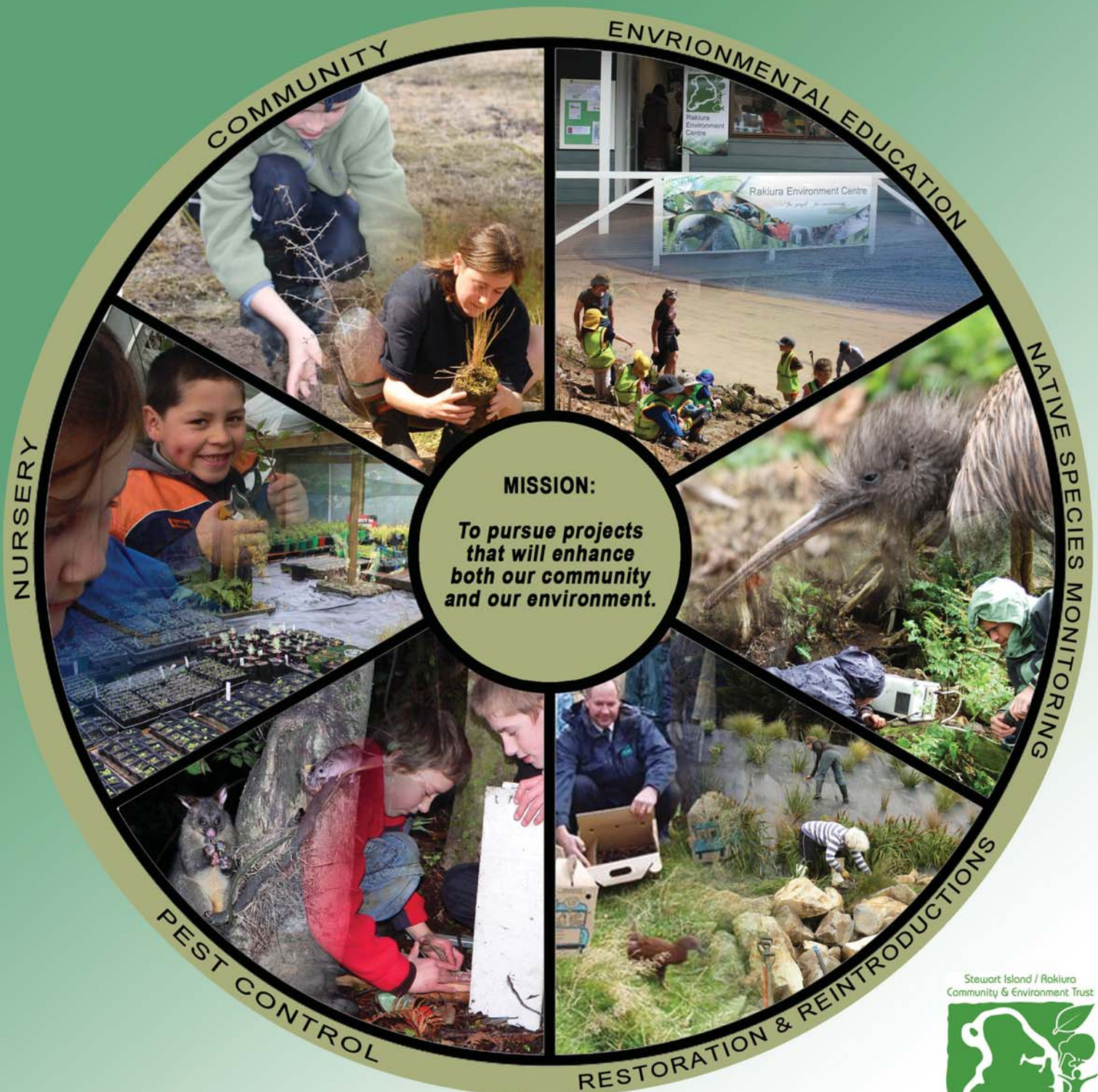


SIRCET news

www.sircet.org.nz

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS!



Stewart Island / Rakiura
Community & Environment Trust



Grass Roots – Who is SIRCET?

The Stewart Island/ Rakiura Community and Environment Trust (SIRCET), a non-profit organisation, was founded on the 6th March 2003 to promote projects that benefit the community and its environment around the settled parts of Stewart Island/ Rakiura. Initially the main focus of the Trust was waste management in the form of a project called Rakiura Resource Recovery.

With the local council developing that concept into a waste management system for Stewart Island, the focus for SIRCET changed towards ecological restoration. Our Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project (HMBHRP) aims to create an open sanctuary in our backyard. This project started as a result of locals becoming concerned about the number of sooty shearwater/tītī and little blue penguin deaths at Ackers Point. Volunteers started to carry out predator control in the area, and with the support of landowners, the project

Stewart Island / Rakiura
Community & Environment Trust



for people for environment

has grown to protect 210 hectares from Ackers Point to Golden Bay Road.

SIRCET is able to carry out its work through the hard work of volunteers, and with sponsorship from the community, visitors and local businesses, DOC, Environment Southland, and the generous support of a wide range of funders.

Humble Beginnings - Resource Recovery

The need for resource recovery on Stewart Island came about because the resource consent for the landfill at Bragg's Bay was due to expire at the end of 2003.

In an effort to adopt a community-based approach to management of our own waste, local residents formed the Waste Liaison Group, superseded by SIRCET, to liaise with the Southland District Council to form a Resource Recovery and Recycling Centre on Stewart Island.

A huge amount of work was done (mainly with volunteer effort from community members, and with support from the Community Employment Group Southland) towards the creation of a new waste management system based on recycling, worm farming and composting as much of the community's refuse as possible.

The Trust eventually decided to bow out of the tendering process for the final contract, but was very pleased to see it awarded to a locally based company, and to see resource recovery initiated on the island. SIRCET continued to provide advocacy and education on resource recovery through its Rakiura Environment Centre.

PLAN OF ATTACK - PEST CONTROL

The Trust's trapping operation was initiated in October 2003, with a workday to cut lines and set up possum traps. Over the last ten years the project area has grown to cover 210 ha and SIRCET has trapped a whopping 10,000 rats, 430 possums, and more than 30 feral cats in the project area. At least a dozen deer have also been removed by volunteers and local land owners.

RATS

Control of the island's three rat species (Ship (the most abundant), Kiore and Norway) started with traps protecting a 20ha area around the vulnerable tītī and penguin colonies at Ackers Point.

With the injection of significant funding, traps lines were rapidly added and by 2007 lines of Victor rat traps covered from the tip of Ackers peninsula to the Golden Bay Road. Monitoring tunnels were set up inside the project area in 2008 and then at a control site, Ryan's Creek, in 2012 to provide comparison – monitoring since has seen rat numbers consistently lower in the protected area.

Rat plagues do however continue to be a problem and in 2008-09 a Contingency Plan was developed. Cholecalciferol strikers used the following year were extremely effective at knocking the rat (and possum) numbers back. Since then we



have been relying on intensive trapping and recently the trust has purchased over 50 Goodnature self-resetting rat traps which will save our pest manager's and volunteer's valuable time.

FERAL CATS

On average, we have caught three feral cats per year since 2003 – this control is core to the success of the tītī colony and penguin breeding at Ackers Point. With pet cats living in the project area we restrict ourselves to using live capture cage traps that are checked daily.

New Havahart traps have been acquired and we look forward to a sustained feral cat control program.



DEER CONTROL

With the impact of deer on forest regeneration well known, SIRCET have been keen to add deer to the list of pests we target in the project area. To date deer control has not been formalised with hunting being conducted by locals on a sporadic basis. More recently a deer pen

has been used in the area with good results. SIRCET are excited to have a draft Deer Control Plan that will be released in March for community consultation with the finished plan ready for operation next financial year.

PEST FREE RAKIURA SCOPING STUDY

In 2007 SIRCET secured funding to investigate the possibility of making Stewart Island/ Rakiura free of rats, wild cats and possums. The resulting feasibility study found that such pest eradication

was possible however there are many technical and social issues to be addressed. The decision on whether to pursue it belongs to the community.

WEEDS

Since the inception of the HMBHRP in 2003, SIRCET has undertaken several activities with the aim to raise awareness about weeds on Stewart Island and to help in their control including volunteer weed registers, community education programs, ongoing weed surveys at Lonneker's Beach and, research and monitoring in collaboration with the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic.

In 2012 the trust began a five-year weed control program at Ackers Point, starting



with a survey of the project area and writing of an Operational Plan.

POSSUMS

Possum control has been undertaken using Warrior traps attached to trees. Control effort has been sporadic and sustained control has not occurred. However it appears that the effort has been sufficient to maintain low populations according to the monitoring that is undertaken by local DOC staff.

Over the last year our Pest Manager has made a concerted effort to revamp the old traps to keep the pressure on the possum population. With the inclusion of 20 new Goodnature self-resetting possum traps spread over the project area, we are looking forward to continued low possum numbers.



LOOKING FORWARD

SIRCET initiated a review of our pest trapping and monitoring program at the end of last year and DOC kindly offered the time of Phil Tisch to come and professionally review our current set up. Results are due soon and will give us some direction to work towards.

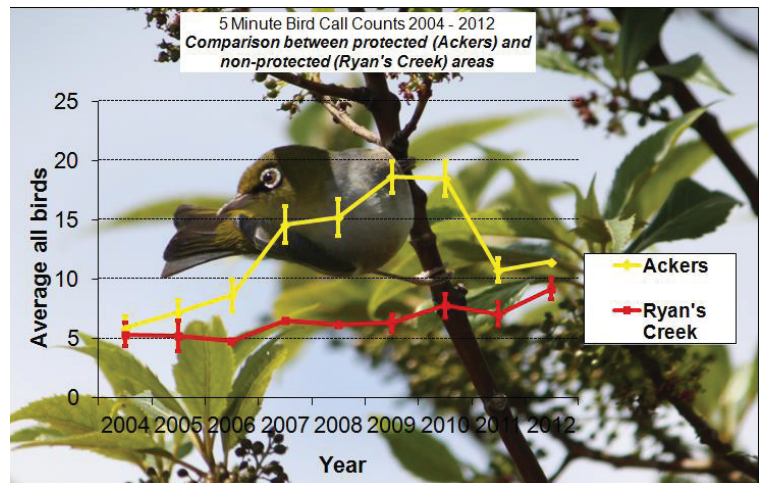
OUTCOME (*Native Species*) MONITORING

Sustained control of Stewart Island's animal pests over the last ten years, primarily through trapping, has resulted in an overall increase in the health of the forest and the number of native birds present around Halfmoon Bay.

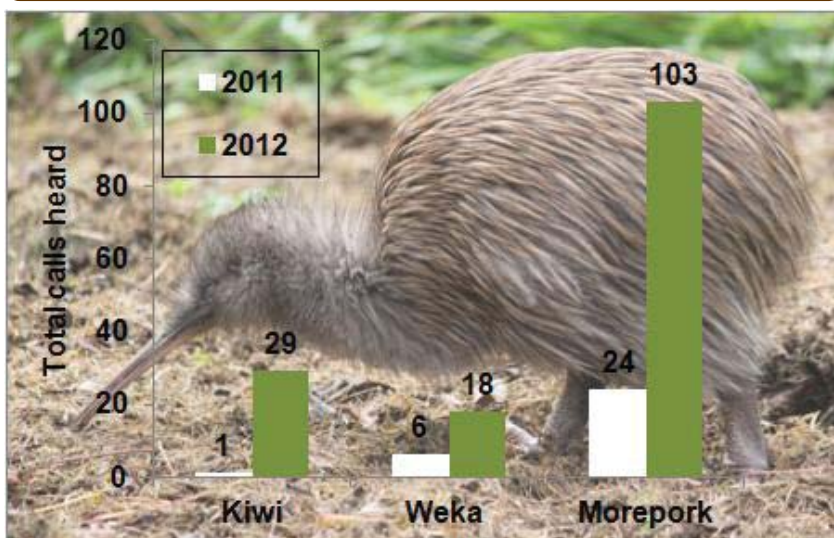
FOREST BIRDS

5 minute forest bird call counts, began by SIRCET in 2004 and carried out in April each year, were the first monitoring of the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project's success.

The counts measure changes over time in the populations of native bird species both within the project area (Ackers Point) and in a non-treatment area (Ryan's Creek). Since monitoring began, a significant increase in the total number of birds in the project area, compared to the control area has been recorded. While numbers have decreased in 2011 and 2012 this monitoring method is best at looking at gross levels of change over time and SIRCET look forward to future results of the counts.



KIWI, WEKA, MOREPORK/ RURU



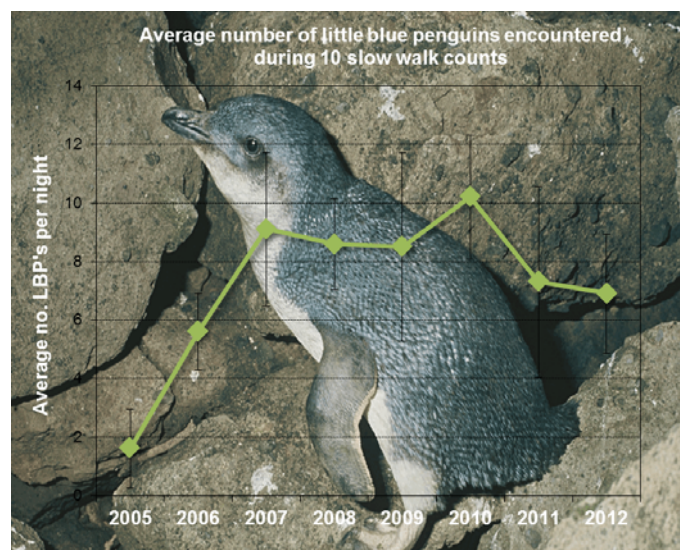
Kiwi, weka and ruru/ morepork are all monitored throughout the country by versions of call count schemes. As our newest monitoring program, initiated in 2011, SIRCET adopted a modified call count scheme to monitor all three of these species at once.

This simple population monitoring technique will provide an understanding of population health across years. Call counts are conducted both within the HMBHRP area and in 'control' sites where no pest trapping is undertaken. No meaningful conclusions can be drawn from our results at this early stage however they are contributing valuable information to the National Kiwi Recovery initiative, as well as Stewart Island's DOC database. The program is also providing a wonderful opportunity for volunteers to get involved and experience face-to-face encounters with these iconic Stewart Island birds.

LITTLE BLUE PENGUINS

Throughout New Zealand the population and range of the Little Blue Penguin has been declining in areas not protected from predation. Ackers Point is a popular attraction where Islanders and tourists go and watch the Little Blue Penguin (and Tīti) returning to their burrows. SIRCET has been undertaking monitoring of the Little Blue Penguin colony on Ackers Point since 2005.

Several different methods of monitoring have been trialed by SIRCET over the years, starting with 10 nest boxes placed in 2005. The artificial nests were never taken on by the penguins (believed to be due to the presence of other preferred habitat such as easily dug soil). Nest monitoring using a burrowscope camera was also trialed although this method proved very time consuming. In the end, the current method of 'slow walk counting' was shown to be the best use of time, and has been used since 2005. This monitoring method shows the bigger changes in this population over time (4-10 years), rather than the more fickle seasonal changes.

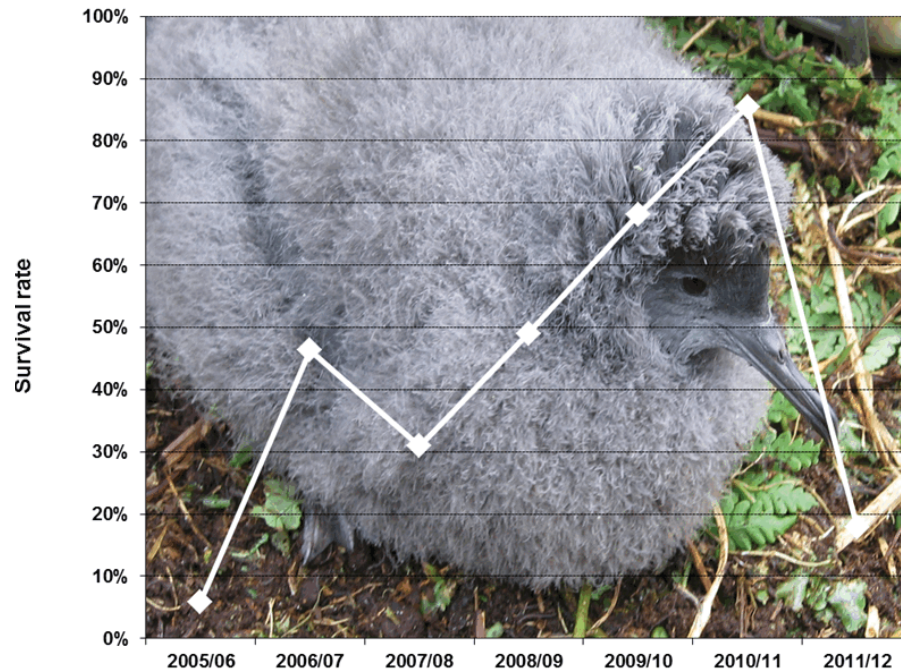


SOOTY SHEARWATER/TĪTĪ

Ackers Point is one of the few remaining mainland-breeding colonies of Sooty Shearwater/Tītī providing a unique opportunity for the public to observe this taonga species. Since 2003 SIRCET, with assistance from DOC and the University of Otago's Kia Mau Te Tītī Mo Ake Tōnu Atu (Keep the Tītī Forever) team, has been working to protect and monitor this population.

The aim of monitoring this colony is to gauge its response to the community pest control in the area and to determine whether this slow-breeding species will be able to recover on its own. Monitoring methods have included banding (ceased in April 2011), burrowscoping, and total burrow counts. Nesting success is our main measure of the survival of this colony. 2011-12's disappointing results may have been impacted by Japan's March 2011 tsunami and the consequent Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power-plant outfall and North Pacific food chain contamination. However, we are anxiously awaiting the results of the 2012-13 monitoring that is currently underway.

Ackers Point Tītī chick survival rate



Enhancing the colony by transferring chicks from elsewhere and hand-raising them on-site has been previously discussed and remains as an option open to the community.



VEGETATION MONITORING

Three vegetation monitoring programs are undertaken in the project area to provide an indication of the effectiveness of possum and rat control: seedling plots set up on Ackers Point by the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic during April 2004; mistletoe monitoring, which began in January 2006; and photo points, set up in 2005-06.

The seedling plot monitoring has shown an increase in the number and diversity of seedlings, and the mistletoe monitoring shows an increase in the size of mistletoe plants. The photo point monitoring program was designed as a long term program and so data collected in 2005-06 and 2011 will be analysed during the next round of monitoring, due to take place in 2016.



Stewart Island by Simon Stockdale

RESTORATION

Lonneker's Beach Revegetation Project

After the Southland District Council removed mature blue gum trees from a steep bank at Lonnekers Bay in 2009, SIRCET undertook to control weeds and replant the 0.125ha area with natives.

With plenty of help from the council and DOC, SIRCET staff and volunteers have transformed the site through various planting days and educational workshops. Plantings have expanded from the original site and now span the entire beach. Replanting of the final section is to be completed this year and with ongoing weeding and care, the backdrop to this beautiful beach will become more natural.



Harrold's Bay

In 2006-07 a Weed's Workshop was held at Harrold's Bay, gateway to Ackers Point, to clear the area of weeds such as thistle and gorse.

The Community Native Plant Nursery provided plants and volunteers planted them and built cages to prevent browsing. The area has been maintained since by volunteers giving the planted natives a chance to thrive.

Other restoration projects SIRCET have been involved with over the years include the Mill Creek and Lee Bay revegetation projects.



REINTRODUCTIONS

Stewart Island Robin

Just two years after the initial trapping program was set up, in April 2005, SIRCET released six Stewart Island Robins into the restoration area.

Another nine robins were released the following year however, in subsequent years, none of the reintroduced birds were able to be relocated. It's not known if the robins were predated or simply dispersed outside of the project area.



Stewart Island Weka

And in April 2005 the first of 75 Stewart Island Weka were also successfully reintroduced into the Harrold Bay and Leask Bay areas.

Some of the birds were fitted with transmitters allowing early monitoring, and in more recent years, the introduction of the new Kiwi, Weka, Morepork monitoring program has taken over this task. The weka seemed to have formed a healthy population in the Halfmoon Bay area.



Looking Forward...

Due to high rat numbers preventing the maintenance of a <10% rat density in the project area, as well as a reduction in staff resources, SIRCET's reintroduction plans for rifleman and brown creeper (planned for 2008) have been delayed for several years.

Planning for the translocation project is postponed to 2013/14. Our vision of enjoying "Saddleback/ Tieke in our backyards" remains a motivating target for the trust.





Nursery



The Stewart Island Community Native Plant Nursery began as a Darwin's Barberry control initiative by DOC and the Dancing Star Foundation, as a site to provide native alternatives to locals, as well as road side plantings and development sites, to plant in place of the removed weeds.

SIRCET's involvement began in 2008 with the utilisation of the site for a 'Women in Conservation' workshop. The trust's role at the nursery has steadily grown and today it is managed part-time by a SIRCET employee, Denise Hayes, who has tirelessly worked to implement its systems including site maintenance, composting, propagation, seed collection, plant identification, work mornings with local and international volunteers and a host of educational workshops.

The site is generously donated by the Dancing Star Foundation who, together with the Department of Conservation assists SIRCET with its nursery operations through a Memorandum of Understanding.

2,093 hours have been contributed at the nursery since May 2010, including contributions from SIRCET staff, local and visiting volunteers, school groups and DOC.

The Nursery stock currently boasts more than 3,860 plants with approximately 800 plants set aside for special projects such as the Lonnekers Beach Revegetation Project. Over 80 different native plant species are currently in stock.



Rakiura Environment Centre

Back in 2003 the trust decided an environment centre in the Halfmoon Bay township would provide an area where people could get information and advice on local environmental initiatives.

Glowing Sky offered the empty part of their shop (and generously continues to do so free of charge) and the trust was successful in its bid to the Ministry for Environment for funding to set up and run the centre. In October 2011 a complete overhaul of the centre was completed after two years of volunteer work and a further funding application to the Community Trust of Southland, and it now features bright new displays, updates, a TV screening local dvd's and information for visitors to get involved with volunteer and sponsorship programs.



Environmental Education

In addition to providing information through the Environment Centre, one of SIRCET's major objectives was, and remains, to 'educate and involve the community in conservation activities'.

Benefits sought included not only an increase in biodiversity, but also economic benefits such as employment opportunities and tourism growth. With the help of landowners, SIRCET's first community workshop was held in April 2005, titled 'Protecting Biodiversity in the Backyard'. The trust's first pamphlet was produced in 2008 and has been regularly updated. Through community consultation and a large amount of media coverage, a wide understanding of the trust's activities was achieved and many landowners outside the project area are trapping. Each and every year the number of hours contributed to the project by volunteers has grown impressively.

Today the community education program has grown to include an annual suite of activities including the production of the SIRCET News newsletter, weed and animal pest community workshops, and school group sessions hosted by SIRCET.



FUNDING

Our work could not occur without the funding and support of many organisations, businesses and individuals. We are hugely appreciative of your support and the names listed here are only a small number of those who contribute to making our backyards a better place.

Funders

Over the ten years several funders, both large and small have provided significant funding to enable the Trust to conduct its work. This funding has paid for: employing staff, purchasing a vehicle, computers, field electronics, traps, bait, nursery supplies, producing newsletters, upgrading the Environment Centre and much more.

- Biodiversity Condition and Advice Fund
- Community Trust of Southland
- Tindall Foundation
- WWF Habitat Protection Fund
- Ministry for the Environment, Environment Centre Fund
- Department of Internal Affairs, Community Internship Programme
- Environment Southland, Environmental Enhancement Fund
- Lotteries, Environment and Heritage Fund
- Department of Conservation, Southern Islands and Stewart Island
- Honda Tree Fund
- Kiwis for Kiwi (formally the BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust)
- Southland District Council, Community Initiatives Fund

Sponsorship and Donations

Our Sponsor-a-Hectare program has continued to grow with donations increasing every year. Many visitors to

Stewart Island leave a donation as thanks for the wonderful environment they have experienced.

Those that have been on-going or significant donors include: Real Journeys, The Stewart Island Pub Quiz/Vicky Coates, Forest and Bird Stewart Island Branch, Ulva's Guided Walks, Sails Ashore and Kowhai Lane, The Fernery, Bay Motels, Kaka Retreat, Rakiura Charters and Aurora Charters.

We have also had on-going support from the Southland District Council, with provision of graphic design and printing, NZPost Community Post, Ship to Shore, Glowing Sky and Stewart Island Flights.

Self-funding

We have struggled to find the time to devote to creating self-funding and it is still high on our priority list. Some of our initiatives are:

- A beautiful painting by Margaret Fairhall of a weka and chicks was developed into cards and these have been sold at various retail venues;
- The Trust sells rat traps that are the same as used in the project area: and
- For the last two years the Southland District Council has provided SIRCET with a donation in return for maintaining some of the gardens around the township.

The Future

A major new funder has been secured for the next three financial years (details to be announced by the funder soon) and in conjunction with two more years of a Community Trust of Southland grant, this leaves us in a secure financial position for the next two years. Sponsor-a-Hectare donations look set to exceed the amount raised in previous years and the Trust will also be working to develop a product to sell to be more self-funded.

AWARDS & MEDIA

Articles & Clips

Our local paper the Stewart Island News (SIN) has provided a wonderful medium utilised by the trust to update its readers on current projects; articles over the years have included species monitoring updates, invitations to events, and our Volunteer Voice to name a few.

Other articles released include several in the WWF Magazine and Project Crimson Newsletter, showcasing SIRCET and Stewart Island as an example of communities standing up to protect their local treasures. In 2007-08 SIRCET featured on radio and television clips with the joint production of DOC and TVNZ's Meet the Locals.

SIRCET News

The same year SDC and SIRCET grew their relationship to include the design of the SIRCET News newsletter, undertaken by SDC employees Donna Hawkins and Gloria Eno.



Awards

Year after year SIRCET's volunteers, contributors and supporters have deservedly been recognised for their contribution to Stewart Island's unique environment.

A few of the awards presented to SIRCET include two Environment Southland Environment Awards (2005 and 2007), and the 2012 Regional Winner Heritage & Environment TrustPower Powering Volunteers awards



Website

The trust's original website, developed in the first year of SIRCET's operation and sponsored by Glowing Sky, helped to form the basis of what would be one of our most useful tools to provide information to the public about the trust's objectives and activities.

It has been developed over the years and now features a volunteer voice, news and events, a photo gallery and information on how to get involved or make a donation.

