

Brad Windust and Jo Sim

CONSERVATION DOG HANDLERS

Conservation Dogs are highly trained dogs used by the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) to find unwanted pests and protected native species.

We asked Brad and Jo, Conservation Dog handlers, your questions:

Q: How do you train your dogs? Do you kill the cats and stoats, or just find them?

BRAD: It takes a lot of training to pass the test to be a conservation dog. Wero loves to play ball, so when he finds stoat or cat smell or scat (poo), he drops to the ground to tell me. That's when I give him his ball as a reward for his hard work. Wero's job is just to find cats and stoats, then expert trappers come in and trap them. He always wears a muzzle so he can't harm anything. Even though he's highly trained, it's extra safety.



Wero indicating he's found something.



Brad Windust works with **Wero**, who detects stoats and cat scat (poo).



Q: Why does your dog track cats and stoats?

BRAD: Stoats and cats kill lots of our native wildlife like kiwi chicks, bats, and geckos. When they get into special pest-free areas, they're very tricky to catch. That's why Wero gets called in to help with his amazing nose. He can sniff them out!



Ātaahua!

Q: Who do you work with/ where do you work?

BRAD: We get to work in the most beautiful places in the world. For example, all around Aotearoa, there are lots of pest-free islands. We need to go and check to make sure no cats or stoats have got onto them.

Q: What is the best thing about being a conservation dog handler?

BRAD: It's a dream job working with my best mate. We wander through the wilderness on remote islands and fenced sanctuary sites that are exploding with native wildlife, just like it used to be before pests arrived.



Q: Why do your dogs track native birds?

JO: To help understand where they are so they can be monitored. For example, kiwi are tracked by the dogs and caught by me, then a transmitter is attached so that their movements and breeding success can be checked. Sometimes we find penguins so people can then protect them with trapping.



The dogs with a DOC Ranger reading band on a TITI sooty shearwater.

Q: How do you train your dogs?

JO: Basic obedience first, simple but good. Then I train them while on a long lead to find a bag of feathers for me that I have hidden so they learn to indicate (signal) but not touch the feathers. They get to learn with live birds when they pass their exams. The dog exams are tests set and certified by DOC.



Left: Together, Rua and Miro indicate a penguin burrow. Right: Rua is indicating a kiwi.



Q: What is the best thing about being a conservation dog handler?

JO: Getting to work with endangered species in beautiful places with my dogs!

Jo Sim works with dogs **Maddie**, **Rua**, and **Miro**. They mostly detect penguins and kiwi but find other seabirds too.



Ready to sniff some pingus!

Q: Who do you work with/ where do you work?

JO: I work with a huge variety of people and organisations. Community groups who are trapping, sanctuary groups – such as Tāwharanui, Zealandia, and Maungatautari – councils, and DOC.

Q: How do you call your dog back when it has gone too far?

JO: I use a whistle that I know they can hear. This works well in the forest when I can't see them. It also means that I don't have to yell at them!



Questions by **Osgar** (age 9) and **Bill** (age 10)