

THE BATTLE FOR THE BANDED RAIL

Project Description

The project aims to increase the numbers of Banded Rail and other shy margin dwelling birds on the margins of Waimea Inlet. The project will support local communities to take effective action to increase the area of safe habitat by restoring selected areas of the estuary margin and protect the birds by trapping predators.

The Banded Rail, moho pereru, *Gallirallus phillippensis assimilis*, were once commonly seen on the margins of the Waimea Inlet. Over the years habitat has been lost due to horticulture, housing development, modification of the estuary margins with road, walking and cycle track developments. Pests (mustelids and rats) and domestic pets have also had an impact and the numbers of these shy birds have reduced dramatically. They are now classed by Department of Conservation as at risk/ declining.



Figure 1: Banded Rail The only areas in the South Island where Banded Rail can be found are in Nelson and Marlborough. The distribution of Banded Rail in the Nelson area was assessed in 1980 and then again in Dec 1982. (Graeme Elliot; *Notornis* 36: (1989)). The areas of Nelson/Tasman where Banded Rails and Marsh Crakes were found in this study are shown in the Figure 2 below.

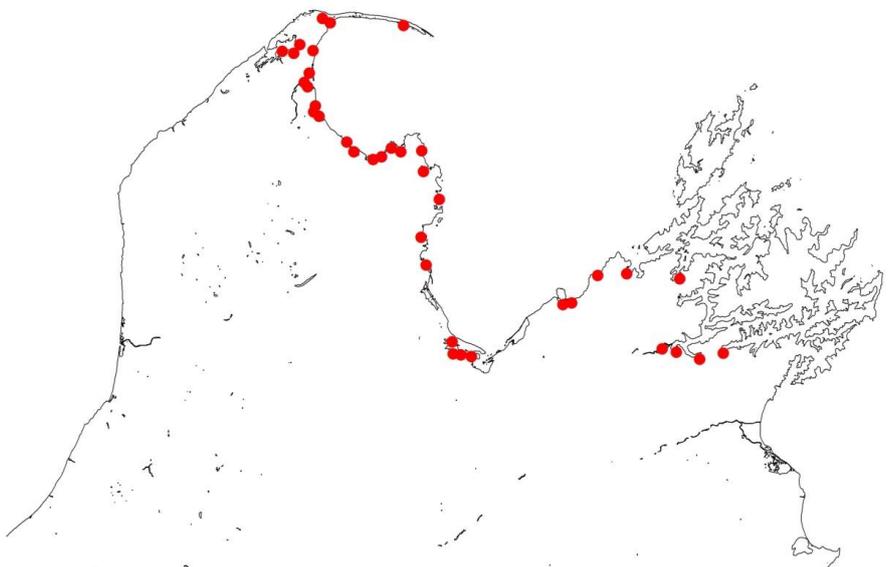


Figure 2: Areas in which Banded Rail were observed (Dec 1982)

Graeme notes that it is very difficult to observe these shy and secretive birds and for that reason we have chosen not to try to assess current numbers or distribution of the birds. The project will instead develop an easy way for members of the public to report on sightings of the birds as a means of confirming the habitat restoration and protection of the birds is resulting in the desired results.

Banded rails are reluctant but strong fliers that can travel considerable distances, mainly at night. (nzbirdsonline.org.nz) Although the birds may have disappeared from some sites, it is hoped that the restoration of vegetation and control of pests in these habitats will result in an increase in bird numbers and the return to those areas in which they previously were found.

The vegetation in the area in which Banded Rail are found show a transition from scrub above the level of high water spring tides, through zones dominated by the rushes *Juncus maritimus* (wiki) and *Leptocarpus similis* (oioi), to mudflat below the level of low water neap tides. The ideal vegetation sequence for Banded Rail habitat has saltmarsh and rushes, then scrub with Coastal Ribbonwood (*Plagianthus divaricatus*), Manuka and other native shrubs with forest trees e.g. Kahikatea, further inland.

Surveys of Banded Rail report that the birds are only found in salt marshes with a regular freshwater supply and with the small estuarine snail *Potomopyrgus estuarinus*, an important element in the birds' winter diet.

The project will identify suitable areas in which the vegetation sequence of saltmarsh/rushes and scrub can be re-established and work with land owners to restore the estuary margin with appropriate eco-sourced species. Priority areas will be those in which the snail is found. In some situations it may be possible to plan to re-establish forest trees at a later stage.



Figure 3: Commencing planting on estuary margin



Figure 4: Vegetation sequence from salt marsh to forest on Waimea Inlet

There has been extensive trapping done in selected areas around the Waimea Inlet over recent years to reduce the number of predators of Banded Rail and other birds. The project will coordinate with the current trapping initiatives of members of the Ornithological Society, local conservation groups and private landowners to increase the area around the estuary being trapped and the number of people working regularly and effectively to monitor the traps.

Trapping and restoration planting managed by local communities will increase the chance that local communities will take responsibility for rare bird survival.

Project Management

It is proposed to form a Project Community Action Group to plan and manage the work to for pest control and restoration of Banded Rail habitat. An important task for this group will be creating greater awareness of the plight of the Banded Rail and activating locals and other enthusiasts to participate in trapping, weed control and planting activities.

Monitoring and reporting on the results of trapping and eventually of the growth in the numbers of Banded Rail will further increase local interest and participation in the projects.

Project Community Action Group

supports actions that protect and improve habitat for Banded Rail

Project Manager + Community Activation Group

Plan & prioritise activities	Make traps, plants and other resources available
Coordinate and liaise with projects	Provide links with expert support
Provide information to communities	Schedule planting days and workshops
Allocate funding/resources	Report on project outcomes

The Project Community Action Group and those undertaking planting and trapping initiatives will be supported by an Expert Advisory Group. There is a lot of experience already available through individuals who have been trapping and monitoring bird life on Waimea Inlet for many years. Similarly, there are a significant number of restoration planting projects around the Inlet and individuals who are associated with these projects keen to share their experience and knowledge. It will however be important to ensure that the Expert Advice is available to those who are undertaking the projects to avoid the risk of well-intentioned but ill-informed advice being acted on.

Expert Advisory Group

provides expert advice & information as requested

**Dept of Conservation, Tasman District Council, Ornithological Soc,
Tasman Environmental Trust, Waimea Inlet Forum & other voluntary groups**

Bird habitat improvement Trapping Restoration planting
Weed control Stream care Community empowerment
Prioritising, monitoring and evaluation