

Last of the species?

Scientist E. O. Wilson once called insects “the Little things that run the world”. Unfortunately, because they’re small and hard to see, it can be hard to tell how they’re doing. But thanks to some long term studies overseas, it is clear that insects, like other animals, are also vulnerable to habitat loss and invasive predators. More than 1000 invertebrates (insects, spiders etc.) are listed as threatened or at risk in New Zealand. However, for many of our native insects, we don’t know enough about them to know whether they’re at risk or not.

REDUCED but still common



Red Admiral
Vanessa gonerilla

A lot of native insects evolved to live on native plants. Species like the red admiral butterfly (*Vanessa gonerilla*) depend on the native stinging nettle ongaonga (*Urtica ferox*). Unfortunately, the native stinging nettle isn’t very popular in cities because of its poisonous sting. Because of this, it is very rare to see admiral butterflies in urban areas. Another possible explanation for the decreased numbers of kahukura is the arrival of parasitic wasps (*Pteromalus puparum* and *Echthromorpha intricatoria*) that prey on this species.

Canterbury Knobbed Weevil

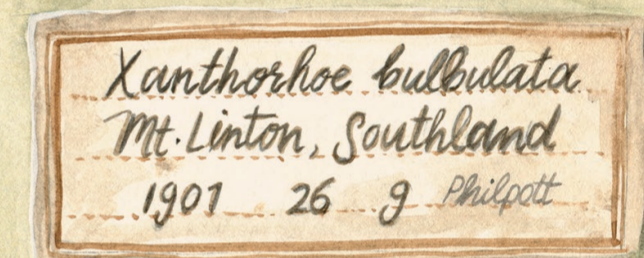
Hadramphus tuberculatus

The Canterbury Knobbed Weevil (*Hadramphus tuberculatus*) was thought to be extinct until 2004 when a small population of fewer than 100 weevils was found in a patch of golden speargrass. These weevils unfortunately only feed on this kind of grass which makes them very vulnerable.



ENDANGERED

EXTINCT



Carpet Moth
Xanthorhoe bulbulata

The carpet moth (*Xanthorhoe bulbulata*). This moth used to be very common throughout central Otago but rapidly started to disappear after the 1930s with 1991 being the last time anyone saw one. Loss of habitat and key food species was probably the reason for its decline. The moth was finally declared extinct in 2016.

