

SIRCET news

March 2016

A word from our staff

Shona Sangster—Project Administrator

This quarter has been full of meetings and events, as well as plenty of interest in SIRCET's work from the many visitors to the island. We've also received some really great feedback on how wonderful the Maori medicinal gardens are looking. On the 22nd February a public meeting was held to discuss the future of the Community Native Plant nursery. SIRCET's trustees sought to put forward the benefits and issues of the nursery and to get community feedback on future options. The meeting was well attended and there was plenty of discussions, with some actions going forward agreed upon. Watch this space!

On the 12th Of March SIRCET and Environment Southland (ES) hosted the biennial Landcare networking field day. Speakers included Ali Timms—chair of ES, Lloyd Esler on the Human History of Foveaux Strait, Sarah Crump (DOC) on the Wetlands of Stewart Island and Awarua. Attendees also visited Ackers Point and Lonnekers Beach to look at the revegetation work there. Nathan Cruikshank said "The day was a huge success with 47 people attending on the day. Over the past 6 years we have only averaged 35 people attending. The fact that 47 people attended shows the interest SIRCET has created in the field of environmental education across the province."

On Friday 4th March Phill Waddington, the man who invented the DOC series traps (DOC 150, DOC 200, and DOC 250) gave a very interesting talk at DOC. Kelly and Miguel got a chance to head out with Phil earlier in the week and were shown how to calibrate the DOC 150 traps with weights as well as a bunch of tweaks and hacks. All this will lead to a higher catch rate and more humanely killed rats. And finally a huge (and belated) welcome to new Trustee Willy Gamble!

Right: Willy Gamble Below: Phill Waddington and Kelly Bunce with a trap



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.

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

www.sircet.org.nz

Kiwi monitoring update for March

from Sandy King

Monitoring of the Ackers Point kiwi continued over the summer with mixed success: the kiwi did fairly well but the monitors didn't quite keep up! Our three monitored pairs all hatched a chick, but the objective of determining chick survival after leaving the nest by attaching a transmitter to one chick wasn't realised. Matatika and Ngaio left their burrow early in the season, leaving egg shell fragments as evidence suggesting they had hatched a chick but the chick was never caught on camera and we haven't caught up with the birds in the flesh since. A trail camera caught the chick from Takiti and Tx52 (the golf course birds) many times, along with both its parents, coming and going from the burrow. Our capture attempt was abandoned after a second egg was seen in the burrow and this family has now moved to the far side of the golf course. The chick was getting bigger and spending longer out of the burrow each time the camera images were reviewed, so we can be optimistic for its survival, but may never know for sure.

The chick belonging to Kaihuka (formerly known as Tx22) and his mate was caught on camera many times with both parents and a sub-adult, which is probably a chick from last season. Camera images showed that it was spending long periods out of the burrow but returning between 5-6am - a perfect time for a stake-out! Kev Carter and Bridget Baynes, recent additions to the DOC team with the requisite kiwi handling and transmitter attachment skills, Jen Ross, and Sandy King assembled at the Ackers Point road end at 4.30am one calm fine morning, equipped with torches, catch nets, and optimism and were strategically positioned outside the burrow by 5am. On cue, the chick appeared about 5.30am; Kev's first attempt with the catch net was thwarted by low fern and it ran behind Jen who was kneeling motionless and not daring to move. What she couldn't see was the chick sitting on her boot so was surprised when Bridget brought a net down over her foot. However, because the net couldn't sit flat on the ground the chick escaped from under it and disappeared into thick fern. It looked like a fast moving fluffy coconut. We waited, hoping for a rustle in the undergrowth that would give away its position, but the chick had gone into stealth mode. A flash of movement over to the right was the last we saw of it as it sprinted into the burrow. At that point it was time to give up, and enjoy the amazing dawn chorus as we walked back. Subsequent capture attempts were dependant on Kev's availability coinciding with a fine morning, which just didn't happen. The family has now moved on from the natal burrow, with nothing to suggest the chick isn't with them.

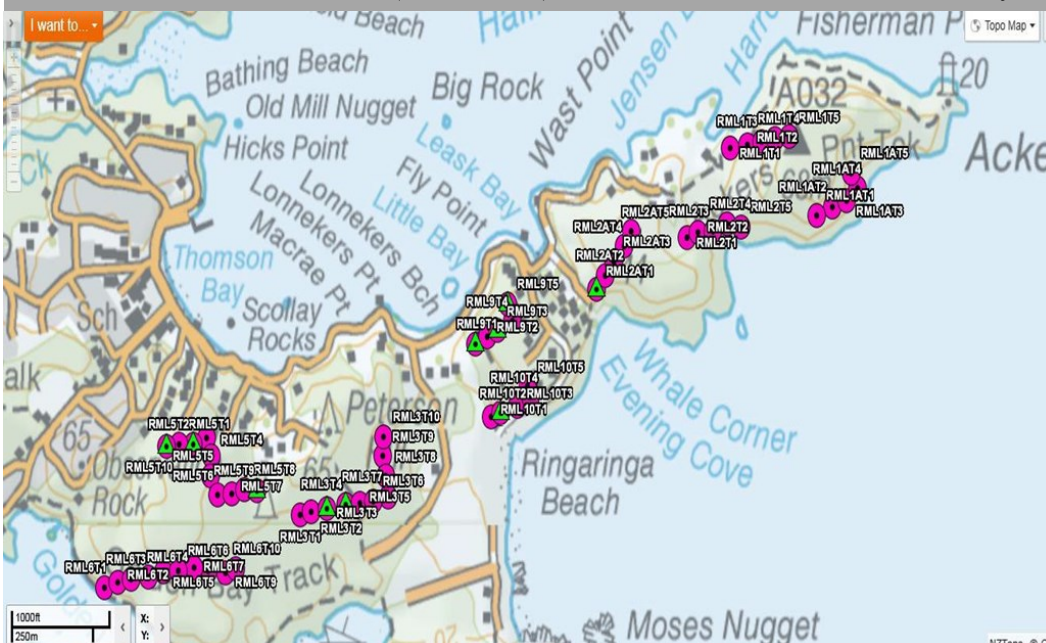
It's likely that three new kiwi have been added to our local population this season and it's timely to remind everyone to manage their pets responsibly. Ideally, keep your cats inside at night. Have your dogs under control at all times, and don't allow them to free-range – you won't know what they're up to if you do, and sign your dog up for kiwi avoidance training. Our most recent training session at Easter featured a new piece of technology, the e-kiwi, which replaces the collars we have used previously and gives a different experience for our dogs.



The new e-kiwi looks like nan's hat!

Rat Monitoring results

Below is a map of a combined result of our last two monitoring results. The pink circles represent where our monitoring tunnels are situated, the green triangles represent positive rat activity. In both December and January we got the same result of 20% in the Buffer Zone (RML 9 & 10) which is an actual result of rat activity in two out of ten tunnels, the map



below represents this with four green triangles as different tunnels were hit on the two separate occasions. We have been focusing on these 'green' areas with our rat trapping in the core and buffer zones. I will note that the tunnels with rat activity are tunnels that are situated closer to residential areas, with no rat activity being present in the bush dense areas. We have recently been giving residents in the buffer zone a new DOC 150 trap to operate on their property, it will be interesting to see if these extra traps have an effect on our future monitoring results in this area.

Update from our Pest Manager – Kelly Bunce

Summer Volunteers 2016

Well it's been a busy couple of months with visiting volunteers, we were lucky enough to have Fraser Thomason join us for a month. Fraser came to the island with his girlfriend Emma who was working with DOC for the month as part of an exchange programme, Emma is normally based with DOC in New Plymouth. With two times the manpower it was a great opportunity to get some of the 'heavier' jobs done. Miguel and Fraser worked on track maintenance, which involved getting the chainsaw in to the core zone to clear trees blocking the lines due to windfall, they also installed 20 x DOC 150 traps along the coast side of the Light house track, started removing and carrying out unserviceable Warrior Kill Possum traps and ensuring an A12 Goodnature automatic re-setting trap was placed in the vicinity of removed Warriors and also carried out rat monitoring of the entire project zone. Among various other jobs Fraser also gave time to the nursery which was especially helpful as Fraser works as a gardener in New Plymouth. Unfortunately for us Fraser and Emma returned to New Plymouth on Waitangi Weekend and since their departure Miguel is lonely and missing his new buddy!! During this time we also had the pleasure of having Alisdair Burns volunteering with us also. Alisdair is a returning superstar volunteer from the UK, he visited Stewart Island during June / July last year whilst I was on Maternity leave, with his impeccable timing he was a key player that kept the ball rolling whilst I was away. Alisdair enjoyed Stewart Island so much he returned this summer to get another dose of rat trapping before he started his University course in Otago this year. I'm glad I finally had the pleasure to meet Al and I wish him all the best for his studies.

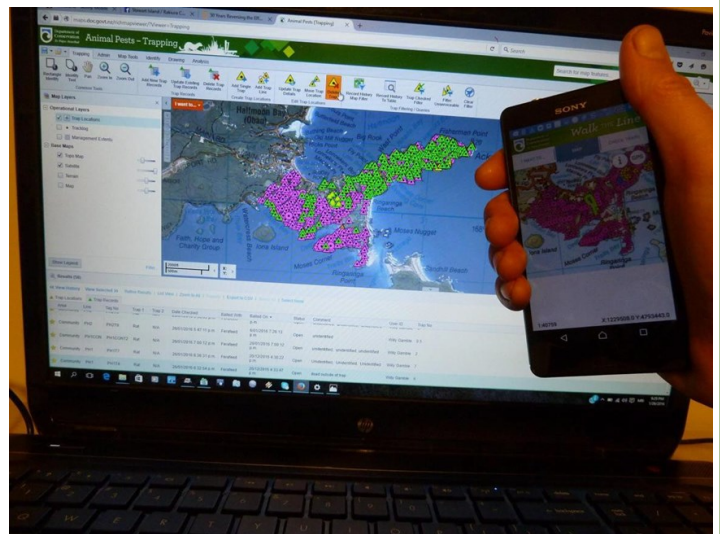
Most recent we have had both Tasha and Levi volunteering with us. Tasha and Levi are both from Canada and have been travelling around New Zealand volunteering with a number of conservation groups throughout the country.

Trapping

We have had reports of cat sightings in our core project zone at Ackers. In response we have had our live cat traps open continuously for the past month, so far we have managed to remove one

feral cat, it's a hard task dealing with a live animal but by thinking of the bird life we are saving makes the task easier. Miguel reported the birds following him and singing and dancing with happiness whilst he removed the cat!!! We will continue to focus on cat trapping and I hope to be able to report fantastic results this year. Helping us achieve this will be the installation of our ten 'auto' cat traps in to the core zone. As I have mentioned these ten intelligent cat traps are being developed by Peter Tait and will be able to be kept open for long periods of time without the requirement of daily checking. If the trap is sprung it will automatically send me a message via text to my mobile phone!

We have also started using a new and exciting data capture tool. The status of all our traps can be viewed live online. Any trapping results volunteers have given me have been entered in to this system so they can see for themselves what traps have been catching. I must admit I'm still getting my head around this new system but thanks to Willy Gamble and all his help and patience I'm getting there. The new system also has an android function so that volunteers can walk their lines and record on the spot catch data with the use of your mobile phones. Thanks to all who attended the recent training session on this new tool This will replace the requirement for volunteers of filling in monthly catch data sheets, and creates easily exportable data for analysis.



Above: New trapping tool in action

Left to right: Levi clearing a Victor trap.

Tasha walking up a rat line with the help of a rope.

Miguel in the core zone with a new A12 Possum trap



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. Contact shona@sircet.org.nz to participate

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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

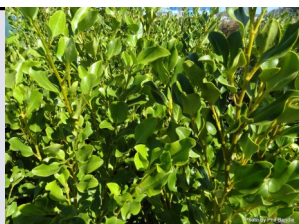
SPONSOR A HECTARE

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 programme and each hectare is available for sponsorship through this annually renewable programme. Levels of sponsorship range from \$30 for 1/2 ha to \$500 for 10 hectares, at a rate of \$50 per ha.

You will receive a certificate, our quarterly newsletter and your name on our SaH map in the Environment Centre. Contact shona@sircet.org.nz to become a sponsor

Nursery Feature

Plant Broad-leaf/Kapuka *Griselinia littoralis* Glossy *Griselinia littoralis* is great for hedges with its wavy leathery leaves. It can be grown at any height and is excellent in coastal gardens, but intolerant of prolonged wet feet and only moderately frost hardy. Prune with secateurs



This newsletter is produced with the support of the Southland District Council and the Ministry for the Environment



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

