

SIRCET news

www.sircet.org.nz

August 2013



Stewart Island / Rakiura
Community & Environment Trust



for people for environment

A word from our staff

SIRCET Trustees would like to acknowledge the huge contribution that Letitia has made in her temporary role as Project Administrator.

It just goes to show – If you want something done, give it to the busiest person you know!

However, I am delighted to report that Letitia will continue in her role as SIRCET Trustee and Treasurer.

Thank you so much.

Hi, my name is Mandy Foster and I'm the new Project Administrator for SIRCET.

My husband Lawrie and I came to Stewart Island a couple of years ago and fell in love with the place. Our 5 beautiful daughters are all grown up and 'doing their own things' so it was time to have a lifestyle change. Some may call it a 'mid-life crisis' – we call it an adventure!

Coming from a fitness/health background and prior to that



Letitia



The photo is of my daughter Tresa and I at the start of our favourite running track.

horticulture and farming, my role with SIRCET is an exciting new challenge which complements our outdoor employment on the island.

You can contact me on through email - info@sircet.org or phone number (03) 2191594

Our AGM is on Thursday the 19 September, 7.30pm at DOC.

We are always looking for new trustees to help share the load and now is a great time to join the team.

We have a couple of exciting years coming up with some excellent funding and we are in the process of implementing a review that should see a change in the way we operate. From that we are really looking for the project to move forward rapidly in achieving our goals. It would be great to have more people on board to share our vision of the Stewart Island community embracing environmental ecosystem protection and restoration.



SIRCET trustees and staff

I had the chance to find out why it is so rewarding to be involved with SIRCET when I spoke to Alina Atkins who joined the team in 2009.



Alina

Why did you want to become a Trustee?

Alina "Becoming a trustee was the best way to get involved in Stewart Island's local conservation efforts at a community level. I also wanted to grow my skill base in community funding, stakeholder communication and species management. As I run a business with my husband, becoming a trustee meant I could learn about, and contribute to conservation on the side."

What in particular are you passionate about?

Alina "I am passionate about the conservation of native plants and animals suffering from human threats, about giving them a 'voice', and seeing the sense of achievement in the community."

What would you like to achieve?

Alina "Ultimately, I would like to see the return of some of Stewart Island's native species which have become locally extinct."

LONNEKERS UPDATE

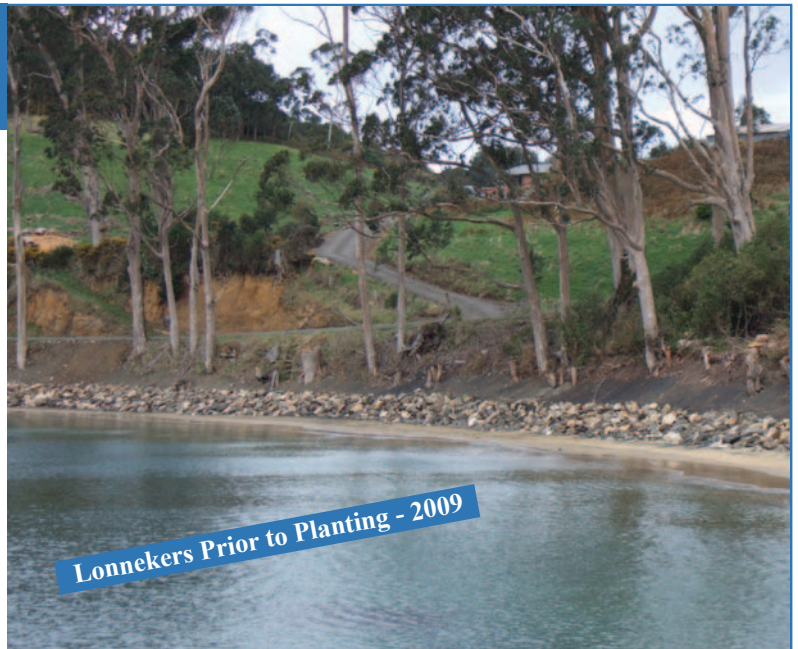
UPCOMING WORKSHOP

A hands-on planting and weeding workshop is being planned for Saturday 13 September from 10am – 1pm at Lonnekers Beach

Come and be part of this amazing community project and at the same time learn about planting to prevent weed growth and native plant alternatives for your own garden.

(BYO gardening tools).

For further information contact Mandy on Shirty1@xtra.co.nz or (03) 2191594.



Lonnekers Prior to Planting - 2009



Lonnekers Project - 2013



Lonnekers Project - 2013



OUR EXCITING NEW KIWI PROJECT

SIRCET have recently started a new project, working with the kiwis that were released into the Ackers project area in February.

Thanks to funding from Kiwis for Kiwi we will be able to follow some of these birds over the next year and report back to the community their progress.

After their release in February, SIRCET followed all the birds for three months and while some birds moved closer to Peterson Hill, all birds remained in the project area. At that stage DOC had intended to stop monitoring and allow the transmitters to fall off naturally. With the decision that we would continue to monitor the birds we had to quickly try and catch the birds again and replace their transmitters, in between the rain showers!

DOC offered their expertise to lead this and along with SIRCET volunteers and local school kids, seven birds were captured. There were several surprises. The first was that all the birds were fat!!! When they were captured on Ulva the bird's condition ranged from poor to moderate but after three months at Ackers they were in good to excellent condition. A bit more space for them than on Ulva!

One bird was caught just a metre from a locals lawn. Kiwis love short grass as an easy place to feed and this bird must have thought he was on to a good thing.

But the most exciting find was diving into the bushes to catch one bird and coming out with a pair. Both birds came off Ulva and while it's not great for genetic diversity it's wonderful to know that the birds have settled into the area so well.

And the last surprise was on the final day of catching when another pair was caught - again both Ulva birds (I won't make any comments about small island populations and inbreeding...).

Having two pairs is a great start to the project. We will use the transmitter signals from the birds to plot where they are going and hopefully when they start sitting still in one place, they will be on a nest. Then it's the countdown to hatching. Over the next year we will keep you updated with the birds' progress.

Article written by Letitia



Kiwi Sitting on a Nest



SPONSOR A HECTARE

Sponsor-a-Hectare program bridges the gap between volunteer time and projects and equipment that need to be financed.

The 'Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project' area is protected by SIRCET's pest trapping program and each hectare is available for sponsorship through this annually renewable program. Levels of sponsorship range from \$30 for ½ ha to \$500 for 10 hectares.



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

TRAPS FOR SALE

SIRCET have for sale Victor Traps made up with bases and covers. These are the same design that we have been using and they have caught thousands of rats!

A dab of peanut butter, check them once a week and it keeps the rats from living in the ceiling chewing on those yummy wires and means you don't have to use poison.

Traps cost \$20 and contact Denise



MOREPORK (RURU)

This cute, wide-eyed sombre native bird could well be the original stealth jet with soft fringes on the ends of their feathers allowing them to fly silently through the forest.

Added to this the forward-facing eyes and binocular vision make them deadly night-hunters. Acute hearing, large sharp talons and beak give their intended prey of rats, mice, insects and small birds, no chance at all.

In Maori mythology, these birds of the night represent wise watchful guardians which belong to the spirit world. Their high-pitched piercing call heard in the dark of the night is thought to be a forewarning of bad news.

Named for the sound of its call, Morepork (Ruru) is New Zealand's only surviving native owl, found in mainland forests and many offshore islands including our own Stewart Island. They are one of the few native bird species that have adapted to human colonisation and really enjoy the smorgasbord of introduced rodents.

Some interesting facts:

- *From head to tail they measure approximately 30cm*
- *Their average weight is 175g*
- *They can turn their heads through 270 degrees (yikes)*
- *Females are bigger than the males*

Morepork nest in tree cavities, in clumps of epiphytes or amongst rocks



and roots. Generally the female will lay 2 eggs (sometimes 3), usually between October and November and then incubates them for 20-30 days during which time her mate brings her food (these birds certainly aren't silly are they!)

Once the chicks hatch, Mum stays on the nest until the owlets are fully feathered and then around the 35th day mark, the little ones head out into the big scary world!

2013 SPECIES MONITORING RESULTS

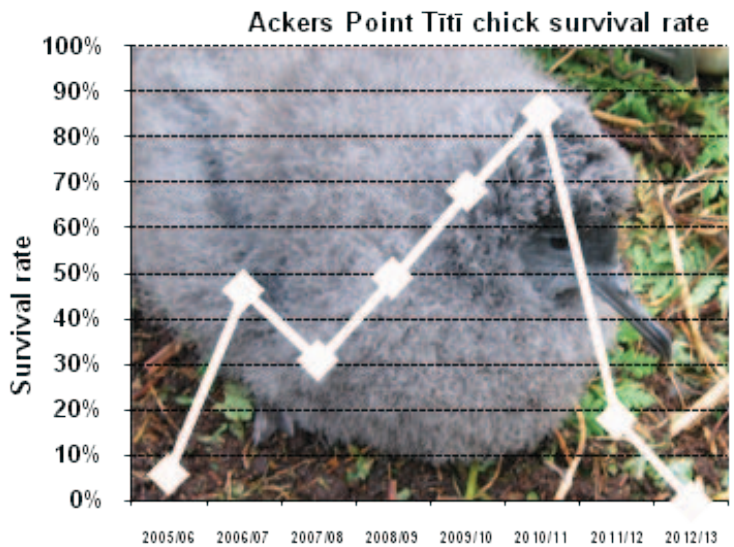


Titi Monitoring

The peaceful dusk is interrupted by the noisy squabbling of hundreds of Titi returning to their burrows after a day's feeding.

Like something out of a David Attenborough documentary, these birds have mastered the art of crash landings by hurtling through the tree canopy and hitting the ground with a resounding 'thump'

Sooty Shearwater 'Puffinus griseus' is also known in New Zealand as 'Titi' or Mutton birds and is recorded as one of the most abundant bird species in the world with an estimated population of 20 million.



Titi only breeds in the temperate and subantarctic regions of the Southern Hemisphere but these remarkable birds cross the equator twice a year in the pursuit of an endless summer and travel up an extraordinary 65,000 km (39,000 miles). During the New Zealand winter, the birds flock to the north of the northern hemisphere to feed on runs of seafood off the coast of California and the Sea of Japan.

Potentially vulnerable to changes in their food supply, the catastrophic earthquake and resulting damage caused by the

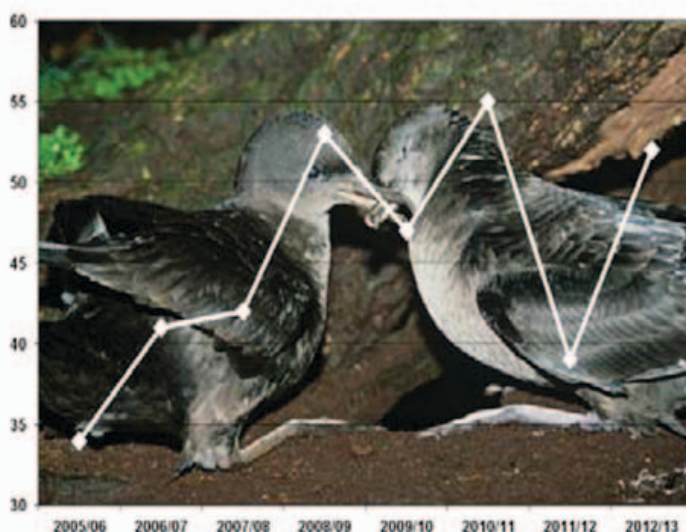
Tsunami in Japan in 2011, may have limited the birds natural food source. Compounded by the La Nina weather patterns which affected the globe last year the birds that returned to their Southern breeding grounds were in poor condition.

Not surprisingly the 2012/ 2013 season saw an extremely disappointing result for titi/ sooty shearwater breeding at Ackers Point, following on from a poor 2011/12.

After an initial increase in the number of pairs found to be incubating eggs this year, not one of these nests survived through to the last stage of burrow-scooping, which is carried out just prior to the chicks emerging from the burrow. Therefore no chicks were produced at the colony this year

This is the worst result since burrow scope monitoring began at Ackers Point; however it mirrors much of what has been seen on the titi islands over the previous breeding season. We all look forward to an improved result over the coming season.

Estimated number of titi breeding pairs at Ackers Point



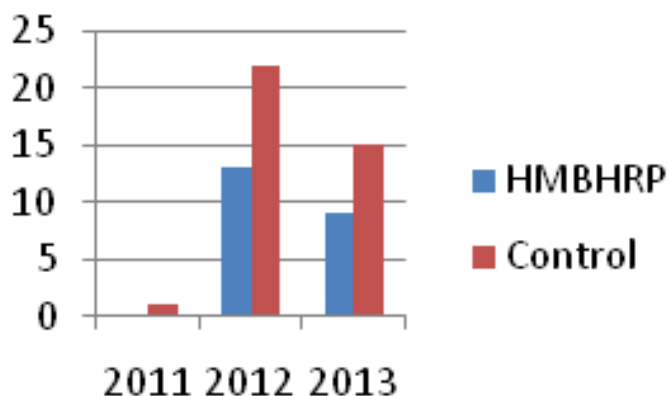
Kiwi/Weka/Morepork Call Counts

Once again Kiwi/Weka/Morepork monitoring took place at eight different locations – four within the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project area and four outside the project perimeter.

Monitoring involved recording the calls of the three species heard at the site during a two hour period and then returning to the same location a further 3 times at the same time of the night. The calls heard are recorded and also the time, directional bearing and sex and details of the environmental conditions are also recorded.



Kiwi were heard/seen a total of 24 times at 5 sites which was down from the 35 heard in 2012. It was encouraging to note that 6 calls were heard at Harold's Bay as no kiwi calls have been recorded at that site before.

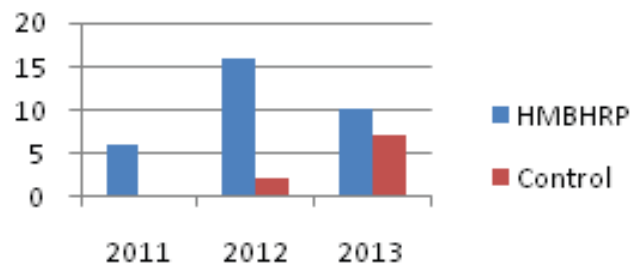


Total number of kiwi calls heard inside and outside the project area, 2011-13



Stewart Island Weka

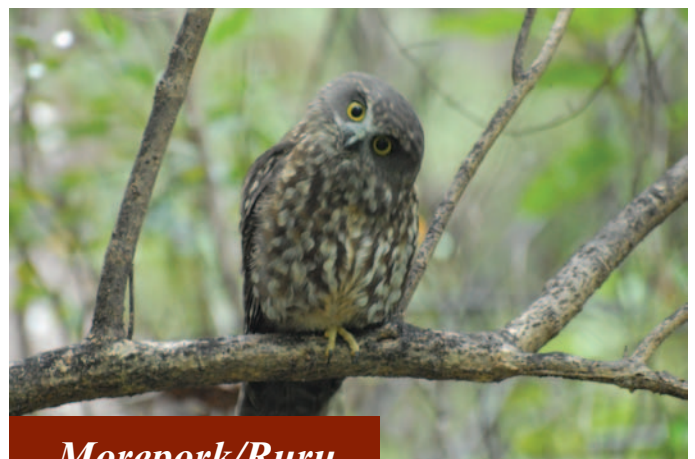
Weka – these smart, cheeky, curious and famously feisty flightless bird were heard a total of 17 times in 2013 compared to 18 in 2012. Calls were heard at 5 sites in 2013, compared to 6 sites in 2012. Over the 3 years of monitoring, call numbers have been higher inside the project area than outside, although this year the number of calls outside the project area increased.



Total number of weka calls heard inside and outside the project area, 2011-13



Total number of ruru/morepork calls heard inside and outside the project area, 2011-2013



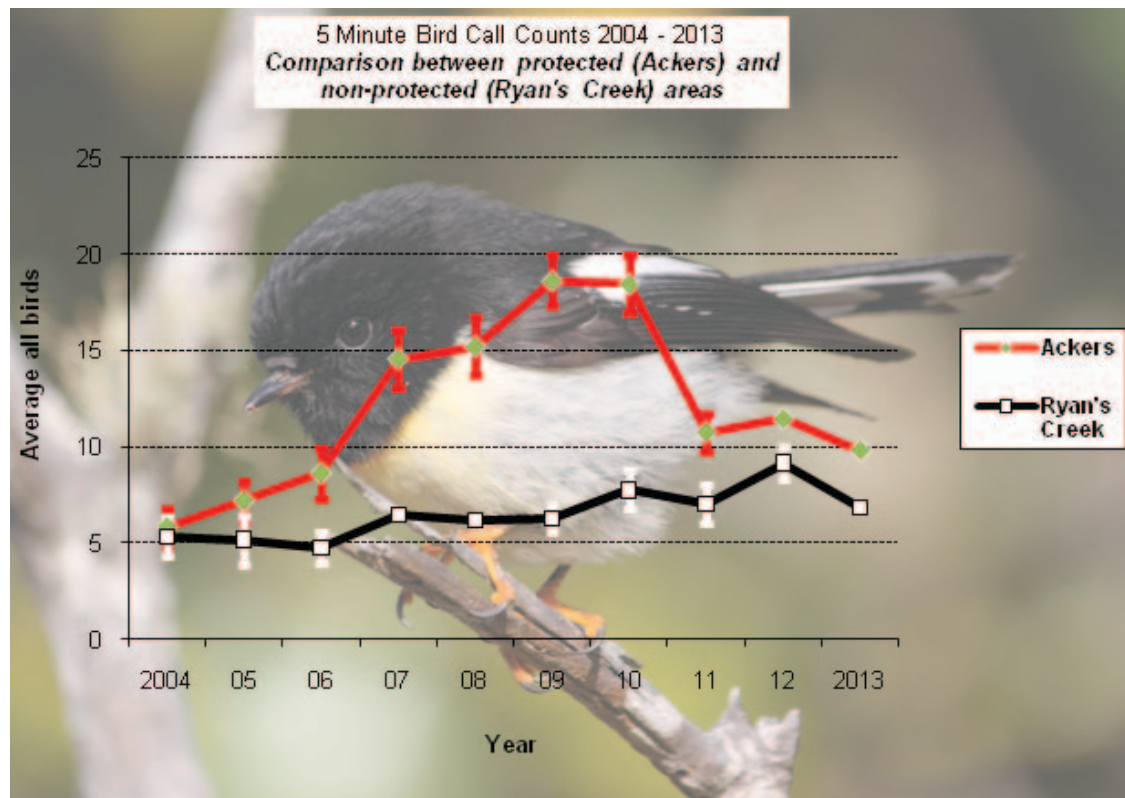
Morepork/Ruru

Morepork/Ruru – At dusk the melancholy call of the Morepork can be heard in the bush as it calls to other Ruru and claims territory. 58 such calls were recorded this year (compared to a high of 103 calls last year), at 7 of the 8 locations.

It is noted that call numbers have been significantly lower inside the control area than outside, possibly a reflection of rat control reducing the food source available to Morepork inside the project area.

5 MINUTE BIRD CALL COUNTS

Contractor Matt Jones once again carried out this year's call count monitoring in the project area at Acker's Point and the Ryan's Creek control site.



The results indicate a further small decrease in bird numbers in the project area and a larger decrease in the control site.

Three years of high rat numbers may be impacting on counted bird numbers. It is positive to see that results over time do indicate that we are consistently monitoring more birds within the Project Area than outside of it, an indication that our pest control is leading to higher bird numbers in this area.

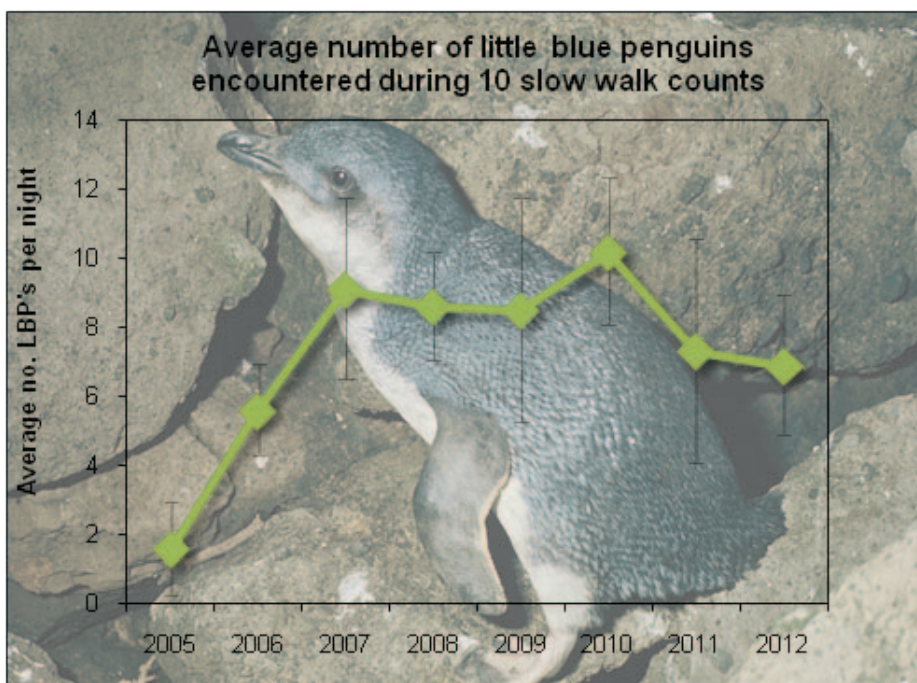
Little Blue Penguin Slow Walk Counts

The Little Blue Penguin (Korora) is the World's smallest penguin weighing only 1 kg and growing to a maximum of 40cm in length.

During the breeding season which varies from late June to September, these little birds come ashore at dusk and leave at dawn. They may be small but they are incredibly noisy and their distinctive screams, wails, trumpeting and deep growls can be heard reverberating through the bush.

Once again environmental consultants SolutionNZ were contracted on behalf of SIRCET to carry out monitoring of the Acker's Point Little Blue Penguin colony. During the 10 slow walk counts undertaken by 18 volunteers in December 2012, a total of 69 penguins were seen, equating to an average of 6.9 birds per night.

This is a small decline from last year (note graph), however, the slow walk counts are intended as a gross measure of

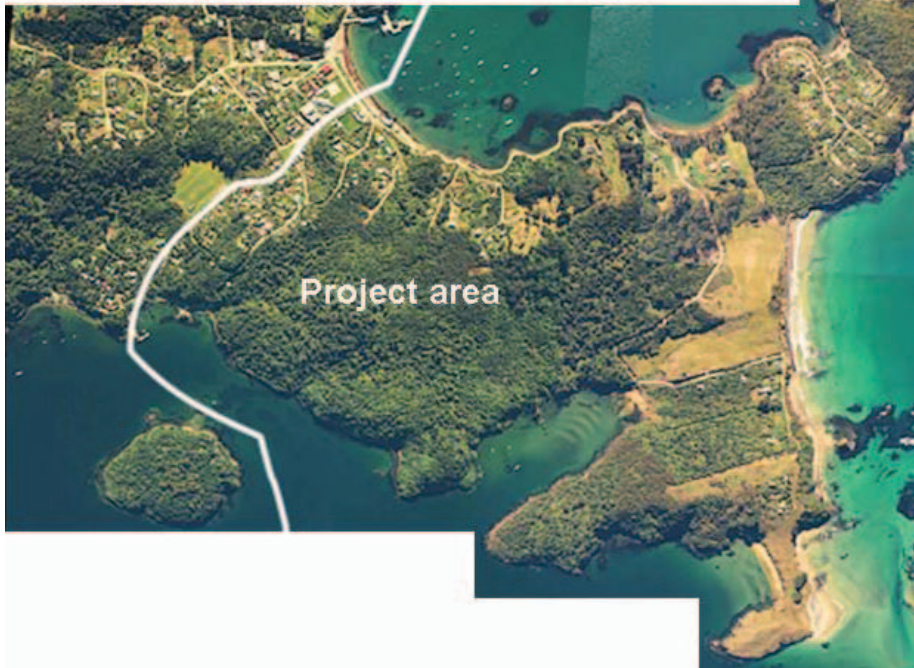


changes over time, rather than a detailed indicator of year-to-year changes. Only nine of the 18 volunteers had been involved with monitoring in previous years and this can lead to less detection of what can be elusive birds. The monitoring method is best to show change over time, so it is the trend of change over four to ten years and beyond that is of real significance.

HMBHRP Review

10 years ago, the Stewart Island/Rakiura Community and Environment Trust (SIRCET) was established to protect and enhance the environment and community of Stewart Island.

Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project



The Halfmoon Bay Habitat restoration Project (HMBHRP)

was initiated in 2003 to provide the local community with an opportunity to take control of the restoration of Ackers Point. Since the initiation of the HMBHRP a huge amount of effort has gone into working towards the Trust's vision of 'maintaining an environment that allows Tieke/Saddleback to reside in our gardens'. As SIRCET's projects and scope has expanded we have not been able to make real progress towards this vision



Rat

This prompted SIRCET to undertake a review to determine whether the vision set out for the HBHRP is achievable and if so, to make recommendations that will improve the likelihood of the projects success. DOC offered to undertake the review for us and Phil Tisch and Lindsay Wilson, from DOC Te Anau visited us and then wrote the review document.

The review team recommendation was that the vision is achievable but we need to make some changes to how we conduct our work, starting with goals and moving through to operational changes. It was recommended that SIRCET trustees meet to determine the over-arching purpose of the project and the Trust. The Trust met in late June to discuss the review and the recommendations in order to make decisions on future planning and to give a clear indication of the path forward. We looked at what we want to achieve and were successful

in refocusing the project and SIRCET. A further meeting is needed to decide how to implement the review recommendations around the operational changes. DOC generously provided substantial financial support to implement the review and the trust is very excited to move forward in such a strong position

Watch this space!

Ten Year Celebration Event

It has been 10 years since a group of locals got together with a mutual desire to make our local environment better and while the project has changed focus from waste minimisation and recycling to ecosystem protection, SIRCET is still going strong.

On the 9th March we held an event to mark our ten year anniversary and as a chance to thank our volunteers, sponsors, funders, landowners, trustees and staff; the many and varied people who are the backbone of our work.

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon as we gathered at the shed on Ian and Philippa's property, surrounded by the project area and with bellbird and tui calls echoing around. We had a great spread of nibbles, a few drinks and some themed games! Splat the Rat was popular, although Betty wanted to rescue the



fluffy rats and give them a cuddle. Toss the Poss saw Alina's lovingly handcrafted possum flying in all directions. Spear the Deer gave the archery fans a chance to practice, with the target remaining very intact!

We had a great list of sponsors for the event, including those who donated items for the food, the raffle and the Trademe auction. We had also approached several companies asking for wet weather gear for our hard working Pest Manager. Swazi very quickly put their hand up and also sent us 20 cosy beanies to pass out to volunteers. As our Pest Manager, Denise puts in countless hours getting rid of the rats, cats and possums, we wanted to give her this great outdoor gear as a way of thanking her and keeping her warm and dry. It was wonderful to present it to her and it has since been put to good use!!

Thank you to all those who attended, helped out, sponsored and donated towards this event. The work could not be done without your support!!

Article by Letitia



Denise proudly displays her new Swazi Gear



TRADEME AUCTION

As a fundraiser to be run in conjunction with the ten year event we organised a Trademe raffle of a 5 day trip to Stewart Island with transport, accommodation, food and activities all included.

There was a flurry of last minute bids and the final winning bid was \$1220, a fantastic result! The winners came to the island in May and while the weather was against them, they enjoyed their look around Stewart Island and the meals, accommodation, boat trips, shopping and gifts. We thank the following sponsors for their generous support

Real Journeys, Bay Motels, The Fernery, Glowing Sky, South Seas Hotel, Margaret Fairhall, Stewart Island T-shirts, Kelvin Hotel, Department of Conservation, Sails Ashore, Observation Rock Cottage, Church Hill, Bird on a Pear, Rakiura Charters, Maass Mussels.



Beautiful fantail painting donated by Margaret Fairhall for the Trademe auction.



VISITING SCHOOL GROUPS:

Over the last year, a number of young budding environmentalists from visiting school groups had the opportunity to take part in pest control and native plant nursery workshops.

As part of SIRCET's aim of environmental education, several visiting school groups including; Glenham, Mararoa and Queenstown Primary Schools, took part in pest control sessions which involved a 30 minute talk introducing SIRCET's history and the Half Moon Bay Habitat Restoration Project followed by a discussion of the dreaded vermin and a visual display as to how the pests are controlled. Following a chat about the various native bird species and SIRCET's monitoring methods, the students went for a walk to the Ackers Point Lighthouse where they had the opportunity to check, clear and reset rat, possum and cat traps along the way.

Glenham School and Queenstown Primary School took part in nursery workshops, where after an introduction to the nursery's history and SIRCET's involvement, the children had the opportunity to take part in a variety of propagation and growing on tasks as well as being introduced to some of Stewart Island's rare and endangered native plant species.

Many of the children send letters of thanks and even some helpful ideas!

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

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.

Room 1

Mararoa School

RD 2 Te Anau

5/12/12

Dear Anne

Thank you for taking us around the Ackers Point track and taking us to Mr Ackers stone house.

I really enjoyed the view from Ackers Point of the Blue penguins popping up and down in the sea. They looked really cool. The traps for the rats were huge. Mr Ackers stone house was fascinating because it was still really solid after all these years. When everyone was taking photos Wade and I were leaning on the door and it flew open.

I'd like to thank you again for taking us around the Ackers track and to the stone house.

Yours sincerely

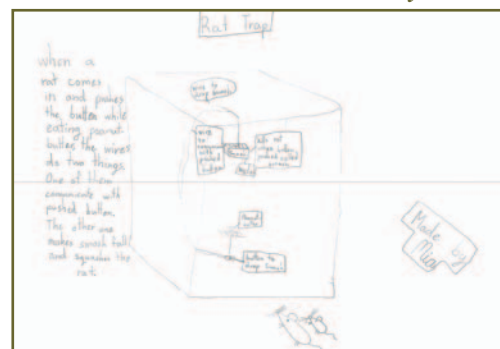
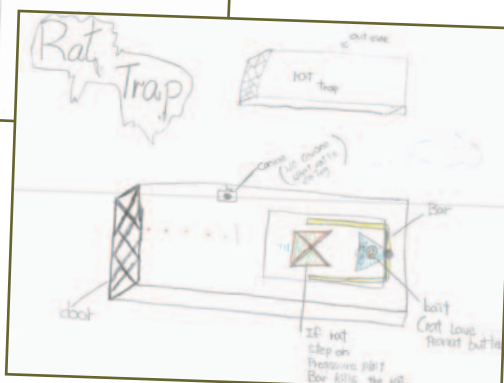
Miles Aspinall



'We got one!' – Denise showing the effectiveness of the rat-trap to Glenham School pupils



Glenham School pupils enjoying their workshop at the nursery



Mia from Queenstown School 'Rat squashing invention'

'Kiwi Ingenuity from our budding inventors – death to rodents' from Queenstown School