

## WEKA LIBERATIONS IN THE PALLISER BAY REGION

By L. T. PRACY

N.Z. Forest Service, Wellington

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By courtesy of the Wildlife Service, Department of Internal Affairs, a number of wekas (*Gallirallus australis greyi*) from Poverty Bay have been released in Forest Service study areas. Two liberations were made in 1958 into mixed forest habitats up the Pararaki River, Aorangi Range and at the Orongorongo Research Station, Rimutaka Range. Both were unsuccessful. The reasons for failure may be related to the low numbers released (13), to climatic differences and to the birds' inability to adapt to a forest environment and its different food resources. Predators may also have been influential in preventing establishment, particularly at the Orongorongo site, but in the Aorangi Range, stoats, cats and rats are in extremely low numbers and would in no way compare with numbers in Poverty Bay.

With the approval of interested property owners, subsequent liberations were made onto pastoral lands containing adequate cover and water. The programme entailed the release of 40 birds at Whatarangi (December, 1966) followed by the release of a similar number near the Matakitaki Stream, Cape Palliser (February, 1968) with further liberations being made at later dates in the interjacent catchments.

To date, four liberations have been made (Figure 1) with an additional eight birds released at Whatarangi to support known establishment. It is intended to liberate a further 40 birds up the Pararaki River in 1970. Upon the completion of the major liberations, supporting numbers of birds will be released at sites where establishment has occurred.

Dispersion from liberation sites has been limited and personal communication with interested observers reveals that only two birds have been known to disperse any distance. This occurred from the main Whatarangi site shortly after release, the birds in question being recorded in the Whangaimoana Stream five miles away to the north-west.

Both the Whatarangi and Matakitaki liberations appear successful, chicks and nests being found in both areas. A clutch size of two eggs has been recorded from two nests. Observation and recording of the establishment and dispersion of these birds will be continued. Many thanks are due to interested residents and bach owners for the welfare of the birds and for information on their movements.

