

SIRCET news

www.sircet.org.nz

April 2012



A word from Alina & Denise

April already and wow, what a summer we've had! And the new plantings at the Lonnekers Beach Revegetation site have noticed too! Jessi Nichols is our new Lonnekers Manager, and she's planning an exciting planting day for April 21, when we'll see some rare Stewart Island natives returned to the ground.

We also welcome Jessi and Di Morris to the team of Trustees this edition, both bring previous SIRCET experience to the table and we're thrilled to have them back!

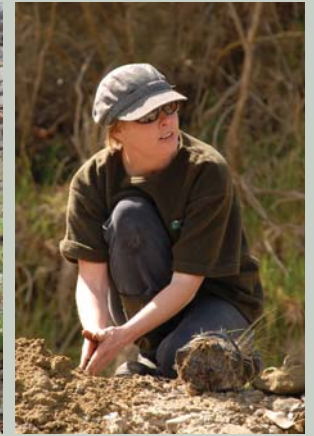
Check out our little blue penguin monitoring results – we're pleased to report a relatively stable population on the Ackers Peninsula. Thanks to this season's volunteers for helping out with the counts.

Like listening to lovely birds? Join our call count team for the 2012 Kiwi, Weka & Morepork monitoring. Grab a mate and a hot chocolate, and enjoy a calm few hours outdoors one evening to count their calls.

Rat numbers seem to finally be wearing thin thanks to some hard yakka by Denise and her Trapping Team. Our monitoring results are looking promising and we hope to prevent another winter



Alina



Denise

explosion this year.

On 2 February the planet celebrated the wonderful world of wetlands. Read about World Wetlands Day and the bog-tastic winners of this year's plant and bird of the year winners!

We hope you all enjoy reading our updates this edition, and as usual, if you have any comments, questions or bright ideas, get in touch!

Welcome back Di and Jessi

SIRCET would like to welcome back Di Morris and Jessi Nichols, who have recently joined the team to become our newest Trustees!

Di, who currently works with DOC, Stewart Island, and Jessi, who has just welcomed little Pippa into the world, are both ex Pest Control Managers of the trust.

Jessi has also recently taken on a new SIRCET position, coordinating the Lonnekers Beach and Town Gardens projects.

Welcome back to you both!



Jessi



Di and son Henry

SIRCET invites your ideas and feedback

Do you have any suggestions for improvement, require further information on joining SIRCET, or have an article of interest you would like to see featured...

Just give Alina or Denise a call on 03 2191 487 or e-mail us...

alina@sircet.org.nz or denise@sircet.org.nz

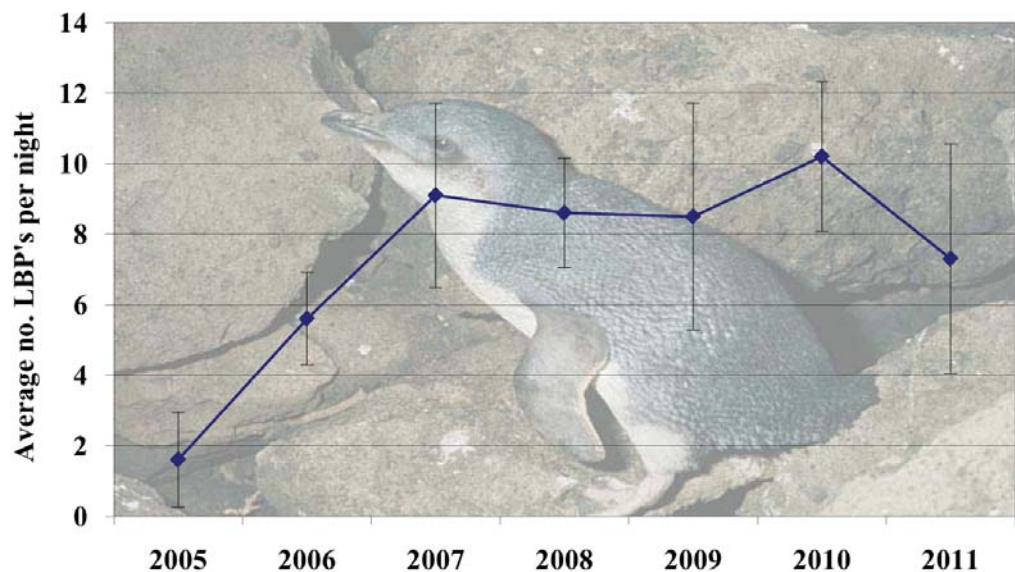
LITTLE BLUE PENGUIN RESULTS

Over the summer, Little Blue Penguins/ Korora are bringing food to their chicks on land at night

In December 2011, as every year since 2005, SIRCET spent 10 nights walking the track to Ackers Point counting these penguin parents.

This season an average of around 7 penguins were encountered each night. This is a reduction in numbers to pre-2007 levels, as depicted in the graph, however this monitoring technique does allow for variation from year to year, and it is the trend of changes over four to ten years and beyond that, that is of real significance. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped out this season!

Graph a) Average number of little blue penguins encountered during 10 slow walk counts



LONNEKERS UPDATE

Wow, what a difference 18 months makes!

The Lonnekers Beach Revegetation plantings are maturing well, with Sites 1 and 2 now well established.



Before



After

After contracting Jessi Nichols to take over the project, we're now looking forward to the next phase of plantings, including ground covers and bringing back some rarer Stewart Island natives.

UPCOMING WORKSHOP

Looking for something to do with the kids over the Easter break?

Jessi is organising a hands-on workshop on Saturday 21 April (10am – 1pm), so come on down to Lonnekers Beach to learn about planting to prevent weed growth and native plant alternatives for your garden. If you have some tools, bring them along.

Contact Jessi on jessi.nichols@xtra.co.nz or (03) 2191 291 for any questions.

WORLD Wetlands Day

In 1971 New Zealand joined other nations at a convention in Ramsar, Iran, to formulate plans for protecting the world's wetlands.

At that time the world's remaining wetlands were fast disappearing under an ever-increasing demand for agricultural land and industrial sites.

These changes were occurring at an alarming rate without recognition of the important roles wetland ecosystems play in providing freshwater and natural resources for use. The meeting resulted in the development of the Ramsar Convention for the Protection of Wetlands which is celebrated by World Wetlands Day, on 2nd February each year.

THE CONVENTION TODAY

Number of Contracting Parties: 160

Sites designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance: 2,005

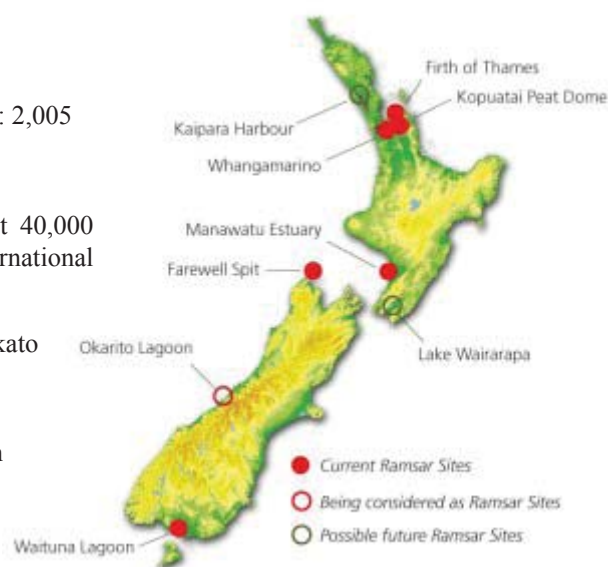
Total surface area of designated sites (hectares): 192,809,323

By 2006, New Zealand had established 6 sites, covering at least 40,000 hectares, designated under the Ramsar Convention as Wetlands of International Importance. They are:

- Waituna Lagoon, Southland
- Kopuatai Peat Dome, Waikato
- Farewell Spit, Nelson
- Firth of Thames, Waikato
- Whangamarino, Waikato
- Manawatu Estuary, Foxton

Image: NZ Ramsar sites

Image text: Source: www.wetlandtrust.org.nz



WHY PROTECT WETLANDS?

Over the years, most NZ wetlands have been turned into pasture or reclaimed for industrial use. Other wetlands have been modified by changes in water levels or polluted with effluent or high nutrient run-off.

Wetlands have also suffered from the introduction of aggressive pest plants and animals. As recently as the 1970s, wetlands were still officially listed in many regions as wasteland. By the beginning of the 1980s, nearly 90 percent of North Island and over 60 percent of the original wetlands in the South Island were irreversibly modified in some way.

In the process a number of wildlife species found nowhere else in the world disappeared. By protecting remaining wetlands we are helping to protect rare ecosystems, improving the health of our waterways and potentially improving our own health.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Wetlands are among the world's most productive environments. They are cradles of biological diversity, providing the water and primary productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival.

The Ramsar wetlands in NZ are major strong holds of a number of native species. For instance, the fernbird/mata is an endemic species whose range and abundance has reduced dramatically along with its habitat. Native freshwater fish, including several whitebait species, eels and native waterfowl also rely on the wetlands for survival.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Wetlands are vulnerable to invasion by pest fish and weeds because it is very hard to detect them until they are a problem. Once they have invaded a waterway and become pests it is then very difficult to remove them. To help control the spread:

- don't move fish and other water animals around or release them to new waters;
- don't collect aquatic plants from the wild or release weeds into the wild by emptying aquariums into waterways; wash your boats, trailers and fishing gear down carefully after use to prevent water weeds and fish eggs from hitching a ride.

Congratulations to New Zealand's 2011 Plant and Bird of the Year winners: both wetland locals!

Sources: www.ramsar.org, www.forestandbird.org.nz, www.doc.govt.nz



We love OUR WETLAND FLORA & FAUNA!

NZ'S FAVOURITE PLANT COMPETITION 2011

The annual vote to find New Zealand's favourite plant is over for 2011 and the conclusion is that everyone loves native plants!

The winning species, bamboo rush (*Sporadanthus ferrugineus*) highlights many of the issues surrounding our native plants and ecosystems. Relatively new to science, this handsome and impressively tall rush is now only found in the Waikato region because 95% of its wetland habitat has been destroyed.

The top ten ranked plants for 2011 range from lowly liverworts to the lofty kauri and include many rare and threatened species. Some old favourites returned, such as pohutakawa which has previously won the vote twice. Less well-known species also emerged, such as the gorgeous New Zealand calceolaria (*Jovellana sinclairii*) whose showy bell-like flowers mean it is often mistaken for an exotic.



Giant cane rush



Source: www.nzpcn.org.nz

2011 BIRD OF THE YEAR

The pukeko has won the crowning title of Bird of the Year in 2011

This birdy-come-lately arrived on our shores 1,000 years ago from Australia, and has since won over New Zealanders with its plucky attitude, fabulous blue-suit and mischievous charm. This bog-tastic bird makes its home in our wetlands – a habitat that has shrunk in recent years due to drainage for farms, and other such developments.

So a big round of applause please for our blue-suited battler – the pukeko, our critically endangered kakapo for securing second place and a surprise bronze medallist the hihi.

Congratulations!



Pukeko

Source: Forest & Bird





CALLING ALL BIRD LOVERS!

SIRCET is once again heading out into the night to begin the 2nd season of Kiwi, Weka and Ruru (Morepork) monitoring to gather information on the population health of these beautiful bird species in Halfmoon Bay.

This is the first project of its kind in the Bay, and we are now seeking volunteers to assist in carrying out the bird call counts through the month of April/May.

If you would like to join us for an evening or two, monitoring involves a short training session, setting out before sunset on a calm, fine evening, either on your own or with a team, making yourself comfortable at one of the monitoring sites located around the village, and recording the calls of these three species you hear within a two hour period (~6-8pm).

Contact Alina for further information.



RAT EXPLOSION COMING TO AN END

After a winter of seemingly unchallenged reign, Halfmoon Bay's rat boom may just be coming to an end...Denise and her team of dedicated volunteers have been working hard through the summer, devoting themselves to regular trap checks, improving their techniques through a Brush-Up workshop, and several rounds of intensive trapping - and it looks to be paying off.

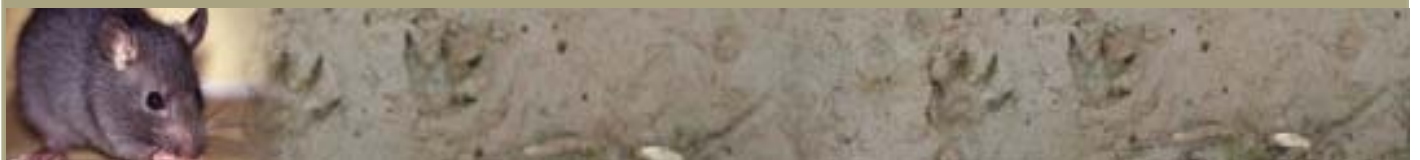
Recent rat monitoring has yielded our lowest results in 12 months with January and March's results at 15% and 17% respectively. While this is a wonderful achievement, the results are still higher than our target of 10%.

The majority of the positive tracking so far this year was detected across the top of Peterson Hill - near all the houses – and this seems to be a continual pattern. So if you live, or own property in this area, and think you can help with setting up additional rat traps or becoming a volunteer, contact Denise.

Despite the lower monitoring result, we are still catching a lot of rats at the moment. SIRCET is remaining vigilant, and are now coming to the end of an additional round of intensive trapping,



in an effort to prevent another explosion. With two consecutive monitoring sessions yielding positive results, it looks as though we are back on track.



Pesky Possums

*Originally introduced to New Zealand in 1837 to establish a fur trade, the Australian Brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) has become New Zealand's most noted pest animal.*

Possums are found virtually everywhere on mainland New Zealand and Stewart Island (although they have been eradicated from major offshore islands since the early 1990s) and their numbers are estimated at around 70 million.



What's the Problem?

As well as infecting cattle with bovine tuberculosis (Tb), threatening the country's valuable dairy industry, possums eat pasture, pine seedlings and horticultural produce and cost NZ government agencies \$111 million in possum control in 2006 alone.



Mamaku, or black tree fern, recovering from browsing. The image on the right shows the same plant two years after the start of possum control (Courtesy DOC)

Environmentally, possums cause major damage to native forests by browsing on trees and regenerating plants. They are voracious eaters, consuming an estimated 21,000

tonnes of vegetation throughout New Zealand a night, destroying spectacular flowering trees such as pōhutukawa and causing the complete collapse of forest canopies – especially tree species they prefer, such as rātā and kāmahī. These trees are then replaced by shrubs that are unpalatable to possums, changing the area from tall forest to low open forest and shrublands.

By feeding on flowers, possums stop seeds forming, and by eating the new shoots, make it harder for trees to recover from weather and insect damage. Many plants fail to regenerate under possum assault.

Once thought of as leaf eaters only, possums are now recognised as opportunistic consumers of any high-energy, high-protein foods. These include eggs, insects like the giant wētā, lizards, New Zealand's endangered native bat species and land snails, and birds such as kererū, kiwi, muttonbird, and tūī, as well as the flowers, leaf buds and fruit that sustain these animals. This predatory behaviour has driven some native species into decline.



Rat Possum Predation Thrush Nest

Sources: teara.govt.nz, DOC, Environment Southland, Nga Manu Images

Missing mistletoes

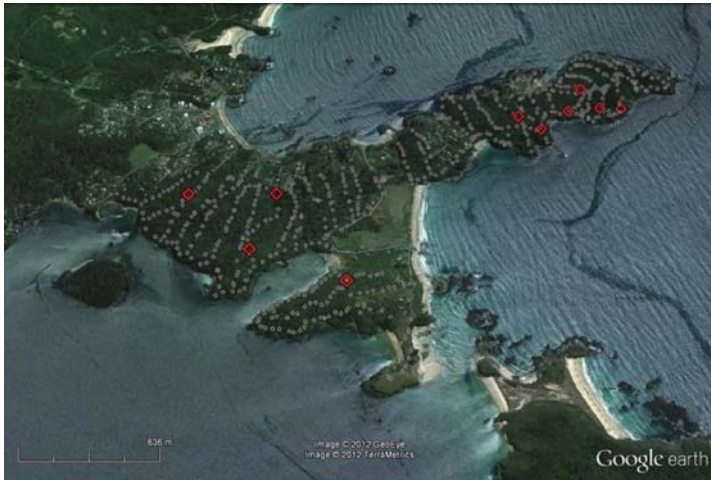
New Zealand's eight surviving species of native mistletoe are threatened by possums. These shrubs live on larger trees, and have fleshy leaves and juicy stems which are readily eaten. Possum control can lead to dramatic increases in mistletoe growth and flowering, and initial monitoring of mistletoe in Stewart Island's HMBHRP area has shown a positive increase in the size of the plants since trapping began in 2004.



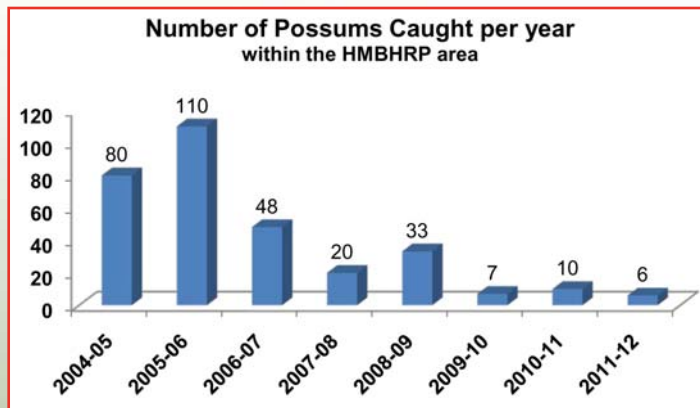
Mistletoe recovering in the project area

SIRCET's Possum Control Project

In 2004 SIRCET began trapping possums within the 210ha Half-moon Bay Habitat Restoration Project area. The 700-odd Warrior Kill traps, represented here by the small white diamonds on the map, were set up along transect lines, and set and checked weekly throughout the year.



The small white diamonds indicate warrior trap locations, and the red diamonds represent the 10 new automatic kill traps



Possum catch data

In recent years, due to limited volunteer time, and a successful drop in possum numbers, SIRCET decided to move to a 'maintenance only' approach, closing the majority of the traps, and focusing its resources instead on the 25% of traps that were catching. Trapping effort was reduced to two short periods of opening each year, which in turn eliminated the unfortunate kaka by-kill (3 birds) which had been experienced.

Project Update

In June 2010, a new humane, automatic kill possum trap became available, and with the help of sponsors, SIRCET decided to purchase and trial 10 of these. After seeking advice from DOC, reviewing the best historical catch sites, and noting areas of high possum 'sign' over the past year, SIRCET has located the new traps around the project area for maximum efficiency. These new traps can be seen as red diamonds on the map.

The new traps have already caught 5 possums, and SIRCET continues to note their efficiency, moving the traps around as necessary.



GoodNature automatic kill trap at work

Throughout April/ May, SIRCET volunteers will be bringing in the majority of the old Warrior traps for a cleanup.

They will then be mounted on white boards and reopened, beginning with those sites with a positive track record. A winter trapping program is anticipated, and SIRCET will then reassess the 'maintenance only' status of the project. DOC continues to assist with annual monitoring.



White board mounts, or flour as seen here, is used as a visual attractant



What can I do to control possums in my backyard?

To tell if you have possums on your property, look for signs such as vegetation damage, possum trails and droppings.



Possum track



Possum droppings



Possum tree damage

There are several ways you can help prevent possum damage on your property:

- Eliminate favoured nesting sites such as in roofs, under floors, in holes and crevices of trees and stumps and in dry holes underneath tree roots. Remove dense vegetation and piles of logs and tree stumps.
- Protect preferred trees such as rātā and kāmahī using a metal or plastic band wrapped around the tree trunk. This will only work if the tree's canopy is not linked with other trees. Protect tree seedlings and shrubs with covers or cages.
- Trapping: In urban areas such as Halfmoon Bay, trapping is the best option for possum control, since neither shooting nor poisons are appropriate for safety reasons. The use of leg-hold traps, which pose a risk to weka, penguins and kiwi, is restricted; so kill traps are a good, humane option.

Check out the website for the National Pest Control Agencies (NPCA), www.npca.org.nz, for further information, or for information specific to the HMBHRP area, contact Denise.

Sources: Forestwalkart.blogspot.com, NPCA

Possum Workshop

SIRCET will be holding a Possum Trapping workshop on Stewart Island in the coming weeks.

Join us to learn about how to spot possum sign, preventing damage to your property and trapping techniques. Bring the kids along to learn about trap safety.

Check out our website blog soon for a date and time!

Informal feedback sought

Environment Southland is currently reviewing their Regional Pest Management Strategy.

Feedback from the community is being sought to help assess how the strategy has performed to date, to decide if changes need to be made. This is a one in five year opportunity, so if you would like to provide input to help form the proposed regional strategy, prior to formal consultation taking place, contact **Richard Bowman on 0800 76 88 45 or service@es.govt.nz**.

Disposing of possum carcasses

Returning carcasses to the soil replenishes the forest. By burying possums under trees suffering from possum damage, or in your garden, you help recycle nutrients the possums have taken. Ensure carcasses are buried well away from waterways.

REMEMBER:

Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling possums, as they carry parasites and diseases such as Giardia and Tb.

From the Landowners Guide to Possum Control.

SIRCET SPONSORSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

SIRCET has recently reviewed its sponsorship and membership options and some changes have been made to bring us in line with similar charities involved in habitat restoration.

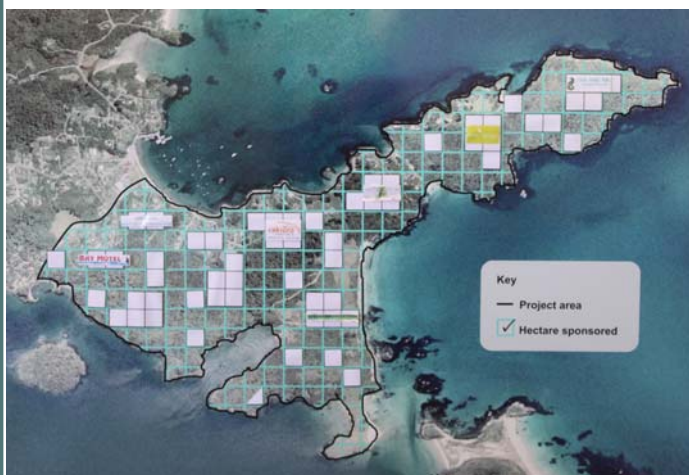
SPONSOR A HECTARE

SIRCET's Sponsor-a-Hectare (SaH) program, which began in 2005, bridges the gap between volunteer time and projects and equipment that need to be financed.

The 210ha 'Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project' area is protected by SIRCET and each hectare is available for "purchase" through the annually renewable Sponsor-a-Hectare program. Levels of sponsorship range from \$30 for ½ ha to \$500 for 10 hectares.

Features of this program remain unchanged except for the introduction of the new SaH map which was unveiled at the recent Rakiura Environment Centre re-launch, and features which hectares have already been snapped up – 57.5 hectares are currently sponsored but we still have 152.5 hectares to go!

So if you are interested in becoming part of the program or making a gift to someone who has enjoyed the island please get in touch or check out our website www.sircet.org.nz. Sponsorship certificates make a wonderful Christmas gift and all donations are 100% tax deductible!



You will receive a certificate, our quarterly newsletter, email updates and invitations to our field days and special events.

VEHICLE SPONSORSHIP PACKAGE

See your company logo displayed on the SIRCET vehicle, and receive all the other sponsor benefits, such as the quarterly newsletter, VIP invitations to special events, and your company acknowledged as a major sponsor in the environment centre, on the SIRCET website and at on- and off-island events.



Cost: \$2,000 per year

FRIENDS OF SIRCET

Subscribe and become a 'Friend of SIRCET' member by making an annual \$25 donation to the Trust.

Donations go towards funding of equipment needed to continue vital projects such as pest control. You'll be added to our mailing list to receive an electronic copy of our quarterly newsletter, plus invitations to workdays and special events.

BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP

Financial assistance from businesses plays a fundamental role in helping SIRCET continue its important work and a range of opportunities are now available to businesses to show their support:

Become a Business Member or Business Sponsor-a-Hectare Sponsor. Businesses that subscribe to our annually renewable Business Membership will be entitled to display the new purpose-designed SIRCET Business Sponsor logo. Your company's support will be acknowledged in the Rakiura Environment Centre, on the SIRCET website and at event displays, and (if joining the SaH Program) your logo will be displayed in the Centre on the Sponsor-a-Hectare map. You'll also receive a Business Sponsor Certificate, our quarterly newsletter updating you on current projects and monitoring results, and VIP invitations to special events and field days.

Cost: \$250 per year

SPONSOR-A-POSSUM TRAP



SIRCET is now seeking sponsors to help us purchase the last of our ten new automatic, humane possum traps. These traps will dramatically reduce the amount of time and volunteer-power needed to undertake possum control in the project area. Thanks to those businesses and individuals who have already sponsored the first five traps!

Cost: \$167.30 (incl. GST)

Contacting us

ALINA THIEBES - Project Administrator
Administration, sponsorship/ fundraising, newsletter, work days
(03) 2191 487 or 027 354 9991
alina@sircet.org.nz

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Stewart Island/ Rakiura Community and Environment Trust - PO Box 124, Stewart Island 9846
www.sircet.org.nz, info@sircet.org.nz