

From: 7(2)(a)
To: customerservices@orc.govt.nz
Subject: Official information act request
Date: Wednesday, 23 September 2026 9:20:49 am

23 September 2026

Kia Ora,

I am writing about the Information on rooks you share with the public through your website, specifically the following claims, including their potential impact on native nesting birds;

"These intelligent birds can form large flocks (called parliaments) and have the potential to inflict massive damage to Otago's crops, pastures, invertebrate communities, and even native nesting birds. Rooks are attracted to recently cultivated paddocks and will feed on newly sown crops, causing significant damage. Rooks can also have negative impacts on soil invertebrate communities and native birds, which rely on these as a food source."

<https://www.orc.govt.nz/environment/biosecurity-and-pests/animal-pests/rooks-r>

Please supply the following information under the [Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) / Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA)]:

Primary sources of evidence Council relied on for these claims.

Citations to published studies, survey data, incident reports, or other primary evidence, rather than secondary summaries.

If the statements were taken from another agency or pest-factsheet, please say which one.

I ask because I have not been able to find New Zealand evidence that supports these claims. I would like to understand the basis for the wording on a public Council page.

If you cannot cite primary New Zealand evidence, I request that the statements be corrected or qualified.

Nga Mihi

7(2)(a)

EMAIL – 6 October 2026

LGOIMA SR.40901 - Pest management - Rooks - Decision

Kia ora 7(2)(a)

Your official information request received by us 23 September 2026 for the following information relating to Rooks, has been granted. You requested:

1. Primary sources of evidence Council relied on for the published claims.
2. Citations to published studies, survey data, incident reports, or other primary evidence, rather than secondary summaries.
3. If the statements were taken from another agency or pest-factsheet, confirmation of which agency/factsheet.

The information you have requested is attached.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Proactive Release

Council has published this LGOIMA

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact us by return email.

Kā mihi,

7(2)(a)



Legal

legal@orc.govt.nz



Important notice

This email contains information which is confidential and may be subject to legal privilege. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not peruse, use, disseminate, distribute or copy this email or attachments. If you have received this in error, please notify us immediately by return email or telephone (03 474-0827) and delete this email. The Otago Regional Council accepts no responsibility for changes made to this email or to any attachments following the original transmission from its offices. Thank you.

LGOIMA SR.40901 Release – Pest management – Rooks

1. Primary sources of evidence Council relied on for the published claims:

- a. **These birds... have the potential to inflict massive damage to Otago's crops, pastures, invertebrate communities, and even native nesting birds.**

Crops & pastures

Purchas (1980) documented feeding by rooks on newly sown maize and barley, as well as ripening peas and broad beans, and identified maize as particularly vulnerable to damage because seeds are readily located and removed from planted rows. Rooks can cause significant damage to emerging maize, pumpkin and potato crops, as well as walnut orchards, and may damage pasture while searching for grubs by pulling up vegetation and exposing bare soil (Flynn 1979). Rook feeding on agricultural crops caused substantial economic losses, prompting large-scale control programmes. Estimated crop losses reached approximately \$98,000 in 1968-69 and \$154,000 in 1969-70 (Flynn 1979).

Overseas studies have shown that rooks can cause agricultural damage by feeding on newly sown cereals and other crops, particularly through the removal of newly sown seed and damage to developing crops, although the severity of impacts varies with crop type, food availability, and local population dynamics (Dunnet & Patterson 1968).

Invertebrate communities

Rooks consume large quantities of pasture invertebrates and may locally reduce the abundance of indigenous invertebrate species through predation, although published New Zealand studies have not quantified population-level effects on native invertebrate communities.

Purchas (1980) found rooks spent at least 40% of feeding time, and up to 75-80% in spring, feeding on invertebrates. They recorded predation on earthworms, grass grubs, beetles, flies, moths, spiders and other invertebrates.

Native nesting bird

While it is theoretically possible that rooks could compete with native birds for habitat or food resources, I have not located published New Zealand evidence demonstrating adverse effects on native nesting bird populations, reproductive success, or nest-site availability.

Overseas sources describe rooks as opportunistic omnivores that may occasionally consume bird eggs and small birds, although these prey items are not generally considered major components of the species' diet (Lever 2005).

b. Rooks are attracted to recently cultivated paddocks and will feed on newly sown crops, causing significant damage

Rooks are strongly attracted to recently cultivated paddocks and newly sown crops because these areas provide easy access to both exposed seed and soil invertebrates. New Zealand studies in Hawke's Bay found that rooks regularly fed on newly sown maize and barley, as well as ripening peas and broad beans, with newly sown maize being particularly vulnerable because the large seeds are easy to locate and remove from planted rows. Rooks may also pull out emerging seedlings while extracting the seed, resulting in direct crop losses and reduced plant establishment. The agricultural impacts of rook feeding were sufficiently severe in some parts of Hawke's Bay during the 1960s and 1970s to justify large-scale control programme with crop losses estimated at tens of thousands of dollars annually. Overseas studies have reported similar behaviour, finding that rooks can remove newly sown grain and damage developing crops while foraging in cultivated fields.

c. Rooks can also have negative impacts on soil invertebrate communities and native birds, which rely on these as a food source.

Rooks are major predators of soil and pasture invertebrates and spend a substantial proportion of their feeding time foraging for organisms such as earthworms, grass grub larvae (*Costelytra zealandica*), beetles, fly larvae and caterpillars. Studies from Hawke's Bay found that invertebrates comprised the majority of the rook diet for much of the year, with birds spending up to 75-80% of their feeding time consuming invertebrate prey. Through this intensive foraging, rooks have the potential to influence local soil invertebrate communities, although published New Zealand studies have not quantified population-level impacts on indigenous invertebrates. Porter et al. later noted that the only identified effect of rooks on New Zealand native fauna was their consumption of indigenous pasture invertebrates.

Published New Zealand studies have not identified rooks as having significant detrimental effects on native bird species. Research in Hawke's Bay concluded there was "no indication of rooks having any detrimental effects on New Zealand's native fauna" apart from the consumption of some indigenous pasture invertebrates (Porter et al. 2008). Rook impacts documented in New Zealand have primarily related to agricultural crops, pasture disturbance, and predation on invertebrate prey rather than native birds.

Conclusion

Council considers that the available evidence provides strong support for the conclusion that rooks can have significant impacts on agricultural production, particularly through damage to newly sown crops, disturbance of pasture, and predation on soil invertebrates. These impacts are well documented in New Zealand research and have historically been of sufficient concern to justify coordinated control programmes.

In contrast, the evidence for impacts on native bird populations is limited. While overseas literature indicates that rooks may occasionally consume bird eggs or small birds, Council has not identified published New Zealand studies demonstrating adverse effects on native nesting bird populations, reproductive success, or nest-site availability. Similarly, while rooks consume indigenous invertebrates and may locally influence invertebrate communities, the extent of any population-level effects on native species has not been quantified in New Zealand.

Accordingly, Council considers that the published evidence supports statements regarding agricultural impacts and predation on invertebrates, while the evidence relating to impacts on native birds is less certain and should be characterised as a potential rather than a demonstrated impact. Council will review the wording of the webpage to ensure that documented impacts, potential impacts, and areas of scientific uncertainty are clearly distinguished.

Notwithstanding these distinctions, the current management of rooks remains consistent with longstanding national and regional efforts to eradicate the species from New Zealand. This approach reflects the historical evidence of agricultural impacts and aligns with the management objectives adopted by regional councils and other agencies involved in rook eradication programmes.

2. Citations to published studies, survey data, incident reports, or other primary evidence, rather than secondary summaries.

The studies cited above include:

- Dunnet & Patterson (1968), "The Rook Problem in North-East Scotland"
- Flynn DV 1979. APDC takes over rook control. *Counterpest* 2: 8-9.
- Lever (2005), *Naturalized Birds of the World* (cited in the Global Invasive Species Database account), which notes that rooks may take bird eggs and small birds.
- Porter, R.E.R., Clapperton, B.K., & Coleman, J.D. (2008). *Distribution, abundance and control of the rook (Corvus frugilegus L.) in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand, 1969-2006*. *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, 38(1), 25-36.
- Purchas (1980), "Feeding ecology of rooks on the Heretaunga Plains, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand"

ORC also holds survey data of historical rookeries where targeted surveillance carried out each spring.

3. If the statements were taken from another agency or pest-factsheet, confirmation of which agency/factsheet.

To the best of Council's knowledge, no published statement was taken from another agency or factsheet.