

SIRCET news

www.sircet.org.nz

May 2015



A word from our staff

Shona Sangster (Project Administrator)

Well, the island is still buzzing from our recent brush with royalty! It was great to have His Royal Highness Prince Harry to visit and he was kind enough to take an interest in SIRCET's work when he visited to the community centre to meet representatives of local volunteer organisations and industry. He asked plenty of insightful questions about our predators, and displayed a good knowledge of NZ native birds, sharing that he would love to see a kiwi and getting a wee lesson from chairperson Di Morris on the difference between a Kaka and a Kakapo.

In other news, Kelly Bunce is off to have her baby, we wish her all the very best and look forward to welcoming the new arrival to our conservation family! In the meantime if any volunteers out there have questions or need assistance please get in touch with either Letitia McRitchie or myself. We also really need volunteers to take over some vacant rat



trap lines so if you're looking to give back to the community or just fancy the exercise to ward off those extra winter kilos please get in touch with Letitia.

We are also looking for volunteers for our night bird call count monitoring, if you are keen please get in touch with Sharon Ross.



SIRCET and trustees meeting HRH Prince Harry - credit Jess Kany

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



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SIRCET Update from our Pest Manager – Kelly Bunce

I'm Kelly Bunce; I've been visiting the Island my entire life and have been living here and working with SIRCET in the Pest Manager position since December 2014.

I've been keeping busy with rat trap lines, cat traps, The Community Native Plant Nursery and visiting School groups!

Rat catch numbers were down during the warm summer months as per past years trends, but come March with cooler weather the numbers have increased significantly –only 78 trapped rats were recorded for the month of February but that figure has jumped to 278 in March!

Since December I have been fortunate to have had a number of visitors of Stewart Island giving their time to volunteering with SIRCET.

Recently I had the pleasure of working with Cecile and Jerome, from France for three weeks in March and April. They helped me out in the Core Project area checking and re-baiting trap lines and baiting and setting cat and possum traps and also helped out with trap lines in the Community Zone. Back home both Cecile and Jerome's work careers involve assessing and reducing the Environmental impact of Civil and Construction projects in Paris. They have loved getting out of the office in Paris and getting their hands dirty in the bush on Stewart Island helping reduce the number of pests and predators that compete with our Native Plant and Bird life. I can't thank them enough for their contribution to our project; it was such a pleasure having them here.

Our most recent Visiting Volunteer was Sabine Pahl, Sabine is from Hamilton NZ. Sabine was an absolute Trooper! Sabine spent her time with SIRCET rebaiting and checking all our lines in the Community Zone that currently don't have local volunteers assigned to them, she also replaced and maintained traps that required attention and even managed to spend time helping out with the Community Native Plant Nursery. Sabine absolutely loved Stewart Island and will be returning to help out again in three years' time.

School Groups 2015!

2015 hasn't been all about trapping, I have also had the pleasure of having visiting school groups either helping out in the Community Native Plant Nursery, weeding and planting at the Lonnekens Restoration Project or joining me to check rat traps along the Light house track to Ackers Point. Every group has been a joy to have. Thank you to Queenstown Primary School, The Little Brown Kiwi Group and St Thomas's School from Winton.



Students from Queenstown Primary School helping pot up plants at the Nursery



Students from Queenstown Primary school - Learning about methods of pest control with Kelly



A student from The Little Brown Kiwi Group planting at Lonnekens.



Students from Queenstown Primary school at the Lighthouse on the Ackers Point track



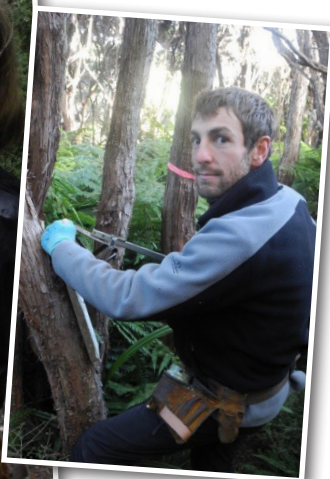
Volunteers

I would like to thank Sabine and all our volunteers – visiting and local residents for their contribution to Stewart Island and SIRCET, your efforts have been outstanding and absolutely priceless to the success of our project.

If you also would like to volunteer we have a number of Community Lines that need your help – Please contact me on 027 838 2300.



Sabine Pahl – Helping out at the Community Native Plant Nursery.
The Community Native Plant Nursery is located at Horseshoe Bay – All plants are only \$2.00 each, it's such a great way to get native plants back in to your gardens which will also attract native birds.



Cecile and Jerome trapping - Acker's Point

Our Valuable Volunteers

SIRCET relies on the contribution of volunteers and last year our wonderful volunteers contributed 3,278 hours to the project: checking rat lines, helping at the nursery, managing the trust, monitoring species and the many other tasks that contribute to making our environment that bit more special. Our volunteers come from near and far and we would like to feature a couple that have recently made a wonderful contribution.

Cécilia Mélé and Jerome Joanny volunteered with SIRCET in early 2015. Their accommodation at Ann Pullen's was sponsored by E Hayes and Sons and we would like to say thank you to them and DOC and Ann for their continued support of our valuable volunteers!

Where are you from and what were you doing before you came to Stewart Island?

France. We are environmental engineers in France, working to assess the impacts of railway infrastructure on the environment and implementing measures to avoid or reduce those impacts.

What made you come to the Island and volunteer for SIRCET?

We chose Stewart Island because it is wild, peaceful and beautiful, and we wanted to help SIRCET to kill rats, possums and feral cats to protect birds.

Your most enjoyable work experience to date?

Working together with Kelly in the beautiful scenery to kill pets.

Your most unpleasant work experience to date?

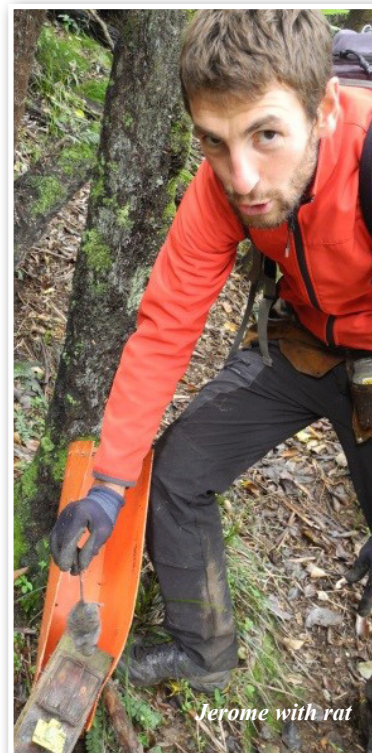
Dead rats! The smell and the maggots.....

What have you learnt during your time as a volunteer?

We learnt to work as a team, changing and building traps, and how to plant trees.

Kelly and the Trustees would like to express a huge thank you to Cécilia and Jerome. We are always looking for more volunteers and you never know what you will be doing! If dead rats are not your thing, there is lots of work to be done at the nursery, maintaining Lonnekers and weeding within the project area. All the work contributes towards the ecological restoration of Ackers, and who knows, you may just have a kiwi join you!!

If you would like to enquire about volunteering, please get in touch with us at info@sircet.org.nz



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'

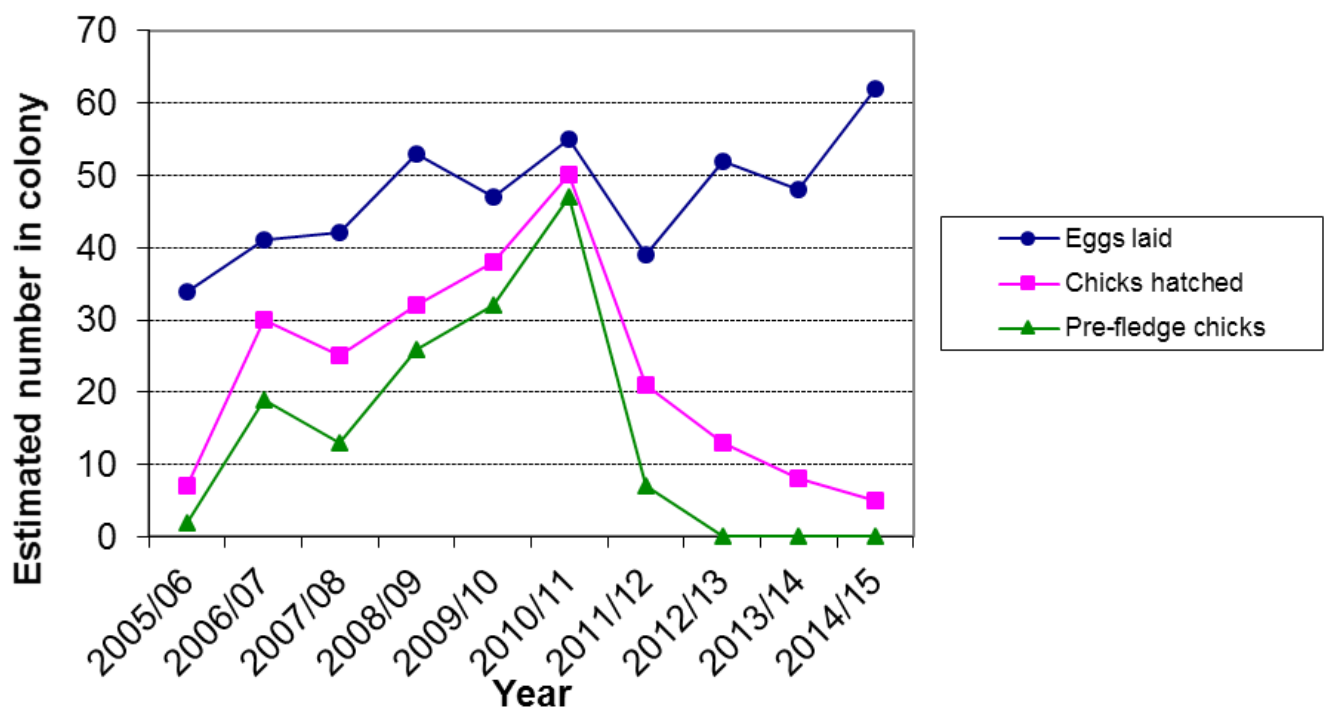
Sooty Shearwater '*Puffinus griseus*' is also known in New Zealand as 'Titi' or Mutton birds and is recorded as one of the most abundant bird species in the world with an estimated population of 20 million. Titi only breed in the temperate and subantarctic regions of the Southern Hemisphere but these 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. With such a wide ranging habitat, they can be affected by many factors, from fluctuating climatic conditions to disasters such as the earthquakes in Japan.

Sadly we have to report that no chicks have fledged from the



Ackers Point titi colony for the third consecutive season. 80 study plot burrows were investigated which contained an estimated 23 eggs. At least two chicks are thought to have hatched. There are a number of possible factors which may explain these results. Of the many factors at play, the main one that SIRCET can have an impact on is predation by pests and we will continue to work hard to reduce rat numbers. However there is one bright spot, our contractors found some prion remains, indicating that this species may be able to establish at Ackers Point.

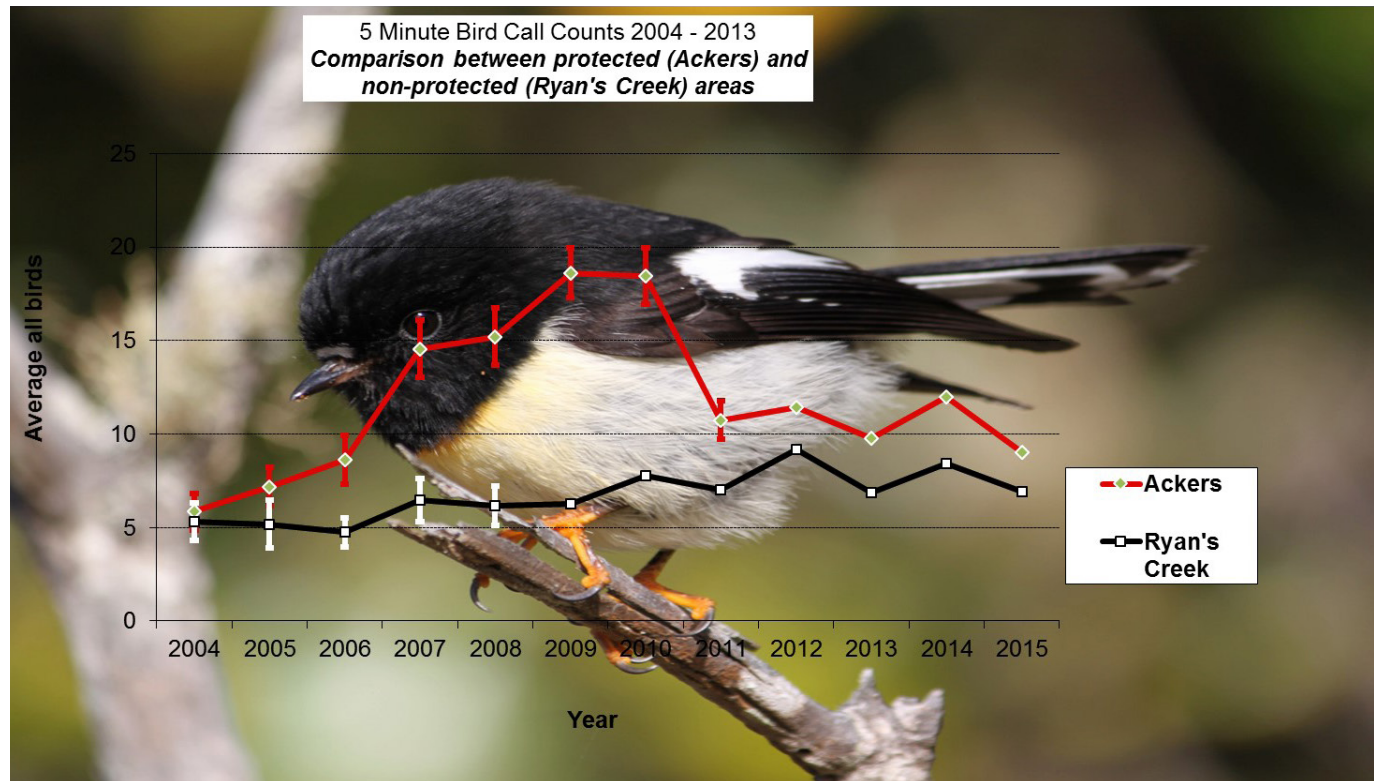
Ackers Point titi colony breeding success



5 Minute Bird Call Counts

Thanks to contractor Matt Jones who 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 larger decrease in bird numbers in the project area and a smaller decrease in the control site.

Consecutive 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.



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 Shona



THE NURSERY FEATURE PLANTS



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

Kelly 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...

OLEARIA ILICIFOLIA - Mountain holly/Hakeke



Mountain Holly is a type of tree daisy found in mountain areas from East Cape southwards.

It has long light green leaves with sharply toothed margins resembling holly, hence the name. Luckily it is nowhere near as painful to touch as holly can be! During spring it is covered in clusters of white daisies. It grows up to 2 metres and is best grown in a well-drained soil with some shade.

EARINA AUTUMNALIS - Easter Orchid, Raupeka



This is a species of orchid that is endemic to New Zealand. Its small white flowers produce a strong fragrance - a generally pleasant scent which is often compared to vanilla in nature.

The white, waxy flowers have yellow or orange markings. The panicles are up to 10cm long with many flowers 5mm across during February to May. Its stems are up to 80cm long. These are erect if short and droop down if long. Its roots are fibrous rhizomes. The shiny dark green leaves are 4-12cm long and 5-8mm wide they are widest near the base, narrowing towards the tip. It generally occurs as an epiphyte or lithophyte. Lithophytes are a type of plant that grows in or on rocks. Lithophytes feed off moss, nutrients in rain water and litter. When growing as an epiphyte it frequently grows in close association with other endemic orchid species such as *Winika cunninghamii*.

SIN KIWI MONITORING UPDATE – MAY 2015

Monitoring of the kiwi released into the Ackers Point area in 2013 continues all year round, with longer intervals between checks in the non-breeding season.

The suspected breeding season can extend from June-February and during this period we monitor more frequently to see whether the males are consistently in the same place. After laying that massive egg the female leaves the male to do most of the incubating, allowing him a few hours out each night to feed, so when a male is in the same place over a period of time during the breeding season it can be an indication that he is incubating. The behaviour of the un-named male Tx22 aroused suspicion recently as he had remained in the same place for several checks. I decided to check more frequently than required at this time of year, and to set up a camera near the burrow he was occupying, just to see what he was up to.

It turned out to be well worth the effort; the camera revealed that he was sharing his burrow with not just one, but two other kiwi.

One of these birds is obviously a female – her long bill and large size are indicators of her gender, and she is banded thus another bird from the 2013 release. However, and this is the exciting part, the third kiwi is small and unbanded and it is quite likely a chick. This is great news – although we've recorded 2 breeding events over the last 2 years, the real measure of breeding success is the survival and recruitment of the chicks into the breeding population. The other two chicks have both disappeared after about 10 days and may or may not still be alive, but this chick has survived this far and is now about half the size of its parents.



But how did this breeding event escape our notice?

Looking back over the records I found a gap in monitoring between the end of June 2014 and late September 2014 – the interval between Cherie finishing and me starting, at which time I didn't have a feel for the birds' patterns of movement.

After a few checks I became suspicious about Tx22, thinking he had been in the same area for a few weeks, but then he moved and was in a different place at each check so I thought nothing more of it. Now however, I am theorising that he began incubating in late July or August, with the chick hatching in October or November. Whether or not I'm right is neither here nor there really; the project has produced a chick which has survived about 6 months and that is a good indicator of success!



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.



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

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 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.

TE ANAU HELICOPTER SERVICES

Te Anau Helicopter Services is owned and operated by Gaven and Jennie Burgess.

They have been working in aviation in the Stewart Island and Fiordland region for over 10 years.

They are dedicated to preserving the conservation areas of New Zealand and carry out Department of Conservation work on Stewart Island as well.

Te Anau Helicopter Services have 3 helicopters which can carry out all ranges of flights including scenic flights, hunting parties, conservation work including transfer and tracking of Kakapo, Takahe and Kiwi, heavy lifting and construction, photography, wild animal management and flight training to name a few.

With hangers on Stewart and Bluff, we are pleased to support the local community.



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