

LOOK FOR ROOKS

Pest control in the Wellington region

Greater Wellington Biosecurity Officers carry out surveys and control of rook populations annually in the Wellington region. Our objective is to eradicate all rooks from the region through having no 'active rookeries' by 2029. Greater Wellington works in co-operation with neighbouring Horizons Regional Council to manage rooks across both regions.

Rook control has been undertaken in the Wellington region since the mid 1990's. There aren't many left, but we still need to be vigilant to ensure that populations aren't able to persist.

Why are rooks a problem?

Rooks are a pest species which threaten the economic wellbeing and environment in the Wellington Region. During summer, the soil in which rooks usually find invertebrates to eat becomes too hard for them to dig.

To account for this, rooks target agricultural crops as a food source. They eat and destroy newly germinated crop seedlings, maturing lentil and cereal crops and ripening walnuts.

Precision planted crops such as maize, peas and beans are especially at risk, and sometimes need to be re-sown due to the damage caused.



Rook nest in a large pine tree



Rook nest containing chicks and eggs

If you have rooks or a 'rookery'



Photo: CC Francesco Schiavone

Adult Rook

We want to hear from you if you suspect you have spotted rooks on your own property, or a neighbour's.

Rooks form distinctive breeding colonies called 'rookeries'. These conspicuous nesting areas are usually built in large exotic trees such as pines or gums, and sometimes near buildings or houses.

Landowners must not attempt to control rooks themselves. Rook control is a specialist task, which needs to be planned carefully and safely. Greater Wellington Biosecurity staff will plan a control operation for the nesting season, preventing any additional dispersal or breeding.

Greater Wellington is permitted under the Biosecurity Act 1993 to implement control of rooks on private property within the Wellington region, a task which is made easier with help and cooperation from the community.

How will Greater Wellington carry out control operations?

Greater Wellington uses DRC 1339 poison to control rooks, either using nest or ground control methods.

Nest control

- This is our primary control method, which is usually carried out in spring while rooks are nesting. This is also the safest method, as it prevents bait reaching the ground where non-target species are at a greater risk.
- A helicopter is used to lower an operator into the tree canopy on a sling and chain, to access the rook nests
- DRC 1339 mixed with petrolatum gel is applied to the inner edges of the active nests, avoiding any chicks or eggs inside.
- On return to the nests, the gel will stick to the feathers and feet of adult rooks. They will then ingest the gel while they are preening.

Ground control

- This is the most effective control method for rooks which have already dispersed from the breeding rookeries and formed large flocks.
- This is occasionally used in early summer if rooks are found feeding on crops in a regular spot.
- Rooks need to be actively feeding 'pre-feed' bait lines, before any toxic bait can be laid.
- After 3-5 days of prefeeding, small square bread dripping baits are applied to the lines.

What precautions are taken during control operations?

DRC 1339 requires a controlled substance licence to use. Medical Officer of Health approval is also obtained if required.

With both nest and ground control methods, Greater Wellington staff will keep land occupiers informed around potential dates for control operations, as they are very weather dependant.

Extra precautions are taken during ground control operations:

- During baiting, any disturbance of rooks needs to be carefully avoided
- People and stock must be kept at least 500m from ground bait lines
- Dogs must kept under control
- The same vehicles and staff are used to approach the bait line each day, at the same time
- There is no shooting.



Placing a bread dripping prefeed bait line out for rooks

How does DRC1339 work?

After ingesting the bait, rooks will process the toxin within 24 hours. DRC1339 is highly toxic to rooks, affecting the kidneys and circulatory system, and eventually killing the target pest species.

Death can happen between three hours and four days after poisoning, depending on how much bait has been eaten. Rooks will not develop symptoms that cause others to avoid baits.

Some other birds are also susceptible to the toxin, such as starlings and seagulls. Most other birds have increased resistance. There is a low risk to pigeons, finches, sparrows and most avian predators and scavengers. DRC1339 has low toxicity to humans and other mammals.

What are the risks?

- DRC1339 poses a low risk of secondary poisoning to predators or scavengers is because of its rapid breakdown and excretion from a rook's body.
- Under normal conditions the toxin is not dangerous to sheep, dogs, cows or other mammals.
- DRC1339 may act as a chronic toxicant to birds and adversely affect their reproduction if regularly eaten during the breeding season.
- Seagulls are vulnerable to DRC 1339 bread baits. Greater Wellington Biosecurity staff take extra care in avoiding areas where seagulls are present, and will abort control if they repeatedly show interest in bait lines.

Contact us

If you see this bird on your property or need help to identify a potential rookery, please contact us on 0800 496 734 or email pest.animals@gw.govt.nz.

For more information:

<https://www.bionet.nz/assets/Uploads/A6-Pest-Rooks-minor-revision-2020.pdf>

<http://www.gw.govt.nz/rooks/>