

Rooks (*corvus frugileus*)

Description

The rook has a glossy black plumage with a slightly purple sheen. On its forehead, a grayish white piece of skin extends from the base of the bill to the nostrils. This patch distinguishes the adult bird from immature birds, as it does not develop until the rook is at least 1-2 years old. The rook has several calls, the most common being a harsh "KAAH".



Rooks nest in rookeries, up to 150 nests for several hundred birds. Rookeries are often found in tall pines or eucalypts. In spring they lay 3 to 5 eggs in a large rough nest of twigs. The eggs hatch after 19 days and the young begin to fly one month after hatching. Normally only 1 or 2 survive in the nest each year.

What is the problem?

Rooks are generally insect eaters but can also target crops as alternative food sources when the soil becomes hard and it becomes difficult to extract their normal diet. Rooks eat and destroy newly sown cereals, ripening lentils, walnuts, acorns, pumpkin seeds and occasionally potatoes and fruit. They pull young pumpkins and maize plants from the ground in an attempt to obtain seeds.

Rooks will also rip up light soils by pulling out tufts of grass looking for soil invertebrates such as worms and grubs. This can create small cells of damaged groundcover that in light types can begin to erode. The pumice belts that run through Hawke Bay are particularly prone to erosion. Patches of up to half a hectare can be exposed over a period of time.

History

Rooks were introduced into New Zealand in the 1860s from Great Britain. Acclimatisation societies released them throughout New Zealand to control insect pests. The rook was a protected species until 1919. Today in Hawke's Bay, rooks are present in moderate numbers, mostly in the southern half of the region

What can landowners do?

Landowners must not attempt to control rooks themselves. Landowners suffering serious sustained rook damage should contact the regional council.

Rooks are easily disturbed, and can become very wary and bait shy. This makes control difficult and can lead to rookery fragmentation, which results in birds colonising new areas. Farmers can use various methods to protect their crops from rook damage:

- Scarecrows
- Crucified dead rooks
- Repellent on seeds
- Gas operated bangers
- Brightly coloured objects and polythene strips tied to fences
- Alternating sowing dates – crops maturing earlier or later than the majority attract more damage.

How can the Regional Council help?

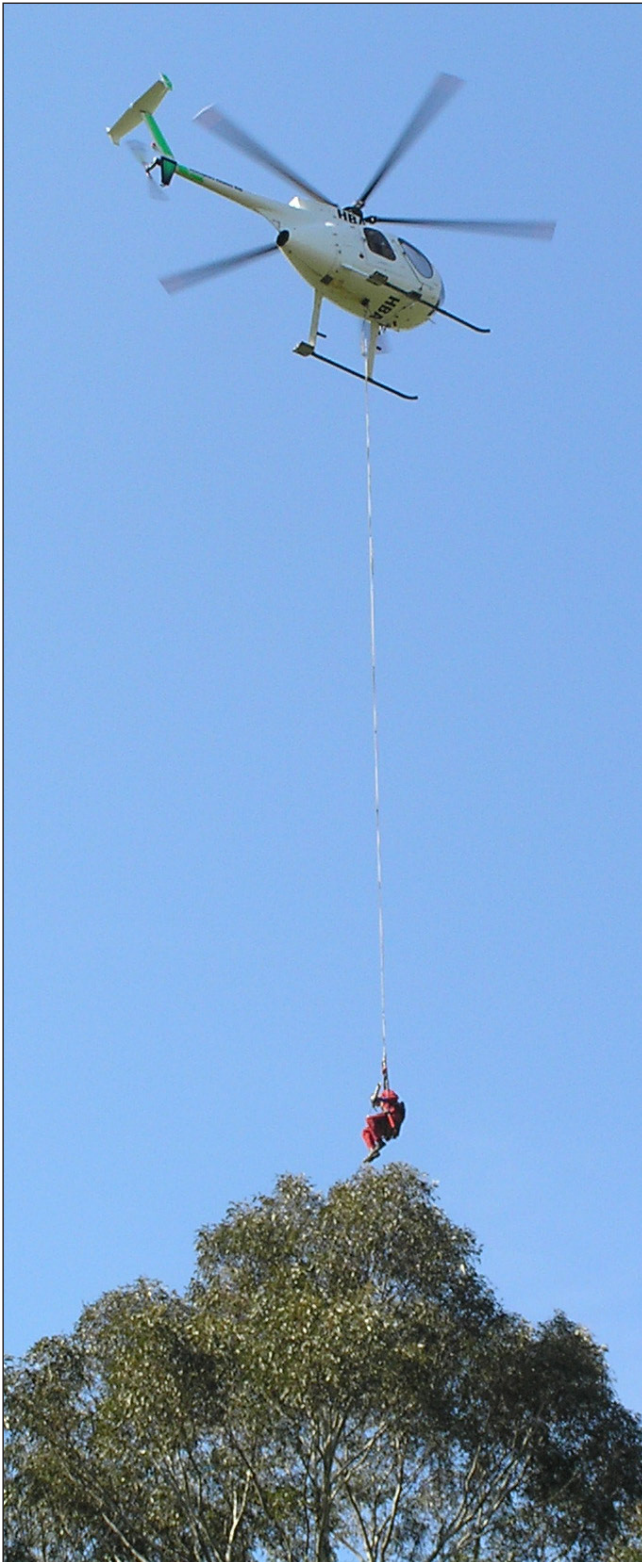
The Regional Council has divided the region into two management areas for rook control. The goal for the northern management area is to eradicate rooks, while the southern zone's goal is to reduce rook numbers.

Hawke's Bay Regional Council uses DRC 1339 poison to control rooks. This toxin is a controlled pesticide specifically used for bird control. Rooks are highly susceptible to this toxin while most other bird species have an increased resistance to it. Under normal conditions DRC 1339 is not dangerous to sheep, cows, dogs or other mammals.

The Regional Council provides two main forms of rook control - aerial and ground control.

Aerial control

The Council conducts aerial control over all known rookeries across the region annually. It is an effective technique targeting the nest directly. A licensed operator is suspended from a helicopter on a strop. The pilot guides that person to the nest to be hand baited with DRC 1339 in a gel paste form. The birds ingest the poison when preening their feathers when they return to the nest.



Ground control

If rooks are found to be feeding in large numbers in a regular spot, the Regional Council may carry out ground control. Ground control is carried out by licensed operator that pre-feeds the birds with a battered bread bait. Once rooks start feeding on the 'line', the contractor then replaces the pre-feed with bread that is laced with DRC 1339 toxin.

The Council also has a limited supply of dead rooks that can be given to landowners to stake out in paddocks or hang on fences near food sources to act as a deterrent to other rooks.

Rules: Rooks (*Corvus frugileus*)

1. All land occupiers that have rooks nesting on their land shall take reasonable steps to ensure that no action is taken, other than by an authorised person pursuant to this strategy, to disturb the birds in their rookeries. A breach of this rule is an offence under section 154 of the Biosecurity Act 1993
2. No person may move or interfere with any article or substance left at a place by an authorised person pursuant to this strategy for the purpose of:
 - Confirming the presence, former presence or absence of rooks; or
 - Managing or eradicating rooks;

Other than in accordance with the direction or under the supervision of an authorized person.

A breach of this rule is an offence under the Biosecurity Act 1993 section 154.

How can I help?

You can help by advising the Regional Council 0800 108 838 where rooks are, especially when they are nesting (September - November). Where there are large (60+) groups (a parliament) of rooks in newly sown crops or paddocks, contact the regional council as they may send out a contractor to conduct ground control.

For further information please contact the Biosecurity Animal Pest Officers at the Hawke's Bay Regional Council.

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Toll Free	0800 108 838
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Website	www.hbrc.govt.nz