

CHEMISTRY?

I wholeheartedly agree that noisy minorities often drown out reason and care little for the common good. With these two points to the fore, I would like to indulge you in a little reason for the common good.

DoC suggests there will be an explosion in the rat population to around 30 million as a result of the forecast beech mast, and postulates these will kill 25 million birds. So, the bird deaths and rat population numbers are broadly comparable.

Now, given the indiscriminate nature of 1080 (it is fatally toxic to all life forms which are reliant on the Krebs, or citric acid, cycle for respiration), is it not equally as likely to be eaten by a rat as a bird, or any other creature – perhaps more so by birds as there may be more of them (interestingly, no one actually knows that figure)?

So, if 25 million birds could die of 1080 poisoning, either directly by scavenging, such as kea do, or by secondary poisoning by ingestion of poisoned carcasses (say, morepork or weka), could we not save an awful lot of time and bother by not dropping the stuff in the first place?

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EXOTICS PHOBIA

Your March editorial (*Commonly Good*) and Derek Grzelewski's generally fine article on trout were related by way of touching on a common theme. The editorial backed the use of 1080 poison for "pests" while Grzelewski's piece also fell into what I term the "pest syndrome" trap by referring to the introduction of deer as "synonymous with environmental disasters".

What is not understood by many in the face of departmental spin about wild animals is that New Zealand's vegetation was browsed heavily by many birds, most notably the moa and also pigeon, takahe, kakapo and others. The claim that our vegetation evolved in the absence of browsing is simply not true.

Landcare Research estimates there are 250,000 wild deer in New Zealand. Scientists such as Dr Graeme Caughley and Les Batcheler have estimated there were between six and nine million moa. So New Zealand's

vegetation evolved over millions of years under intensive browsing – far, far greater than 250,000 deer.

Possums also are browsers. For decades the Department of Conservation claimed there were 70 million possums. In 1994, senior Landcare Research scientist Graham Nugent at a DoC pest workshop scathingly termed the 70 million figure as "the back of a cigarette packet calculation", then added that even the grossly fictitious 70 million possum numbers would consume only 15 per cent of the daily foliage production of forests.

DoC ignored the advice. It also ignored the advice of DSIR scientists such as Mike Meads and Peter Notman, who in the 1990s warned

that aerial 1080, originally developed about 1922 as an insecticide, was killing invertebrates vital to the forest ecosystem. Many invertebrates (eg worms, insects) are also the food of birds from kiwi to fantails, tomits, robins and others. Fewer insects, fewer birds. No food, no birds. Third-form biology stuff.

The editorial quoted the Environmental Protection Authority and Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment – both government agencies. So is DoC, the former Animal Health Board, and state-owned Animal Control Products' 1080 "factory".

Overseas scientists have been astounded at these misguided attitudes. Dr William Graf, a US zoologist, many years ago told the government there exists an "anti-exotic wild animal phobia". It still continues today and some believe it.

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