

SIRCET news

www.sircet.org.nz

January 2015



Stewart Island / Rakiura
Community & Environment Trust



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/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



Kelly Bunce (Pest Control Manager)

Hi Stewart Island. My name is Kelly Bunce and I have been given this wonderful opportunity taking on the job of Pest Manager for SIRCET. Firstly I would like to thank the team for giving me such a warm welcome

A word from our staff

Shona Sangster (Project Administrator)

Stewart Island/Rakiura Community and Environment Trust is starting 2015 with a warm welcome to our new Pest Manager, Kelly Bunce. She brings enthusiasm, local knowledge (her family has had a crib on the island for many years) and conservation experience from exotic Peru to the role and we're really pleased to have her join the team. We also have a new Kiwi monitoring expert, Sandy King, see her update in this edition of the Newsletter. She will be familiar to many from SIRCET's dog training workshops, which she has been instrumental in setting up and running. We're thrilled to be working more with such a committed and capable conservationist. And we are saying farewell to Nic Shaw, who has done a marvellous job of filling in as Pest Manager for the last few months. She has been capable, positive and a joy to work with, and we wish her all the best for the future!

Summer is in full swing and we are very busy with a number of things. Prior to Christmas we had lots of great school groups come and spend time with us learning about our conservation projects, endangered species and predator control. Check out some of the lovely thank you letters we have received from school kids later on in this newsletter. And a big thanks to the MOZ buskers Georgia Awatea Jones and Charli Merana Jones who very kindly donated their proceeds to SIRCET. Wonderful to see how passionate young kids can be about conservation.

We've had lots of interest from visitors who want to come and volunteer with us which is very gratifying. It's so fantastic that people want to give back in this way when travelling. SIRCET still has volunteer opportunities (with the possibility of accommodation provided) in March/April so if you or anyone you know are interested please get in touch via email! We'd also like say a huge thank you for to DOC for their support and assistance with our summer volunteer program and E Hayes and Sons Hardware who are sponsoring accommodation as a base for DOC and SIRCET summer volunteers. Our

and especially thank Nic and Denise for taking their precious time showing me the ropes. You have all been fantastic and helpful!

I have been visiting Stewart Island my entire life as my parents Charlie and Judy have had their crib on Butterfields Beach for over 45 years. It takes a very special place to bring a girl home after having lived and worked overseas for ten years. Stewart Island has always held a special place in my heart so it makes me so happy to return and be a part of this project.

I left New Zealand ten years ago to work in the mines of Australia. Work opportunities included Project Administration, operating heavy machinery and also explosives. It was this experience that landed me an awesome job opportunity to work on an Exploration Iron Ore site in Guinea – West Africa (unfortunately infamous now for Ebola). This fantastic opportunity involved training the nationals of Guinea to operate machinery and all aspects of operating a successful project. The experience was absolutely amazing, breath taking and eye opening, the contrasts were so drastic. The nice



current summer volunteer, Peta Maidens comes to us from Queensland and has a wealth of conservation and volunteer experience. Back home she works for the Threatened Species unit in the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage protection, and has volunteered in the Okavango Delta in Botswana, and with the Jane Goodall Institute. We hope she finds Stewart Island's native species an interesting change from koalas and crocs!

On the species front, our annual Little Blue Penguin slow walk count took place in December. I went out as a volunteer and it was thoroughly enjoyable experience. It's amazing what you see out at Ackers Point after dark! I saw lots of Little Blue Penguins, Sooty Shearwater/Titi and not one but two Kiwi. I'll definitely be first in line to volunteer again next year. Thanks to all the other volunteers who participated.

accommodations offered to our workers in Australia were now Mud huts in a small village with no electricity and running water. It was sad to see such a mineral rich country being played like a game of monopoly at the expense of the people – so much poverty.

Fortunately for me (very fortunate in comparison) this opportunity in Africa also included flights to any destination in the world on my breaks which was absolutely perfect for me as I had met my Fiancée Miguel the year prior on a trip to Peru in 2011. For a year I worked rotations of six weeks of work in the Jungle of Guinea to have three weeks of

rest in the Amazon Jungle of Peru with Miguel. To say the least the experiences of 2012 changed my views on life forever.

Once the contract in Guinea came to an end I spent time back in the comforts of home in New Zealand and Australia to rest and re-charge my batteries as the conditions of the Jungles proved to be taxing on my unaccustomed body.

In 2013 I returned to the Amazon in Peru to live with my Fiancée. It took a lot of nerve to leave the comforts of home and the financial security that Australia has on offer. I took with me a Coleman Dome tent which was mine and Miguel's home for the next year and a half, on arrival I bought Miguel a motorkar (more commonly known as a tuk tuk much like the one that is here on Stewart Island) this was our only form of income. I lived a much simpler life exchanging running water for showering out of buckets and living on a boring but economical diet of rice fish or chicken and green banana (yuck!). Hopefully having lived in Peru is enough to get my Fiancée a visa for New Zealand so he can join me here on Stewart Island very soon. Although I wouldn't change any experience in my life I'm so happy to be home to enjoy the simple comforts of living in New Zealand.

Whilst I was in Peru I volunteered at a guest house that worked with medicinal plants and traditional Shamans. Tourists from all over the world would come to seek medical help for illness and disease that modern medicine could not offer answers for – more commonly ailments such as addiction, depression and degenerative diseases, or they would come to learn the practice of this ancient, traditional knowledge and relationship the local Shamans have with the plants and with nature.

It is for this reason I first came to Peru to experience and learn more about this ancient knowledge, and maybe for this reason my career path has gone from blowing up the earth to trying to give Mother Nature a hand.

So that's a summary of how I left ten years ago to return to this position on Stewart Island today. I've had many adventures and seen many parts of the world to confirm what I always knew, that this place is one of the most special places on this planet and it's so important that we conserve it for generations to come.

I look forward to meeting more of you in the community. I'm not shy of a good yarn so feel free to say hello if you see me out and about and if you can offer help in any shape or form I would gladly accept.



Contact us Shona Sangster - Project Administrator

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Kelly Bunce – Pest Manager

kelly@sircet.org.nz

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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



Field Update from Kelly

I have spent my first month with SIRCET learning the systems currently in place. Once again I thank Denise Hayes and Nic Shaw for taking their time and showing me the ropes, I'm very impressed to say the least with everything you have implemented and maintained – BIG boots to fill! Finding my way through the extensive trap lines that exist on the Ackers project and our Ringaringa buffer zone has proved to be a challenge. I look forward to the day that I can walk these lines without having to refer to my map so often! Although I'm pleased to say that I have had success going 'solo' and I have managed to find every trap and I can report a good success rate with rat catch numbers.

I have also had our cat traps open this New Year but unfortunately I haven't managed to trap one yet.

My highlight on the job so far has to be bumping in to a Kiwi whilst out trapping on Ackers, to be honest our first meeting had me running one way and the Kiwi going the other as I was unfamiliar with the sound of the approaching footsteps! Luckily I identified what was 'hunting me' and managed to experience a second, much more relaxed encounter and even had time to take a photo! This amazing 'first time' experience has given me more drive to out-smart these destructive pests.

In the New Year I have had a helping hand from a committed volunteer. Peta has travelled here from Queensland, Australia and will be with SIRCET for two months. Peta has been a delight to have with me and is full of valuable information concerning plant life, she has proved to be a massive help especially in the Nursery. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peta and for taking her valuable time and sharing it with SIRCET and sharing your wealth of information with me. You have been priceless!

Farewell from Nic Shaw

In the blink of an eye my time at SIRCET is now drawing to a close. I would like to take the opportunity to thank everybody for their support and hard work! The volunteers have worked diligently behind the scenes, donating valuable time, efforts, efficiency and petrol. Whether for a short or long period of time, this donation is a big part of what helps make SIRCET run, and has certainly made my job easier. The trustees have taken on the difficult job of responsibility, while also donating the rare time they have to ensure the logistics keep ticking along. I would not have been able to hold the torch without the training of Denise or the ever diligent support and encouragement of Letitia. It amazes me just how hard everybody has contributed to continue on the difficult journey to enhance the native ecology in our expansive back yards. I know that SIRCET will keep moving forward and evolving to reach the current goals and future expansions.

I was lucky to have the job find me, I have furthered my own education with the ecology and biodiversity of Stewart Island's unique environment, falling for the beauty of birds and plant life alike. I came to understand a little more of the battle and complexity to suppress rat numbers, who managed to outwit me at certain times! I cannot complain about the weather, as the winter was mild. Although the five seasons in one hour took on a new meaning at times and I now understand why they say "you cannot have a rain forest without rain". I have had the privilege to learn the terrain of our wider community intimately through zigzagging the ratlines throughout the zones, it gives a great perspective!

School groups were my absolute favourite, the kids delight in dead rats and the large variety of fun facts! I had support from Fiona, Shona and Letitia, who were great partners in crime to ensure the groups were well informed.

The Nursery has also been my happy place, quietly pottering around. I started without a scrap of knowledge, but Fiona stepped in as a volunteer and teacher, so that with our combined efforts - and with the help of school groups and community, the nursery has flourished towards being back to its prime -to emulate the green thumb that Denise had in the past!

I now look at moving forward into new journeys, and will always cherish the time that I have spent with people, birds and plants. All of this knew knowledge will certainly be highly useful in the future... my greenie outlook has evolved!

Kiwi monitoring update for January 2015

For the past few months I've been tracking kiwi that were released from Ulva Island into the Ackers Point area in February 2013.

The pair Matatika and Ngaio are still hanging out towards the Point. After a few weeks of finding them residing in the same area I thought something might be up; however they have since gone walkabout and are in different locations every check, often not together. It seems likely that they are not breeding this season, maybe they need a break after successfully producing a chick last year.

Unnamed male Tx22 has also been moving around a lot and not displaying any sign of breeding.

Also unnamed, the male Tx52 was in the same area for several weeks which might just mean he was incubating an egg. It was decided to investigate further so placed a game camera near to the burrow. So far no chick has been sighted, but it is interesting looking through the photos and learning something about a night in the life of a kiwi. There seems to be a bit of a pattern: about 10pm he emerges and often spends a few minutes preening outside the burrow, before heading off. Another bird, and my guess it's the female Takiti, then appears about this time. It's all quiet before Tx52 reappears about 5am and goes back into the burrow. My assumption



TX 52 emerges from his burrow

is that it's a changing of the guard, with Tx52 standing down from incubation duty and getting a few hours to feed and tidy himself up while Takiti takes over. I'm hoping to see a chick emerge soon!

The thing that surprised me the most about this was how shallow and open the "burrow" is, I had imagined an enclosed deep dark tunnel. However Tx52 is visible without me needing to peer into the hole and would be easily accessible to predators, wandering dogs in particular. This just reinforces the need for good dog control, and the value of SIRCET's kiwi avoidance training scheme for dogs as a backup. Please remind your guests, family and friends that we have these special birds living amongst us and to keep their dogs under control.



MEDICINAL AND EDIBLE PLANT GARDEN

Planting of this garden went ahead as planned in September

The soil seemed to consist of mostly rocks but thank you to all those who helped out and passersby who offered encouragement! The plants have settled in well, surviving the spring weather. I've been working on weedmatting the area (with the assistance of Bella!) and soon there will be barkchip covering the weedmat. In a few years the plants should have filled the area in nicely!

A long term project will be to get some signage so people can identify the plants that are growing and when they are robust enough, to sample them!

A plant that grows well here is *Arthropodium cirratum* or the Rengarenga. While not native to this area it seems to flourish in frost free gardens (not at my house!!) and will soon be in flower. Its a multipurpose plant with the base of the leaves or the rhizome being applied as a warm poultice and it was also eaten. It may have been cultivated as it was often found around old Maori habitations and grows much larger when cultivated. A quick internet search tells me that they taste like potato, take 60 min to steam and only the thickest part of the stem is tasty, the rest being fibrous

A favourite little native of mine is Horokaka or the New Zealand ice plant. This tough succulent likes to grow on rocky cliffs and grows naturally here. There is also the introduced Hottentot Fig that looks similar (but much larger) and according to Hugh Wilsons 'Stewart Island Plants', grows around the Bay (this plant is highly invasive both in NZ and in other countries). I have planted some small sections of Horokaka in the corner of the garden and it will soon spread to form a mat. It has pretty little pink flowers and the seed head is said to resemble a fig in taste, although it makes a pretty small snack. Maybe eat the introduced one first! The leaves can also be pickled and the juice was used on boils.

Letitia McRitchie



Spotted in Halfmoon Bay, this cute oyster catcher parent and chick!



THE NURSERY FEATURE PLANT

As many of you will be aware SIRCET manage the Community Nursery out at Horseshoe Bay.

Denise and her volunteers produce thousands of plants a year that are available for a \$2 donation. These plants have been used in local's gardens to attract birds, replace weeds and simply to enjoy as garden plants. They have been used on many restoration sites with over 1000 plants having been grown and then planted at Lonnekers over the last 7 years.

As a regular feature in the SIRCET News we are going to showcase one or two of the plants that are available at the nursery, outlining the plants properties, history and any interesting information about it. This month's feature plants are...



CAREX TRIFIDA

- Mutton-bird Sedge, Tataki

A beautiful and popular sedge, widely grown in New Zealand.

In the wild it is often associated with seal haul outs and sea bird nesting grounds, especially - as the common name suggests - muttonbirds. Grows up to 90 cm tall, with wide mid-green leaves which are ribbed and have slightly bluish green undersides. Best grown in a moist soil in sun or semi shade. Great in rock or pebble gardens. In summer prominent flower spikes carried on stiff stems do a great job of attracting birds.



LIBERTIA GRANDIFLORA

- NZ Iris, Clumping Iris, Mikoikoi

A tufted flax-like plant. Largest of the NZ Irises.

Three petalled white flowers carried on stems above the foliage. Flowers followed by attractive reddish-black seed capsules that open and release quickly. Has a flax-like appearance and can be used for similar effect. Provides contrasting colour and form in a mass planting of native grasses. Good filler under established vegetation. Ideal for rockeries.



Some of the lovely letters of thanks received from visiting school groups recently

Waituna Creek School
178 Waituna School Road
Rd8
WAIMATE

05 December

Dear Shona

Thank you for giving up your time and showing us all the different traps. I liked the new one the best because it was more efficient for catching the possum. I hope you catch all the possums on the island, so that the native birds can survive. I think the DOC officers are doing a wonderful job on all the Islands.

Your Sincerely
Eliza.





To Nic & Shona

Thankyou for teaching us about how pests affect the wildlife! I really enjoyed watching you set the traps!

Over the whole camp I really enjoyed fishing and going over to Ulva Island and seeing all the different birds and trees and plants.

Once again thank you so much for giving up your time to teach us, we really appreciated it!

We really appreciated how you gave up your time to teach us about something you really want to help with!

From Hannah
Room 6 St Gerards

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 much of our staff and contractor costs but without the generous annual sponsorship from individuals and business's it would be difficult to fund the Trust's day to day expenses including:

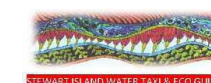
- Management expenses
- Traps
- Rat Bait
- Vehicle running costs

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

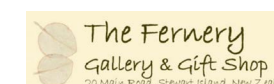
A \$250 Business Sponsor-a-Hectare entitles the business to display the SIRCET logo on their website and also have their logo displayed in SIRCET's annual report, the Environment Centre and on our website. A Business Sponsorship for SIRCET supports the restoration of our environment which in turn makes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

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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



Genera Ltd



BAY MOTEL



Pete Ross Automotive



This newsletter is produced with the support of the Southland District Council and the Community Trust of Southland.

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 a our SaH map in the Environment Centre.

STEWART ISLAND GIFT SHOP

The Stewart Island Gift Shop is a unique and charming business.

Formerly known as the Fernery, because the first owner started by selling ferns out of a wheelbarrow on the wharf, it is now owned and managed by local resident, Megan Cowley. Its range of gifts and artworks are inspired by the fauna and flora of the island. They stock pottery, woodwork, glassware, jewellery and toys. Bird books are especially popular with customers. The gift shop stocks a large number of books on the birds of the island – perfect for the bird watcher. There is also a range of books on Stewart Island, including children's books. The Stewart Island Gift shop is a treasure trove of art and photographs and is a must see for souvenirs of your trip to Stewart Island.

