

SIRCET news

December 2015

A word from our staff

Shona Sangster—Project Administrator

It's that busy time of year for creatures, plants and people. We recently held our AGM and would like to welcome a new trustee to the family, Anita Herbert. The Herberts are building on the island and Anita will be a great asset to SIRCET we are sure.

Our annual monitoring of Little Blue Penguins at Ackers Point is underway. Little Blue Penguins breed in colonies around Stewart Island, including the Ackers Point peninsula. The birds spend most of their lives at sea but come to the shore under the cover of darkness to lay eggs and raise their chicks. They walk inland, sometimes hundreds of metres, towards burrows dug in the forest floor. In areas where there are introduced predators, Little Blue Penguins are at risk during these walks and once inside their burrows, as they are ill equipped to protect themselves and their nests from mammalian threats. We conduct monitoring every year to get an idea of how the pest control we undertake in the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project is affecting the numbers of Little Blue Penguins nesting there during the breeding season. The method we use is a slow walk count, which is exactly what it sounds like. You walk back from the lighthouse at the end of the Ackers point track, to the car park at a very slow pace (think walking down the aisle speed) looking around with a bright head torch.

A very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of our volunteers, friends and supporters!



A little blue penguin caught on camera near a kiwi burrow

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.

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/tīfī 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.

For more information or to get involved please check out our website:

www.sircet.org.nz

Kiwi monitoring update for December

from Sandy King

Monitoring the kiwi released into the Ackers Point project area in 2013 is shaping up to be a busy and exciting job for me this summer, and a busy time for the kiwi as well. I'd been keeping an eye the whereabouts of the three males wearing transmitters since late May when two of them were caught and had their transmitter bands changed. At that time the third male, Matatika, was tucked up in an inaccessible burrow with his mate Ngaio and a sub-adult, and wasn't caught. Over the next couple of months he and Ngaio, and presumably the sub-adult (I don't look into the burrow unless there is a good reason as the transmitter signal tells me where they are) remained in the same burrow.



Takiti leaves the burrow

The other two males were also settled in the same burrows so in October I decided it was time do a bit more snooping and set up SIRCET's two trail cameras outside burrows. The camera set up outside Matatika and Ngaio's burrow failed to capture any useful images and, as Murphy's law dictates, they were the first pair to leave their burrow which was found empty on the first camera check. However they left behind evidence that they had hatched yet another chick – egg shell membrane was clearly visible in the empty burrow. The camera was moved and both cameras have since proved their worth at the two other burrows – the golf course pair Takiti and male Tx52 have a chick which first appeared on camera on 31st October and continues to live in the burrow. Better yet, Tx52 is also still using that burrow and is incubating a second egg! The camera shows his mate Takiti is there as well. Back towards Ackers Point, male Tx22 and his unnamed mate have been using a very long burrow under a tree root complex. The transmitter signal comes strongly from a spot about 3m from the entrance so the camera is the only way to observe their comings and goings. This pair also have a sub-adult kiwi living with them, a chick from last season perhaps, and on 7th November this season's chick made its camera debut. Tx22 is still using the burrow, perhaps he is also sitting on a second egg! Matatika, although he has moved since his chick hatched, hasn't moved far and seems to be in the same general area at each signal check. If this continues in the next couple of weeks it could be an indication that he & Ngaio have renested, and I'll be paying close attention to their transmitter signals.

Potentially our three kiwi pairs could produce six chicks this season and, while it is unlikely that they would all survive to reach breeding age, this does raise questions about their future and the future of chicks in successive seasons. Stewart Island kiwi tend to live in family



Tx 52 stretches after emerging from the burrow

groups for a few years, but eventually the younger birds will be forced to leave and find a territory of their own. Ackers Point is a relatively small area and would quickly reach carrying capacity for kiwi which would then need to disperse out into the more populated areas of Leask Bay, Lonnekers and beyond. Increasing the birdlife in our backyards is a key long term goal for SIRCET which strives to control predators in its project area and encourages residents to do the same around their houses. However for kiwi domestic dogs and cats are as much of a threat as feral predators and need to be managed to ensure the safety of kiwi in our neighbourhood. We can all help to protect our kiwi by not letting our dogs roam unattended, participating in the kiwi



Tx 52 and Takiti's chick

avoidance dog training programme, and keeping our cats inside at night. Having kiwi in our backyards is one of the special things about living here, and a key point of difference that makes us stand out from the crowd in the eyes of the rest of the world.



Tx 22 and chick



Tx 22's chick



Update from our Pest Manager – Kelly Bunce

I just wanted to share our latest Rat Monitoring results with our dedicated supporters. Rat monitoring was completed at the start of December in the Buffer and Core Zones. The result for the Core zone was a fantastic 0%!!! I believe the 0% result in the Core Zone is a first since the project began so it's a fantastic way to finish 2015! The Buffer Zone didn't do quite as well with a result of 20%, therefore a 7% result for both areas combined. We will aim to have the Buffer zone down to 0% in the New Year!

SIRCET has purchased 50 x DOC 150 traps, some of these traps are being operated by residents living in the Buffer Zone – the rest will be mobilised on the north side of the Ackers Point Light House walking track – (Coastal side). We are hoping to eradicate any 'trap shy' rats that may be in the area with these very sturdy and strong traps and hold on to our fantastic monitoring result!

We have also been spending a lot of time mapping the project area and traps to load on to a new Trapping Data Tool developed by DOC. It is a great way to have a 'birds eye view' on the extensive trapping project SIRCET have implemented. A small amount of records have already

been loaded in to the new online system so you will soon be able to have a look online yourselves and see your catches on your lines. Willy Gamble has been volunteering with SIRCET for the past few weeks and has been very helpful getting us set up on this fantastic Trapping Tool. I hope to get back to you all soon with a Link and Login so you can check it out yourselves. A huge thank you to Willy for all the time and expertise he has given to this project.

I would also like to say welcome and thanks to three new volunteers that have taken on lines in the community zone – Willy, Bridget and Jenny. I'm pleased to be able to say that all lines on Petersons Hill have a volunteer checking the traps, so thank you all for your fine efforts and giving your time. Keep up the good work!

Well as always please contact me if I can help in any way, or if you volunteer trappers require any gear for maintaining your lines.

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Please all take care over the festive season and have fun!

SIRCET Pest Lines 2015/2016—Core and Buffer Zones



BUSINESS SPONSOR A HECTARE

SIRCET is a large organisation to run, managed by volunteers but we employ one full time and one part time staff member and several contractors.

External funding covers some of our staff and contractor costs but without the generous annual sponsorship from individuals and businesses it would be difficult to fund the Trust's day to day expenses including:

- Management expenses
- Traps
- Rat bait
- Vehicle running costs

HOW ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS GETTING BEHIND OUR STEWART ISLAND ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS?

A \$250 Business Sponsor-a-Hectare entitles the business to display the SIRCET logo on their website and also have their logo in SIRCET's annual report, the Environment Centre and on our website. A Business Sponsorship for SIRCET supports the restoration of our environment which in turn makes our backyards a better place.

SPONSOR A HECTARE

SIRCET has a 'sponsor-a-hectare' programme which 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 and your name on our SaH map in the Environment Centre.

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT

A special thanks to those businesses that made a commitment to the program this year!



Beyond



BAY MOTE!

AURORA CHARTERS



Pete Ross Automotive



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Southland District Council and the Ministry for the Environment



Nursery Feature Plant

Hebe Lavender Lace is a hardy, compact hebe with an extended flowering season, producing masses of pale lavender blooms throughout the year, peaking during spring and summer. This evergreen plant has a compact growth habit and is considered hardy in most situations. It thrives in both sun and part shade and can withstand wind and frost once established. It grows very well on Stewart Island, and has been used in many public planting areas. It makes a great gap filler!



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 **Kelly**

