

# SIRCET news

[www.sircet.org.nz](http://www.sircet.org.nz)

November 2011



Stewart Island / Rakiura  
Community & Environment Trust



for people for environment



## A word from Alina & Denise

*Another year has flown by and the SIRCET team sends warm Christmas Greetings to all our readers – we're inviting everyone to come and join us on December 3rd for a Christmas BBQ, and some sand and sunshine (fingers crossed!).*

Check out the new-look Rakiura Environment Centre on page 8 that was officially re-opened by SIRCET Chairwoman, Margaret Hopkins in October.

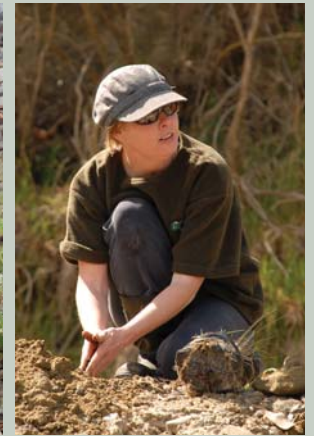
SIRCET has been out and about this Spring having attended plenty of great events such as the Stewart Island Community Group Snack & Yak, the Southland Living Legends Muck In, a Conservation Week themed Church Service, the Community Expo and another working bee at Lonnekers for a much needed spruce up.

What better way to enjoy a summer evening than a stroll out to Ackers Point to count penguins? The Little Blue Penguin is our featured creature this edition and we're looking for volunteers to help out with the annual count of Little Blue Penguins in December and sooty shearwater/ tītī monitoring over the summer, to help us determine whether the community pest control project is having an effect on these Acker's Point populations. We've now received the results from the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic's report on the vegetation there, and it would seem as though the flora of this forest is certainly benefiting from the control of rats and possums in the area.

SIRCET was again commended for its work at the recent TrustPower Community Awards when it took out the Supreme Winner Prize in the Environment and Heritage category!



Alina



Denise

Our membership and sponsorship programs have received an over-haul, resulting in some new opportunities for businesses to make a difference. The long standing Sponsor-a-Hectare program remains unchanged but sports a brand new map in the Environment Centre. Sponsorship certificates make a great Christmas gift so join in the fun, pop into the Environment Centre and select 'your' favourite hectare!

And finally, the talented and charismatic Sheila Natusch features in this issue as our Lady Painter of Rakiura. Sheila has contributed immensely to Stewart Island's (and wider New Zealand's) natural and family history records and, in this article, some of those who know her best share a few words on Sheila and her insatiable hunger for knowledge.

## SIRCET *Out and About*

### Stewart Island's Snack & Yak goes from strength to strength

*Stewart Island's second Community Group Snack & Yak was held on Saturday September 24th. Margaret Hopkins attended the event on behalf of SIRCET and heard from John Prendergast from CTOS who gave a great talk about their role in funding communities and their projects.*

He emphasised that they really like working with the Stewart Island community and supporting their projects because of the local input - both fundraising and volunteer effort. Everyone discussed the difficulties in attracting new volunteers and also 'volunteer burnout'.

A proposal was made to put out a small information directory aimed at new and seasonal residents informing them about the groups that operate, what they do and if they need volunteers. SIRCET welcomes new volunteers and also anyone who may like to become a Trustee in the future.

On November 12th a slight twist on the Snack & Yak saw the island's first Community Expo at the Stewart Island Community Centre. SIRCET's stand included information on the trust's habitat restoration projects, the native plants available at the nursery and how to get involved.

Groups from all over the island joined the expo including Search & Rescue, Civil Defense, Knit & Knatter, the Department of Conservation and many more.



**SIRCET invites your ideas and feedback**

Do you have any suggestions for improvement, require further information on joining SIRCET, or have an article of interest you would like to see featured...

Just give Alina or Denise a call on 03 2191 487 or e-mail us...

[alina@sircet.org.nz](mailto:alina@sircet.org.nz) or [denise@sircet.org.nz](mailto:denise@sircet.org.nz)

# SOUTHLAND LIVING LEGENDS MUCK-IN

***Sunday the 11th of September saw 300 Southlanders and overseas visitors descend upon Bushy Point, Otatara for the Southland Living Legends Muck-In, celebrating this year's Conservation Week.***

Living Legends is a community conservation project that coordinated 17 native tree planting projects throughout New Zealand during the Rugby World Cup 2011. Each planting project was dedicated to a regional 'Rugby Legend', and Southland's Living Legend is Kevin Laidlaw.



*Sophie planting*

Southland's Bushy Point Restoration Project venue is the Otatara Landcare Group's "forest in the making", which commenced in 2000.

Volunteers Sharon Pasco, Ann Pullen and five students from Halfmoon Bay School attended the event, and set to work planting trees, distributing fertiliser, handing out lollies and even a little babysitting! Thanks guys, you really did us proud!

Over 5,000 native trees were planted on the day, and this was achieved in less than an hour! Everyone was so keen to muck in that even the wooden stakes were placed - a job that was scheduled for the Landcare Group members at a later date – and we were

rewarded with a sausage sizzle for lunch.

Alina Thiebes also volunteered with a SIRCET display inside the large marquee. It was a wonderful opportunity to showcase the Stewart Island community's projects and to mingle and chat with other local community groups about their recent achievements, current projects and future plans.

SIRCET wishes to extend our thanks to Real Journeys for sponsoring transport, to Mark Oster (DOC) for organising the event, major sponsors Meridian Energy and Project Crimson, Linda & Ray and the team at the Otatara Landcare Trust and, to Ruud Kleinpaste (The Bugman) who was our passionate and inspirational host on the day.



*Jarden planting*

## LONNEKERS SPRUCE UP

***SIRCET celebrated Conservation Week this year with a working bee of its own on Wednesday 14th September***

Local community volunteers armed with spades and gardening gloves stuck into some much needed weeding and planting at the Lonnekers Beach revegetation site, pulling stubborn gorse and bracken, sliding over the steep weed-matted site and replacing a few plants that had perished over the winter. Thanks to all who attended – Lonnekers is looking sharp again! Weeding in the area is ongoing so if you happen to have a free minute or two when you visit the beach at Lonnekers and you feel the urge to pull out a few weeds then please help yourself!



## Conservation Week Themed Service

***A Conservation-themed Church service was held at the Stewart Island Presbyterian Church on Sunday 11th September.***

Di Morris (Department of Conservation), David Squire (Rakiura Resource Recovery Centre) and Margaret Hopkins (SIRCET Chair) were invited to speak.

Beautiful native flower arrangements were prepared for the service, and a lovely twist on the story of Noah's Ark was told – of Noah's wife, the so-called Mrs Noah – and her efforts to salvage seeds, cuttings and plants while Noah set about rescuing the animals.

Margaret spoke about SIRCET's conservation role in the Stewart Island community and of the goodwill fostered by caring community members through the projects.

Our thanks go out to Raylene Waddell and the Presbyterian Church members for hosting us on the day.



# SIRCET Southland Regional Winner of Community Award

*Volunteers are the backbone behind every New Zealand community, dedicating more than 270 million unpaid hours every year for non-profit organisations up and down the country.*

The TrustPower Community Awards are run in 24 regions around New Zealand to recognise and reward the outstanding contribution voluntary groups and organisations make in our communities.

SIRCET's significant achievements over the past 12 months was recognised at this year's presentations, held in Invercargill on 7th November, with the trust taking out the 2011 Regional Winner award and \$500 prize in the Heritage and Environment category. SIRCET volunteers were commended for "working extremely hard to protect the huge variety of native flora and fauna that call Stewart Island home".

SIRCET trustees were unable to attend this year's award ceremony however TrustPower Community Awards presenter Jessica Somerville accepted the award on behalf of the trust: "This group understands that in order for this project to achieve long term success they need to have the community onboard which they keep up to date through the monthly Stewart Island publication and their own quarterly newsletter. They also get the community involved through community workshops, social volunteering days, BBQs, education programs and by keeping their website up to date.



**The 2011 regional award winners**

As a regional Supreme Winner, SIRCET will be invited to attend the National Community Awards in 2012. Initiated in 2000, the TrustPower National Community Awards provides an opportunity for the Supreme Winners from the regional Community Awards to share ideas and experiences and to compete for the title of TrustPower National Community Awards Supreme Winner. The National Community Awards are the highlight of the Community Awards calendar, bringing together 25 regional Community Award winners to inspire and to be inspired. The host region for the 2011 TrustPower National Community Awards will be the Ashburton District from 23rd – 25th March 2012.

Congratulations to the SIRCET team, local land owners and all our volunteers, supporters and sponsors! 2011 has seen some major challenges and achievements, and Southland has proudly recognised all your hard work and dedication through this award!



"The group also maintain a community nursery which to date has supplied over 22,000 natives for replanting projects. This Trust is working incredibly hard to preserve New Zealand's unique biodiversity on Stewart Island, has set ambitious goals and is clearly achieving them. We wish them all the best in the future".

## Ackers Point forest benefits from local community pest control

*In 2004 the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic (BOP Polytech) began a long-term project on behalf of SIRCET to see what impact possums and deer are having on the vegetation in the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project area and whether our trapping is reducing the impact. Ackers Point and Iona Island are used as the study areas.*

SIRCET recently received a copy of the BOP Polytech's 2010 report: *Change in Vegetation Composition Following Pest Control at Ackers Point, Stewart Island*, by Bradley Strange. The overall findings of the report concluded that the clear increase in both the number and diversity of seedlings and saplings, as well as canopy cover species, shows that **regeneration of native plant species is increasing** following control of possums and rodents in the area.

Mr Strange noted that there was a lack of change in the quantity of palatable (tasty) fern species and attributed this to the presence of deer in the area: deer browse or deer droppings were observed at almost all study sites.

Species such as kamahi, pate and miro were all identified in 2010 in abundance. Back in 2006 they were recorded as seedlings, saplings and small densities of trees, and in 2004 very few of these species were recorded at all. As pate and miro species were all together absent as larger trees in 2004 and are now prominent, Mr Strange suggests that a change in the makeup of the forest is most certainly underway!

# Volunteers sought to help out with Penguin and Tītī monitoring

*Bird monitoring is a fantastic way to get involved! SIRCET is now seeking volunteers to assist with the following activities:*

## LITTLE BLUE PENGUIN SLOW WALK COUNTS

*Since 2005 SIRCET has been monitoring the Ackers Point Little Blue Penguin colony through slow walk counts in December each year, in an effort to get a rough measure of penguin activity over time.*

**What's involved:** 10 nights of monitoring will be spread over the month of December. From around 11pm, 30-40 minutes should be spent slowly walking the Ackers Point track, counting the number of penguins you see.

You can either join a team or (once having received some basic training from the coordinator) head out for a count on your own, you can join in on as many nights as you like.



## TĪTĪ BURROWSCOPIING

*SIRCET has been undertaking monitoring of the 'Near Threatened' Sooty Shearwater/ Muttonbird/ Tītī colony on Ackers Point since 2004. The aim of annual monitoring is to gauge the response of this colony to the community pest control operation in the area, and therefore consider whether this colony of Tītī will be able to recover on its own, or whether a transfer should be considered.*

**What's involved:** Burrowscoping for egg lay, egg hatch and pre-fledge will be carried out in December, February and March respectively, for around 4 days each month.

This involves assisting the coordinator with identifying the burrows,



operating the burrowscope and its camera and helping to record eggs or birds seen. A total burrow count will also be carried out in January, contact Alina for more information.

## Christmas BBQ

*Christmas is nearly upon us once again!  
This year SIRCET's Annual Christmas BBQ is set for  
SATURDAY 3RD DECEMBER, 12 NOON – 2PM AT LEE BAY.*

A sausage sizzle lunch will be provided and you may like to bring a picnic chair or blanket, a hat and some sunscreen.

Everyone is welcome, so come and join us for a snack, some sand & sunshine!





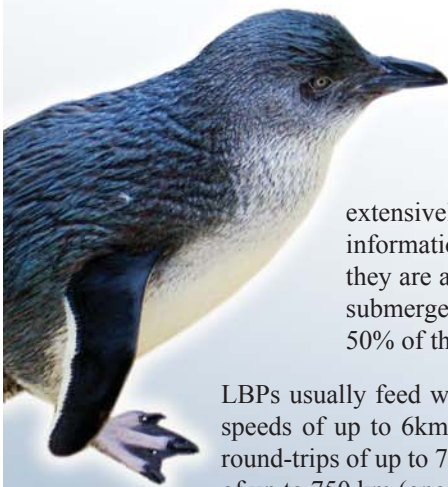
# The world's smallest penguin

## *The Little Blue Penguin*



*The Little Blue Penguin (LBP) (Eudyptula minor), with their slate-blue plumage, are also known in Maori as Kororā, and can be found in many places around New Zealand and Southern Australia.*

It is the world's smallest penguin, usually growing to between 25 and 33 cm tall and weighing a little over 1 kilogram. They only come ashore under the cover of darkness and live underground in burrows.



### *Feeding*

These birds feed by hunting fish, squid and other small sea animals, for which they travel and dive quite extensively. The use of dataloggers has provided information of the diving behaviour of LBPs - they are able to dive as deep as 20m and remain submerged for as long as 60 seconds, although 50% of their dives go no deeper than 2m.

LBPs usually feed within 25km of the coast and can reach speeds of up to 6km/hr underwater. They may make daily round-trips of up to 75km although long winter feeding trips of up to 750 km (one way) have been recorded.

### *Call*

LBPs make a variety of calls to keep in contact at sea (barks), declare territory and advertise for mates (brays) and to let the neighbours know they are home (croon). The only call chicks make is a high pitch peeping as they beg for food. Check out

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Little\\_Penguin\\_\(Eudyptula\\_minor\).ogg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Little_Penguin_(Eudyptula_minor).ogg) to hear LBPs in the wild calling.

### *Breeding*

LBPs in New Zealand have rather variable breeding seasons. The core egg-laying period for most of New Zealand is September to November, and only one clutch is laid. In good food years, LBPs in Otago will egg-lay from May to February, with many pairs raising two clutches of chicks.

Usually two eggs are laid and are incubated for 36 days, with both parents sharing the incubation and feeding duties. The chicks are guarded by one parent for the first 2-3 weeks, after which both parents must go to sea to keep up the supply of fish. Chick growth is rapid, with adult weight (1kg) being achieved in 4-5 weeks. Chicks usually fledge at 8 weeks and are independent from then on.

LBPs usually breed for the first time at 2-3 years of age. Long term partnerships are the norm, but divorce is not uncommon. There is a high rate of juvenile mortality, but individuals can reach up to 25 years of age.

LBPs are very faithful to their home site. Chicks will often return to within a few metres of where they were raised and once settled in an area never move away.





## Predators

Before the arrival of man, marine mammals were the only mammalian predators of penguins in New Zealand. Rats were the first mammalian predators introduced (accidentally) and then several more were deliberately introduced such as cats, in an effort to control rats and mice.

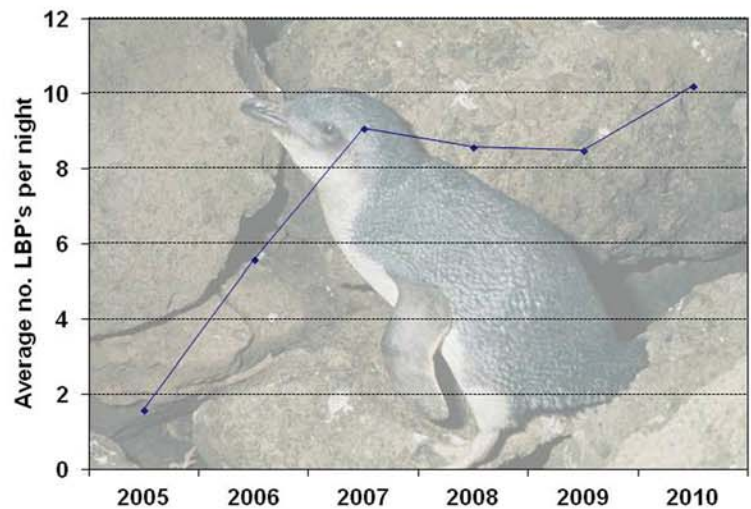
Predation by introduced mustelids (ferrets, stoats, and weasels) has decimated many mainland colonies. In publicly accessible areas, dogs have been major predators. At Chatham and Stewart Islands, the southern brown skua also attacks blue penguins returning from the sea.

## Conservation status

The population and range of the species has been declining in areas not protected from predation, resulting in the Department of Conservation ranking the LBP as "Lower risk - near threatened". Where predator control is in place, populations have been stable or increasing. Nest boxes have been useful in some habitat restoration efforts.

Sources: Penguin.net.nz, Wikipedia.com

Average number of little blue penguins encountered during 10 slow walk counts



## LBP Monitoring - a tale of trial and error

Several different methods of monitoring the LBPs at Acker's Point have been trialed by SIRCET over the years, starting with five nest boxes placed in 2005.

The artificial nests were never taken on by our LBPs, and Kari Beaven, then Species Project Manager, concludes that this may have been due to the environment, "the nest boxes method was taken from a successful program in Omaru, where the LBP habitat was sheer cliffs and hard soil – the penguins there loved the nest boxes in comparison. Although here on Stewart Island, our environment is quite different, the nest sites are easily accessible and the soil is easily dug – there didn't seem to be a need for the boxes."

Nest monitoring, using a burrowscope camera, was also trialed, although this method proved very time consuming.

In the end, the current method of 'slow walk counting' was shown to be the best use of time, and since 2005, has effectively shown the bigger changes in this population over time, rather than the more fickle seasonal changes. (See the graph above)







*More than two years after the start of a total re-haul SIRCET's new-look Rakiura Environment Centre was officially re-opened on 15th October when around 35 guests attended a re-launch drinks & nibbles event. Despite some hiccups with mounting the new information panels, everyone enjoyed checking out the new look over a glass of wine and some local Stewart Island fare!*

The new display panels (see below) feature information on what makes our local flora and fauna so unique, the threats posed by introduced pests, and how the Stewart Island community is protecting our irreplaceable natural assets through the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project (HMBHRP), the Native Community Nursery, Revegetation Projects and Community Education.

White boards display recent monitoring and trapping progress, coming events and activities and information on how to get involved, while the new Sponsor-a-Hectare map offers a bird's-eye view of the 210ha project area. 6 ½ further hectares were sponsored on the night of the re-launch with \$320 going directly to the HMBHRP projects! New sponsors had a ball selecting their 'sections' on the new map with 'prime' sites such



**Margaret (Chair) officially re-opens the REC**

of the 10 available new automatic kill possum traps was also sponsored. The event was meant to be an opportunity for SIRCET to show our thanks, and instead the unstoppable generosity of local and off-island community members shone through once again...thanks everybody for making the night such a success!

The SIRCET trustees would like to take this opportunity to extend a huge thanks to all our sponsors, supporters and local and visiting international volunteers who, without their phenomenal support, this new centre would not have been possible.

Special thanks go to the Community Trust of Southland, Forest & Bird, Donna & Gloria at



**Display Panels**

as the Acker's Point tip and Acker's Stone Cottage quickly being snapped up. And with the launch of the new Business Sponsorship Program (see page 12), the 5th



**Bevan selects "his" section and becomes a new sponsor**

Southland District Council and to Glowing Sky for their continued generosity in donating the space. Thanks to Gary 'Jed' Lewis for the





electrical work, Ken Jones for donating concrete sealer and advice, Margaret & Colin Hopkins for donating paint, Jill Skerrett & Richard Wilson at the 4Square Supermarket (Ship to Shore) for all the tools, water, advice and for providing a delicious lunch during one of the long working bees! Thanks also to all our volunteers who helped out with sanding and painting, Jarod, Grim and Jed for putting their heads together on the panel mounting issues, Bruce Ford & Graham Okey for donating the fill for the hole in the floor, DOC for

## The REC through the ages...



*Teesh & Sharon*



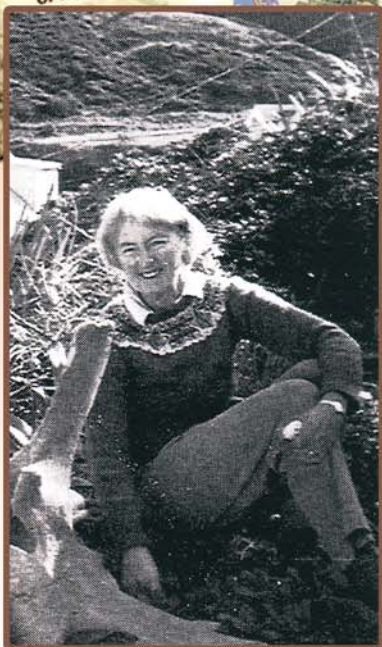
*Wendy & Ann*

donating the lovely aerial photograph featured in the Centre, Claire Kilner for coordinating the upgrade, Alina Thiebes for volunteering to finish it off and to the Stewart Island community for all the unwavering support and encouragement. We hope we haven't forgotten anyone from our long list of helpers and welcome all to come and enjoy your new Environment Centre!



**PROJECT IN PROGRESS**





Sheila Natusch

## Lady Painters of Rakiura

*Sheila Natusch (nee Traill) was born in Invercargill on 14th February 1926 and raised on Stewart Island where her father, Robert Henry (Roy) Traill (1892–1989), grandson of the German missionary Johann Wohlers, was ranger for 33 years. Sheila says of Stewart Island: “The Island was a lovely place to grow up, natural history was all around me, and it’s a wonderful place for future naturalists.”*

She was educated firstly at the Halfmoon Bay School, Stewart Island where Sheila says she received “a good grounding in education”, and then at Southland Girls High School and the University of Otago where she graduated Master of Arts (1949).

A writer and freelance illustrator, Sheila has also worked as a school teacher and library assistant. She has written and published more than twenty books on a wide variety of subjects, many of them relating to natural history and the history of southern New Zealand (particularly Stewart Island), reaching considerable popular audiences by the vigorous clarity with which she communicates detailed research information, often enhanced by her illustrative skills.

Her early books include *Native Rock* (1967) and *New Zealand Mosses* (1969), but she turned increasingly to historical topics, her biography of her ancestor, the Ruapuke pioneer Brother Wohlers (1969) winning the Hubert Church award, followed by *On the Edge of the Bush: Women in Early Southland* (1976).

One biographer claims her best-known book is *Hell and High Water* (1977, 1992), the story of the German mission established in the Chatham Islands in 1843, “full of unexpected human detail and pithy narratorial comment”, although Sheila herself would place *On the Edge of the Bush* or *The Cruise of the ‘Acheron’* (1978) as her most well-known. The latter is “equally strong in narrative and research documentation” and



is about the British survey vessel in New Zealand waters 1848–51. One of her more recent books is *Roy Traill of Stewart Island* (1991).





Sheila has done some beautiful paintings of orchids and other native flowers, as well as portraits and numerous sketches of New Zealand wildlife and scenery. Her mother Dorothy Traill was also an artist as well as her grandmother Mrs Moffett.

Stewart Islander Nancy Schofield, a cousin of Sheila's, talks about Sheila's hunger for knowledge "As a child,



Sheila talked a lot to older people – adults – getting information while the rest of us played, and now we're all so grateful for all the family history she has accumulated."

Stewart Island local and life-long friend Elaine Hamilton describes Sheila as a "hardy soul" who still swims at 85 years of age! "Sheila is an all-rounder, lively

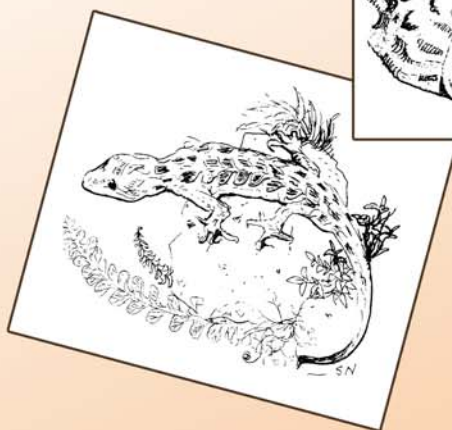
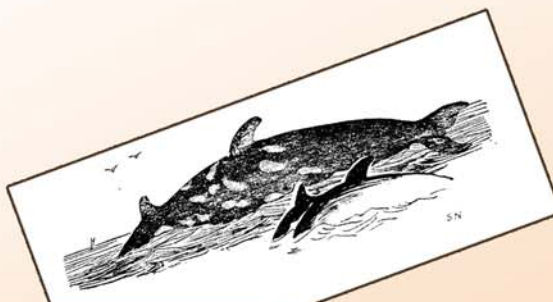
and never daunted by anything. She has contributed such a lot to New Zealand, she is a wonderful person who has been a definite asset and done a great service to Stewart Island recording things... she deserves a medal!"

Sheila married the engineer Gilbert Natusch in 1950. A Stewart Islander of German missionary ancestry, Sheila now lives in Wellington, and is still a full-time writer and illustrator.



### *Some of Sheila's Stewart Island books include:*

- *An Island Called Home*, 1992
- *Brother Wohlers*, 1969
- *The Natural World of the Traills*: an investigation into some of the 19th century naturalists of a particular family in Scotland and the colonies, 1995
- *A Naturalist and a Gentleman*: Charles Traill of Ulva, 1826–1891, 1999
- *Roy Traill of Stewart Island His Kith and Kin*, 1991
- *Rugged Shores*: Foveaux Strait settlements of the Roaring Forties. 1840–1850, c2000
- *Stewart Island*, 1967
- *Moturau Moana*, 1956
- *Stewart Is: a souvenir*, 1984
- *Stewart Island*, 1962, 1967, 1973 (with Seaward, N.S)



*Tui featured on the cover of an unpublished booklet titled 'Birds', created by Sheila for Nancy Schofield's children some 40 years ago. Nancy's grandchildren also enjoyed the booklet*





## SIRCET SPONSORSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

*SIRCET has recently reviewed its sponsorship and membership options and some changes have been made to bring us in line with similar charities involved in habitat restoration.*

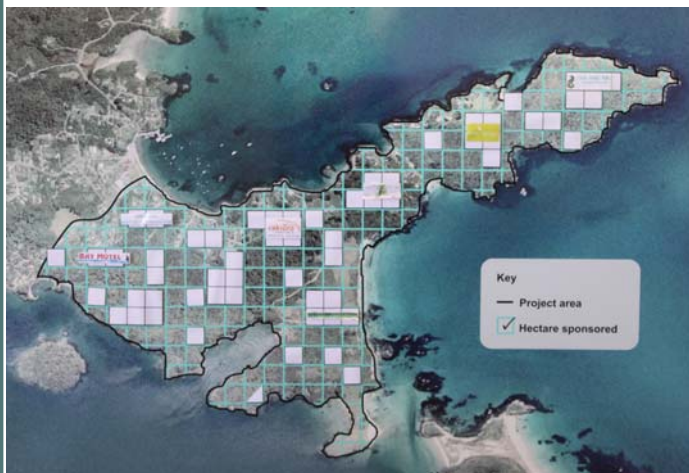
### SPONSOR A HECTARE

***SIRCET's Sponsor-a-Hectare (SaH) program, which began in 2005, bridges the gap between volunteer time and projects and equipment that need to be financed.***

The 210ha 'Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project' area is protected by SIRCET and each hectare is available for "purchase" through the annually renewable Sponsor-a-Hectare program. Levels of sponsorship range from \$30 for ½ ha to \$500 for 10 hectares.

Features of this program remain unchanged except for the introduction of the new SaH map which was unveiled at the recent Rakiura Environment Centre re-launch, and features which hectares have already been snapped up – 57.5 hectares are currently sponsored but we still have 152.5 hectares to go!

So if you are interested in becoming part of the program or making a gift to someone who has enjoyed the island please get in touch or check out our website [www.sircet.org.nz](http://www.sircet.org.nz). Sponsorship certificates make a wonderful Christmas gift and all donations are 100% tax deductible!



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

### VEHICLE SPONSORSHIP PACKAGE

See your company logo displayed on the SIRCET vehicle, and receive all the other sponsor benefits, such as the quarterly newsletter, VIP invitations to special events, and your company acknowledged as a major sponsor in the environment centre, on the SIRCET website and at on- and off-island events.



Cost: \$2,000 per year

### FRIENDS OF SIRCET

Subscribe and become a 'Friend of SIRCET' member by making an annual \$25 donation to the Trust.

Donations go towards funding of equipment needed to continue vital projects such as pest control. You'll be added to our mailing list to receive an electronic copy of our quarterly newsletter, plus invitations to workdays and special events.

### BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP

Financial assistance from businesses plays a fundamental role in helping SIRCET continue its important work and a range of opportunities are now available to businesses to show their support:

***Become a Business Member or Business Sponsor-a-Hectare Sponsor.*** Businesses that subscribe to our annually renewable Business Membership will be entitled to display the new purpose-designed SIRCET Business Sponsor logo. Your company's support will be acknowledged in the Rakiura Environment Centre, on the SIRCET website and at event displays, and (if joining the SaH Program) your logo will be displayed in the Centre on the Sponsor-a-Hectare map. You'll also receive a Business Sponsor Certificate, our quarterly newsletter updating you on current projects and monitoring results, and VIP invitations to special events and field days.

Cost: \$250 per year

### SPONSOR-A-POSSUM TRAP



SIRCET is now seeking sponsors to help us purchase the last of our ten new automatic, humane possum traps. These traps will dramatically reduce the amount of time and volunteer-power needed to undertake possum control in the project area. Thanks to those businesses and individuals who have already sponsored the first five traps!

Cost: \$167.30 (incl. GST)

#### Contacting us

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[alina@sircet.org.nz](mailto:alina@sircet.org.nz)

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