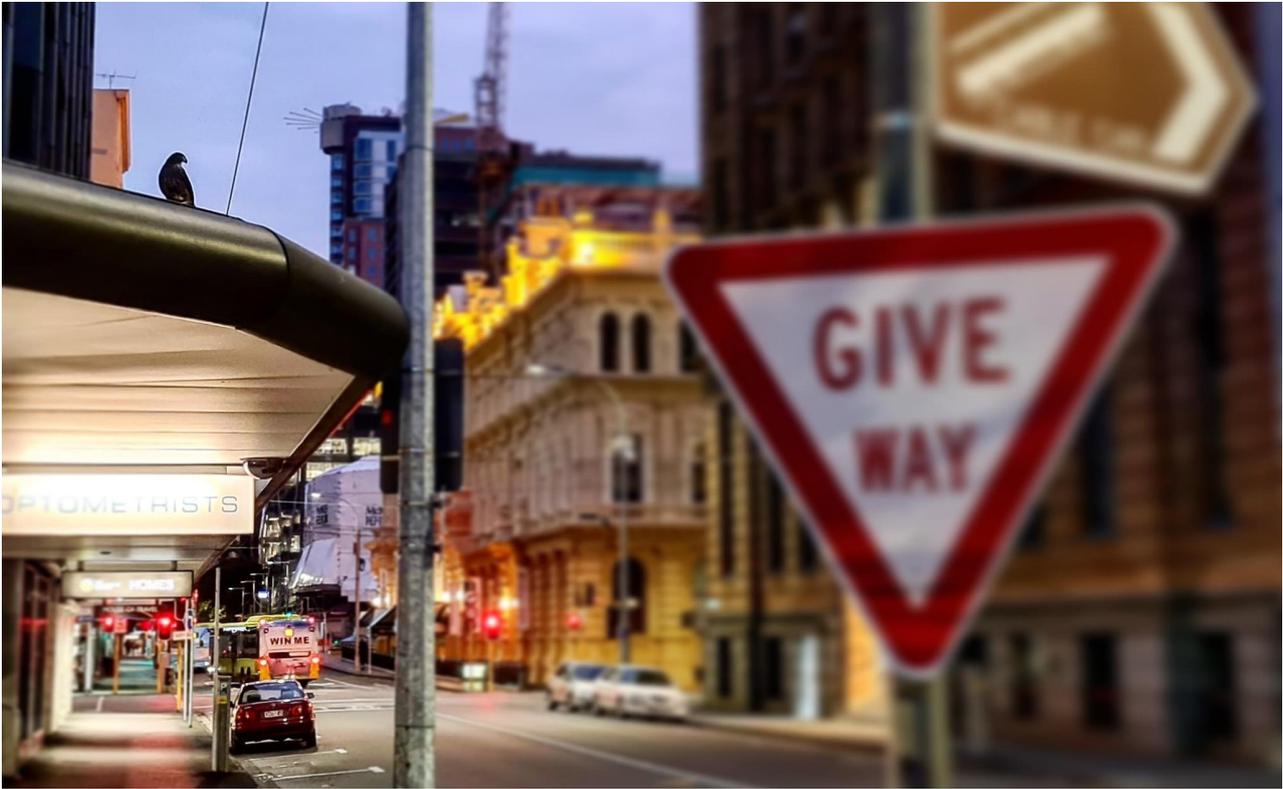


RISING — to the — CHALLENGE

Stories from the Covid-19 crisis



Give way to the karearea/falcon. Wellingtonian Pete McCombe snapped this classic lockdown shot in an empty Lambton Quay.

PREDATOR FREE WELLINGTON – STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN

When Wellington went into Covid 19 lockdown – its residents didn't just stop. They looked and listened.

They listened to the sound of birdsong, and took time to enjoy the birdlife that has become more abundant since it embarked on its ambitious goal to become the first predator free capital city in the world.

“For us perhaps the most symbolic image to come out of lockdown is a photograph taken by a local man Pete McCombe,” says Predator Free Wellington (PFW) project director James Willcocks. “In the middle of our empty CBD, in Lambton Quay, a karearea/New Zealand falcon sits on top of a shop awning after completing its dinner. That image speaks volumes.”

The karearea is an endangered species with only a few thousand breeding pairs in existence. But it's not the only species making an appearance out of its usual comfort zone. Residents on the Miramar Peninsula – where Predator Free Wellington has been undertaking an intense predator eradication programme – have snapped photographs of kākā and kākāriki for the first time in their backyards too.

James says when it became clear the pandemic was going to disrupt its operations PFW made a conscious decision to look for positive opportunities.

“This was twofold,” he says. “We wanted the people of Wellington to take the time to appreciate their mahi – to stop, look, and listen at the birds and nature that are thriving as a result of their efforts over the past few years.”

“And we wanted to have the people of Wellington on board to ensure the lockdown didn’t result in losing any of the gains we have made – particularly eradicating rats on the Miramar Peninsula. We built on the social media campaign called #LockDownKnockDown” and asked residents to help us flatten the ‘rat curve’.

“We have been overwhelmed with the response. Local residents have been looking into our devices on their isolation walks and letting us know if they see any sign of rats. Predator Free Miramar community trappers have stepped up, and have their traps rebaited and reset and ready to catch the last rats on the peninsula. It has meant we have been able to continue data mapping and know where the problem spots are that we need to target when we resume our full operations at Level Three.”

An added complication of lockdown was when a storm hit the Wellington South Coast in week three – effectively dismantling part of the coastal barrier system. Once again the Wellington public chipped in to help out.

“Some of our traps and bait-lines had been swept along the shoreline, but the people of Wellington rose to the occasion again – picking them off the beach and contacting us so we could restore them to their correct position.”

NEXT environmental director Jan Hania says the community is the strength of the Predator Free Wellington movement.

“It’s all about the people, and in these extraordinary circumstances of lockdown they are demonstrating how they own it. The way they have engaged, the inclusive and diverse range of people and cultures, is a real-time expression of community resilience and is an example for urban eradication for the rest of Aotearoa/New Zealand.”

James Willcocks says the broader social outcomes are as important as the environmental gains.

“What we are witnessing is the community coming together, for a common purpose. In lockdown the people of Wellington are showing how strong that community bond is – and in the future that can be applied to solving all sorts of social issues, not just environmental ones.”

Predator Free Wellington is supported by NEXT, Wellington City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council, and Predator Free 2050.



*Kākā and kākāriki have ventured into the Miramar Peninsula during lockdown.
Photo credit: Griffin Hunt, Miramar trapping legend.*