

Wellington real estate a safe haven during Covid-19

When Aotearoa New Zealand went into lockdown earlier this year, closing our borders and restricting domestic travel, a Wellington couple hunkered down – happy with their choice of real estate.

Their search for a safe haven to live a couple of years ago was paying dividends - and they spent lockdown sustainably, foraging on the coastal shores around Island Bay and catching small fish – much to the delight of the team at Predator Free Wellington.

That's because the couple are a pair of nationally endangered matuku moana/reef heron – a dark grey wading bird with a recognisable hunch, a harsh croak and bright yellow legs. There are under 500 left in New Zealand.

“This is significant and exciting for us,” says Predator Free Wellington director James Willcocks. “They were absent from Wellington for many years but over the past couple of years have re-emerged, and not just to look for food, but to nest, and breed.

“It means they feel safe here, it's a refuge for them and there are signs it could be the start of a new population.

“This is the sort of story we are hearing more and more in Wellington. The birdlife is flourishing as we intensify our efforts to become the first Predator Free capital city in the world.”

The appearance of the reef heron signals what is likely to be the start of a new era for Island Bay. In mid September the Government announced a \$7.6 million funding boost for Predator Free Wellington under its post-Covid economic stimulus, shovel ready Jobs for Nature Programme. That allows Predator Free Wellington to fast-track its eradication programme moving into phase two which is intensive trapping for rats, stoats and possums in a geographical area from Island Bay to the capital's CBD. The funding came via Predator Free 2050 Limited.

The investment will create 42 full time jobs and move the goal line to aim to have the entire ambitious project completed within the original target.

“Originally a ten year project, with this new funding we can fast track our project and aim to become the world's first predator free capital city within the next 5 years,” says James.

“The goal is to completely eradicate rats, possums, stoats and weasels from the entire Wellington Peninsula, a total area of 30,000 hectares, and in a city where around 212,000 people live.”

Stage one of the project, removing rats and weasels on the Miramar Peninsula by the Wellington airport is almost complete. The few remaining rats are proving elusive, but at the same time providing good learnings for the team to take to the next geographical phase.

And in turn the lessons from Predator Free Wellington will help the national vision of a Predator Free New Zealand 2050.



The endangered matuku moana/reef heron, has reappeared in Wellington. *Photo credit Jono Walter*



NEXT Foundation is one of the founding partners in PFW, alongside the Wellington City Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council. NEXT Environmental Advisor Devon McLean says the additional funding is a boost to Wellington but will ultimately benefit all of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

“Predator Free Wellington is a template for urban eradication throughout the country,” he says.

“The lessons being learned in the capital will strongly contribute to a methodology for creating other Predator Free cities – an important part of the bigger puzzle of a Predator Free New Zealand by 2050.”

“Wellington has shown it’s ready to scale up the project, a testimony to the mahi of its people,” Devon says.

Certainly the mahi of Wellington’s people is evident in the recently published Predator Free Wellington Impact Report. More than 20,000 households in the capital are actively trapping in their backyards

and reserves, and the project has approval from over 90 per cent of its residents.

Birds numbers are flourishing. In the past nine years the report says tui numbers have increased by 200 per cent, kaka by 300 per cent and kereru 400 per cent.

“In a year of a global pandemic, predator free mahi has proven its not only good the environment its strengthening our communities, improving our health and its good for our economy. It’s making our lives better,” says James Willcocks.

“The return of the rock heron is symbolic. We welcome the return of many more species to Wellington and we are happy for them to flout any Covid-19 quarantine or social distancing requirements.”

Read PFW Impact report [here](#)