



## Mustelids – *mustela species*

Pest Animals

Everyone's responsibility

### Why are mustelids a problem?

Mustelids (ferrets, stoats and weasels) pose a serious threat to New Zealand's native animals and farming industry.

### Threat to our native animals

#### **Mustelids:**

- kill native birds - hole nesting, flightless and ground dwelling birds like kaka, kakariki, kiwi, black stilt and the New Zealand dotterel are particularly at risk
- eat birds, eggs and chicks
- eat native invertebrates, geckos and skinks

### Threat to our farming

Wild ferrets can carry bovine tuberculosis (Tb) which they can spread to cattle and deer herds. Tb is one of the major threats to farming in New Zealand. Mustelids are a threat to poultry farms, and may attack chickens and eat eggs. Mustelids also attack domestic pets, such as rabbits and guinea pigs.

### How do I know if I have mustelids?

Mustelid droppings (scats) are long and thin, often with a tapering twist at each end. Mustelids secrete a thick oily powerful smelling fluid called musk onto their scats. The scats are deposited in eye-catching places, such as the middle of a track, to warn off other mustelids. Another sign of mustelids is dead prey with chewed flesh around the neck and head. However, mustelids don't usually leave their kill in the open, unless they have been disturbed.



Ferrets are the largest mustelid found in New Zealand. PHOTO COURTESY DOC

### Why do we have mustelids?

Mustelids were introduced in the 1880s to control New Zealand's rabbit plagues. They were introduced despite warnings from well-known bird experts about the serious negative impact mustelids would have on native bird life. The Western Lake area of the Wairarapa was one of the earliest mustelid release sites.

### How do I control them?

Kill-traps are the best way to control mustelids. Traps are available from Greater Wellington, the Department of Conservation and some farm supply stores around the region. Contact Greater Wellington for more information.

### Effective trapping

Effective control of mustelids requires long-term systematic trapping. The most effective way to clear large areas of farmland is to work with neighbours to target mustelids across a large area at the same time.

Historically many types of trap have been available, but GW now only sell the DOC series traps, as they meet animal welfare guidelines for a humane death.



A DOC 200 trap that has caught a stoat.

## Where to set the traps

Mustelids are motivated by hunger and are extremely mobile and inquisitive animals. They are attracted to areas where prey is readily available. They like to remain dry and close to cover but will use established tracks to move around. They use both natural and artificial features for cover, so farms provide ideal habitat.

## Place traps near:

- paths, stock, animal and vehicle tracks
- rabbit warrens, chicken coops or bird aviaries
- shelter belts
- waterways, ponds and creeks
- fence lines
- hay barns
- culverts.

## Bait for traps

Fresh, natural bait works best:

- eggs
- mice
- rabbit meat.

Fish, chicken, cat food or freeze-dried meat can also be used. Several commercially produced baits are available. New baits are constantly being developed. Contact Greater Wellington for more information about choosing the right bait for your situation.

## Description

### Ferrets – *Mustela furo*

**Size:** 48-56 cm long.

**Body:** Creamy yellow undercoat with long black-tipped hairs. The legs and tail appear darker than the body. The lighter face area has a dark mask around the eyes and across the nose.

**Habitat:** Farmland and forest margins. New research suggests they are also moving into forests.

### Stoats – *Mustela erminea*

**Size:** 34-40 cm long.

**Body:** Brown/black and pale belly with a bushy black-tipped tail.

**Habitat:** Beaches, high country, native and exotic forests, scrub, sand dunes, tussock, farmland and urban areas.

### Weasels – *Mustela nivalis vulgari*

**Size:** 20-25 cm long.

**Body:** Deep brown to light tan, often with brown spots. Short brown tapering tails.

**Habitat:** Prefer modified habitats such as farmland, forest margins and scrub.



From top to bottom – a ferret, a stoat and a weasel.

## For more information about mustelids

Please contact the Pest Animal team at Greater Wellington's Upper Hutt Depot – 04 526 5327, Masterton Office – 06 378 2484, via email - [pest.animals@gw.govt.nz](mailto:pest.animals@gw.govt.nz) or visit our website [www.gw.govt.nz](http://www.gw.govt.nz)

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