

SIRCET news

www.sircet.org.nz

September 2011



Celebrating
Volunteer Awareness Week

A word from Alina & Denise



Alina



Denise

This edition we celebrate Volunteer Awareness Week and pay homage to volunteers of a SIRCET past with a look at what they're up to now.

The hard work of SIRCET volunteers over the past 12 months was recognised recently with a Highly Commended Award from the Southland Environment Awards.

The Rakiura Environment Centre upgrade is now complete and you're invited to the re-launch here on Stewart Island in October.

The SIRCET crew went Out & About with this year's Garden Bird Survey and held a Trapping Brush Up workshop in the war against increasing rat numbers. Denise and local volunteers have been working hard to bring these numbers back down, and with another round of monitoring due for September, we keep our fingers crossed in the hope that all the hard work is paying off!

Our kiwi, weka and morepork call count results are in and, while the monitoring drew a dismal picture of the estimated number of kiwi around Halfmoon Bay, recent sightings by Stewart Island locals are drawing a different picture! Check out local accounts on page 9. SIRCET are delighted to report a win for funding to continue the monitoring program into 2012. This year's 5 minute forest bird call counts are also in.

As always, please feel free to get in touch with any questions or comments.

Alina and Denise

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 or denise@sircet.org.nz

About us

The Stewart Island/ Rakiura Community and Environment Trust (SIRCET) is a non-profit organisation formed in 2002 by a group of Stewart Islanders enthusiastic about protecting and enhancing the environment and community of Stewart Island.

The Trust instigates and promotes local projects that support these goals.

SIRCET's main project is the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project which 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. Trapping is the primary form of pest control.

The Trust also carries out bird monitoring in this area, which has shown an increase in birds over time. Weka have been released successfully and further bird re-introductions are planned.

SIRCET is able to carry out its work through the hard work of volunteers, and with sponsorship from the community and local businesses, DOC, Environment Southland, and funders such as the Community Trust of Southland, World Wildlife Foundation and Biodiversity Funds.



The world is hugged by the faithful arms of volunteers.

Terri Guillemets

Introducing Trustees and Employees



SIRCET TRUSTEES AND EMPLOYEES FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, Denise Hayes (Pest Manager), Jules Retberg, Letitia McRitchie (Treasurer), Jo Learmonth, Jim Barrett, Margaret Hopkins (Chair) and Alina Thiebes (Secretary and Project Administrator)



Rakiura Environment Centre

For people - for environment

You're invited to:

The Rakiura Environment Centre Re-launch

After a phenomenal effort by our volunteers, supporters and sponsors over the last year, SIRCET's new Rakiura Environment Centre is now complete, and we'd like to extend a warm invitation to all to attend our re-launch drinks & nibbles.

Saturday 15 October
4:30-7pm,
The Centre on Elgin Terrace,
Stewart Island, next to the Glowing
Sky t-shirt shop.
*For any questions, please contact
Alina, see you there!*

SIRCET *Out and About*

TRAPPING BRUSH-UP WORKSHOP

On the 25th of June we celebrated Volunteer Awareness Week with a Trapping Brush-Up Workshop through the beautiful Fuschia Walk, Stewart Island, followed by afternoon tea and a natter about what a huge contribution New Zealanders make to various environmental groups each year.

Denise helped us brush up on some tried and tested rat trapping techniques and also filled us in on some new tricks she's picked up

from specialists in the field. We discovered how to spot rat sign like a pro, where to place traps for maximum efficiency, and the importance of changing our bait types regularly. With another round of rat monitoring on the cards for September, our fingers are crossed that the increased effort of volunteers has paid off!



Volunteers learning how to get maximum spring out of their traps



Maintaining traps with lanolin spray



What to watch out for – rat burrow



Alina Thiebes and David Squire representing SIRCET and the Rakiura Resource Recovery Centre respectively, at the awards ceremony in Invercargill.

SIRCET AWARDED HIGHLY COMMENDED AWARD - Southland Conservation Awards

Southland's environmental champions were honoured at the sixteenth Southland Environment Awards held in Invercargill on Wednesday 6 July. Over 320 people turned out to celebrate the achievements of a diverse range of nominees from all over the region. The awards were organised by Environment Southland to recognise the good work being done – often behind the scenes and voluntarily – by a multitude of people who are committed to conserving and enhancing the region's natural resources.

Stewart Island's Rakiura Resource Recovery Centre received a Highly Commended award in the Commercial Category, for their work in recycling.

Oraka-Aparima Runaka took out the Community Groups category for their long-running project to restore habitat and return native species to Rarotoka / Centre Island. The Stewart Island / Rakiura Community and Environment Trust (SIRCET) also received a Highly Commended award in this category.

A big thanks to the SIRCET volunteers, sponsors, supporters, landowners, employees and trustees for their various contributions to this achievement, to Donna Hawkins (Southland District Council) and Michele Poole (Environment Southland) for organising the event, the judges, the New Zealand Aluminium Smelters for sponsoring this category's awards, and Real Journeys for sponsoring transport for Alina Thiebes to represent SIRCET on the night.

GARDEN BIRD SURVEY

The annual national Garden Bird Survey was held between the 25 June and 3 July.

New Zealanders were invited to watch birds in their gardens, and record the highest number of each species they saw or heard at any one time over a 1 hour period.

The Survey was established by Landcare Research, in collaboration with Forest & Bird and the Ornithological Society to help build up a picture of how both native and introduced birds are faring in our gardens over the years.



Our native Tui are on the increase



The preliminary results are in, you can check them out at <http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/>. You can also view overseas countries' reports to see how we compare!

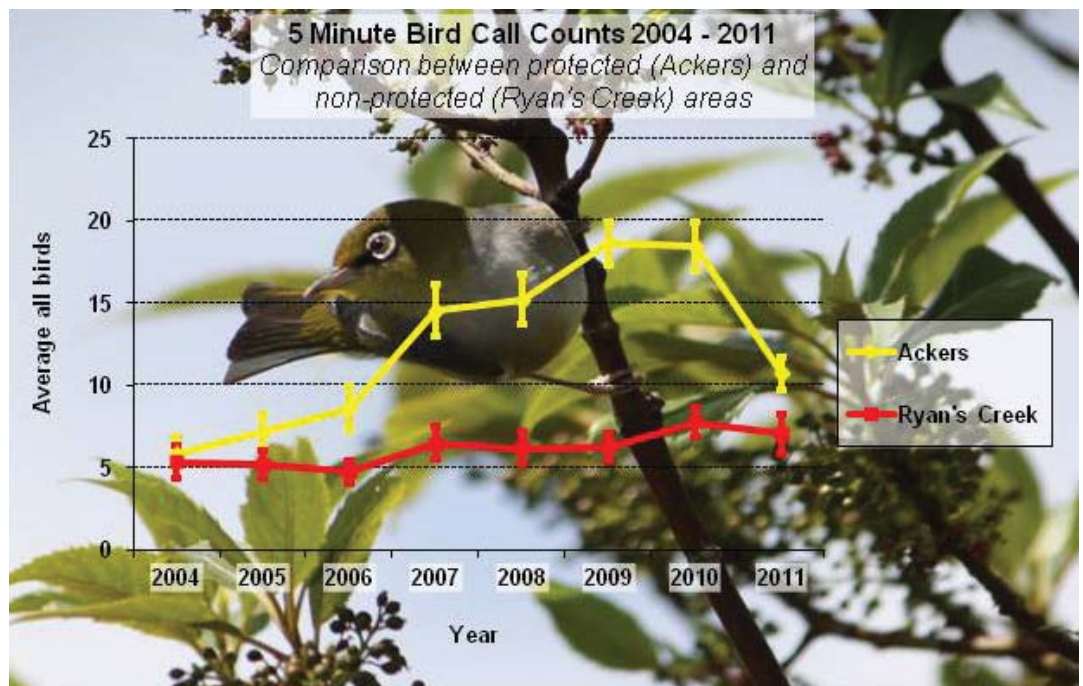
5 MINUTE FOREST BIRD CALL COUNT RESULTS

5 minute bird counts were the first form of monitoring of the success of the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project.

This year's call counts were carried out by contractor Matt Jones. The results show a significant drop in the number of birds, especially at Ackers Point where a drop of almost 50% on 2010 numbers were recorded.

Department of Conservation Ranger for Biodiversity, and SIRCET Trustee Letitia McRitchie says, "High rat numbers over the last two years may have impacted on bird numbers at Ackers. With ongoing pest control and hopefully no more rat plagues for a couple of years, the birds would be expected to soon bounce back.

"However, we don't feel that these results reflect a true significant decline in bird numbers at Ackers, rather it shows the possible influence of a new observer conducting the counts for the first time since the project began. Results can vary widely between different observers and we believe that a few years of



monitoring carried out by the new observer will reflect the true bird numbers at Ackers."

Staff, volunteers and visitors to Ackers are still seeing and hearing lots of birds, especially tui and bellbird. With spring fast approaching the birds are becoming more vocal as they set up their breeding territories and its getting noisy out there!

CORRECTION

SIRCET would like to make a correction to the Titi monitoring results as reported in the last edition of SIRCET News (May-June 2011 edition).

Titi survival rates were incorrectly reported as having reached 100%. While this is ultimately our goal, and we're working hard towards it! the correct survival rate reached in the 2010/11 season was 85%, a notable improvement of 17% on 2009/10. We hope to reach 100% this season!

Volunteer Awareness Week



Volunteer Awareness Week was celebrated throughout New Zealand in June. It was a great time for volunteer groups all over the country to celebrate their recent achievements, and to strategise over the challenges ahead.

Did you know?

- There are 1,300 non-profit organisations working in the environment sector in New Zealand
- They employ approximately 1,020 people
- 92.4% of these groups rely entirely on volunteers to maintain their operations
- Almost 20% of their income comes from membership, donations and grants
- In 2007 more than 6,000 volunteers contributed approximately 19,000 work day equivalents of voluntary work on conservation in NZ, valued at over \$2.1m
- Volunteers contributed over 2,000 hours to SIRCET projects last year alone!



Where ARE THEY NOW?

Our volunteers tell us they get a lot out of being involved with SIRCET: they make friends, learn new skills, have fun, make a difference by giving something back to the community and they pursue their passion. This edition we pay homage to employees and volunteers of a SIRCET past and they share with us where they are now.

Kari Beaven

"I left SIRCET to become a mum, and because I felt it was time to let another project manager take things further. Since then I've had a gorgeous baby boy, who has grown into an enthusiastic two year old, fascinated with birds, insects, flowers, worms and all things outdoors!

I'm still working in conservation, in a private partnership which contracts out our time for advice, project management and specific species or pest management skills. We've managed to translocate

rifleman and brown creeper back to the main Stewart Island, and are looking at sea bird species amongst others. I manage staff and teach volunteers specific skills needed to help in these areas. I still volunteer myself, sitting on the Ulva Island Trust, as well as showing Lyall how to take care of the native plantings we put in at Harrold's Bay as a part of a SIRCET project years ago. Lyall also helped us monitor morepork, kiwi and weka this year for SIRCET's bird counts.

I've continued work as a freelance guide on Ulva Island and around the bay and I sit on the health committee, search and rescue, the community garden and am involved with a



Kari with Lyall and a Quokka in Australia

couple of national groups. I love my life, I love having a son and all the delight that goes with seeing the world through a child's eyes, and I love that I can be proud of our place in caring for this world for our mokopuna."

Jan West

Jan was a Trustee and employee with SIRCET during its first years on Stewart Island as a Mentor and then field assistant, and loved working with the crew involved at

the time, such as Kari Bevan, Sandy King, Jim Barrett, Chris Visser and Gary 'Jed' Lewis. Jan is now living in Invercargill and is completing a 3-year course in Midwifery which she's finding "very full on!"

Jan relished in gathering "proof that what we were doing was being effective". But her favourite aspect was the "pure diversity of the people involved – the attributes they brought

to the group. There was a real sense of community pride". Jan found the most challenging part of being a trustee was the complexities that SIRCET was involved with at the time, "it was a real time of learning for the Trust, making sure we were creating the correct legal basis for the Trust to work under. And there were also challenges with the volunteers, there were very diverse backgrounds but we were all focusing on the one same outcome. Learning the skills each person could contribute, and getting those to all work together in a robust structure – that was challenging."

"I look forward to seeing the Trust achieve what was set out years ago – how close are we to seeing Saddleback/ Tieke in our back yards?"

Claire Kilner



Claire Kilner

Claire, who was also an employee as well as a volunteer, recently left Stewart Island to pursue further study in Wildlife Management University of Otago in Dunedin. "We get to learn all sorts of interesting things such as how some NZ species are under threat from their own genes (clue - inbreeding is bad!), sustainable harvests, statistical modeling of populations, and how to write a submission to a minister. We are learning about the challenges of planning conservation – how do you choose which species to manage with limited resources?"

"I feel so lucky to have worked with SIRCET, it gave me a really good grounding in the realities of conservation and makes the book learning much more relevant. I am enjoying being in Dunedin and catching up with old friends, but I miss the Island, I keep pictures at my desk so that I can look at them when the essays get too much!"

Ronnie Waddell

We said a fond farewell to Ronnie when he sadly passed away last year. Wife Raylene adoringly shares some of Ronnie's anecdotes on his career as a SIRCET volunteer: "A favourite trick of Ronnie's, when out checking his rat trap beat, was to sidle up to unsuspecting tourists and startle them with the casual observation that he was the village rat trapper. And in an interview on National Radio about living on Stewart Island, Ronnie made the comment that he was a volunteer rat catcher and occasional preacher at Oban Presbyterian Church, Ronnie would say "but which activity better serves humankind only the Good Lord knows!"

Kari Bevan speaks of Ronnie's staunch dedication: "Ronnie was an amazing volunteer, out there every single week for two hours, he set aside that time and committed to it. He said he hated the thought of killing rats, or anything at all, but the alternative was even nastier!"



Ronnie Waddell

Bevan Mudie

Bevan worked with SIRCET through 2007 as the Pest Control Manager, before moving on to take a position with Stewart Island Experience. Bevan hosts evening guided walks to the Ackers Point lighthouse and Ackers Cottage, where little blue penguins and Titi returning ashore to their nesting sites are often spotted. Bevan relishes the opportunity to share his knowledge with visitors about Stewart Island's unique natural heritage. He tells visitors of the work local residents and SIRCET are undertaking to preserve the rare birdlife and they are encouraged to help check the rat traps along the way. \$5 per adult is generously contributed directly to SIRCET.



Bevan

Bevan says the most rewarding aspect of his job is, "knowing that I'm contributing to the Island community: we came here to enjoy the physical environment of the place. It can be easy to come to a place like this and just take, but this is my way of giving something back". Part of Bevan's job is to contribute to the local pest control and to promote local conservation efforts. He points out that Stewart Island has an extraordinary rate of local involvement: "10% of the community here contributes to conservation projects in one way or another. If this rate of involvement were seen in Auckland, it would amount to 100,000 Aucklanders!" Bevan feels that the biggest challenge in contributing on a volunteer basis is finding the time, but it's worth it, "it's important to express my personal experience".

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Di Morris

"I had been volunteering with SIRCET for several years with my children assisting in rat removal, (a great way I think for children to become involved) when a job vacancy came up as Pest Control Manager. This was different to anything else I had done in the past yet encompassed many of my skills and I was lucky enough to secure the position. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with SIRCET. I feel very privileged to have worked alongside like-minded volunteers and their energy and enthusiasm was infectious. A real highlight of the job was the continual learning that was happening in the field with regards to trapping techniques. It was a great moment when one of my traps managed to knock off two rats in one hit! The hard work in the rain, hail, sun and snow was all worth it for the monitoring tunnels that showed numbers of rats were continuing to slowly come down. We still had a long way to go before the re-introduction of our threatened birds was viable but there was still hope!"

"I am currently working at the Rakiura National Park Visitor Centre and thoroughly enjoying working once more with visitors to the Island who come to look and learn about beautiful Rakiura."

Kiwi, Weka & Morepork/ Ruru *Count Results*

SIRCET's first round of monitoring of Kiwi, Weka and Morepork/Ruru was completed in June.

This monitoring was carried out with the support of the BNZ Save the Kiwi trust. Keen volunteers spent their evenings sitting in the dark, waiting to document the different calls. Contractor Cherie Hemsley trained the volunteers and collated the results.

Eight call stations were set up to monitor the birds, four inside the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project (HMBHRP) area, and four outside of it, to act as a comparison. Each site was monitored four times over approximately four weeks.

While the number of Ruru calls heard was high, with five calls at both the Back Road station and the Motorau Gardens station, the number of Weka and particularly Kiwi calls heard was low. Only one

Kiwi was heard calling during the monitoring period. Cherie notes that this low result is not in line with anecdotal evidence from local residents, who say that Kiwi calls are common around their homes.

Weka were only heard calling inside the restoration area, but morepork calls were more frequent outside the area. The single kiwi call was also heard outside the restoration area. While these results are disappointing a number of factors are involved, including site selection and comparability and the Stewart Island weather!

The table below shows the number of calls heard at each of the eight stations, with blue representing the Restoration area stations, and green representing the Control stations.

HMBHRP AREA					CONTROL AREA			
	Harold's Bay	Trail Road	Deep Bay	Obs. Rock	Ryan's Creek	Back Road	Mapau Rd	Motorau Gardens
KIWI	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
RURU	3	0	1	2	4	5	4	5
WEKA	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	0

MOREPORK: New Zealand's native owl

In Māori tradition, the morepork or ruru (Ninox novaeseelandiae) was often seen as a watchful guardian.

As a bird of the night, it was associated with the spirit world. Its occasional high, piercing call signified bad news, such as a death, but its more common 'ruru' call heralded good news. A number of sayings referred to the birds' alertness. One saying warned an enemy that they were being watched:

Etia anō āku mata me te mata-ā-ruru e tīwai ana

Me te mata kāhu e paro noa rā kai te tahora!

My eyes are like morepork eyes turning from side to side,

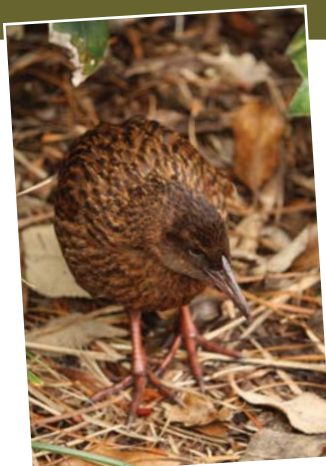
Like the eyes of a hawk who soars over the plain!

Source: TeAra – The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand



Source: Kari Beaven

WEKA:



Source: Claire Kilner

The Stewart Island Weka (Gallirallus australis scotti) is one of 4 subspecies of this flightless rail.

The meat, skin and feathers of weka were important resources for Māori, and for European explorers, who called the birds bush hens or woodhens. Weka are easily tamed with food, and forest campers learn not to leave food or shiny objects lying within reach of these inquisitive birds.

Source: TeAra – The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand

KIWI SIGHTINGS ON THE RISE



While our latest monitoring results drew a discouraging picture of the estimated number of Kiwi in Halfmoon Bay, recent sightings by Stewart Island locals are drawing a different picture!



Our Stewart Island Southern Brown Kiwi (Apteryx australis lawryi) is a subspecies of Tokoeka - Source: Alina Thiebes

This young Kiwi made itself at home in Sandy King's garden for several weeks in autumn, providing ample photo opportunities for awestruck locals.

This was Alina Thiebes' first Kiwi sighting after living on Stewart Island for two and a half years, and while, she says, seeing her first Kiwi right

here in Sandy's garden felt a little like cheating, "no gumboots or days on end searching in the remote bush required!", she relished the opportunity to sit and photograph this beautiful bird.



Kiwi print - Source: Alina Thiebes

Phred Dobbins tells: "I had one walk in front of my trail camera by Harrold's Bay recently and also saw plenty of kiwi sign on the Horseshoe Point walking track."

Petra Davis saw a kiwi on her way home one night last month: "He looked like quite a big one too. I tried taking some photos but didn't want to chase him in

case I disturbed him too much."

Sue Graham spotted these conspicuous prints in the snow at the end of July.

Bronwyn Fehr and Dale Burrows also spotted their first Kiwi's this year. Bronwyn spotted a Kiwi one evening in July whilst driving into Horseshoe Bay, "the beauty of him surpassed all my expectations!" And Dale's first sighting was also in Horseshoe, at around June, "I was walking home one night and heard a loud rustling in the bushes, I got my torch out, spotted the kiwi and quietly followed him through the bush for a few moments, he was huge!"



Kiwi print in snow - Source: Sue Graham

Help keep our kiwi safe!

Please remember to keep your dog on a leash – these vulnerable birds deserve our consideration and protection, we all cherish these sightings and hope for many more in the future!



GRANT RECEIVED

SIRCET is delighted to announce that it has received a grant from the BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust. The grant is for \$1,000 and will go towards continuing the Kiwi, Weka & Morepork/ Ruru monitoring through the 2011/12 season.

Watch this space for a call for volunteers to assist with call counts next autumn!



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.

There are 210 hectares protected by SIRCET and the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project.

If you are interested in being part of the programme or making a gift to someone who has enjoyed the island please get in touch or fill in the form in this newsletter and return it to us. Donations are tax-deductible.

You will receive a certificate, our quarterly newsletter, email updates and invitations to our field days. For more information see our website: www.sircet.org.nz

There are other sponsorship opportunities so if your business is interested in sponsoring SIRCET please contact us.

Thank you to our current sponsors for their on-going support!

SPONSORSHIP OPTIONS

- 1 hectare (\$50)
- 2 hectares (\$100)
- 5 hectares (\$250)
- 10 hectares (\$500)
- ½ hectare (\$30)

Alternatively, choose your own sponsorship amount.

PAYMENT OPTIONS

BANK TRANSFER

Stewart Island/Rakiura Community and Environment Trust.

ASB Bank Invercargill 12-3154-0103153-00

Enter the following details when making your payment:

Particulars - Hectare

Code: (Leave this field blank)

Reference: (your name, e.g. J. Smith)

CREDIT CARD OR MONEY ORDER

Please phone or email to arrange payment

CHEQUE

Make cheques out to: **Stewart Island/Rakiura Community and Environment Trust**

Receipts supplied on request

We would be grateful if you would inform us of your sponsorship and your contact details so that we can continue to send you the SIRCET Newsletter.

Please fill out the following form and return it to us:

Name _____

Business (if relevant) _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Comments or special requests _____

Please feel free to contact us with any questions

Do you visit or live on Stewart Island?

Would you and your family like to be involved in:

- workdays
- pest trapping
- replanting
- tending native plant seedlings

Work on your own, in pairs or in groups.

Please contact Denise Hayes - denise@sircet.org.nz

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