

SIRCET news

www.sircet.org.nz

September 2014



A word from our staff

Shona Sangster (Project Administrator)

Well, it is starting to look like spring. Leaves and flowers reappearing on the tree fuchsia and plenty of kereru around. It has been a cold winter and we'll all be glad to say goodbye to sleet and snow and hello to some warmer weather (hopefully). One of the highlights of my month has been a visit by a cheeky gang of 5 kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*), including this month's cover star. I'm always amazed that these intelligent parrots with such vicious looking beaks let themselves be chased off by the much smaller but more determined and territorial tui. If you enjoy the antics of this species you might want to check out Alfie Kaka on Facebook.

It seems that the cold has also drawn the rats closer to dwellings, with wood piles being a real favourite. And I've caught some large rats too, the size of a kitten. If you (like me) need extra traps for your house or woodpile and live within the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project Area, SIRCET can make these available free of charge. When not enjoying checking my volunteer rat lines, it has been a busy few months in the office writing accountability and end of financial year reports.



Nicola Shaw (Pest Control Manager)

It has been a pleasure to be accepted as a part of the community since the beginning of this year. I find Stewart Island to be a beautiful and diverse world away from the mainland. My background includes many years of tourism and more recently completing a Diploma in Marine Sciences which also included many facets of terrestrial ecology. Being passionate about the well being of our environment, my interim position with SIRCET has enabled me to develop many skills and I continue to try to live up to the high standards that have been set before me! If there are any questions, queries or assistance required, please don't hesitate to ask - if I don't have an instant solution, I will search for one. Thank you to all the volunteers that continue to hold this project to the level it requires to be successful and to DOC and businesses and community that support us. It's fantastic to be a part of the team that endeavours to improve a part of Stewart Island's ecology through pest control and restoration. Thank you all!

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



Farewell to Denise!

Trustees, staff and friends of SIRCET all got together on the 25th of July for Denise Hayes' farewell dinner at the South Sea Hotel. It was great chance to thank Denise for all her hard work in the Pest Manager role and present her with a token of our appreciation. Thanks to Cherie, Letitia and Alina for organising the gift, flowers and those very appropriate table decorations!



Field Update from Nicola

While checking rat traps through Ackers and Wilsons block, the birds have certainly showed themselves: Tui, Waxeye, Tomtit, Kaka, Piwakawaka, Weka, Kereru and many signs of Kiwi. Rat numbers have been down as expected with the winter season, though there are signs of the elusive few that have outsmarted all efforts. With a change of bait it is expected to have a boost in captures, hopefully also trapping the few that repeatedly chew through the back of the traps. Volunteers have continued to put in great efforts of support, without them it would be a mammoth task to ensure the full area is contained.

Possum traps have recently been re opened with a couple of successes within the first few days. And again the cheeky rats have been at the possum bait, though a few have not managed to get away!

With intensive trapping behind us, line maintenance, marking and trap cleaning has been able to continue at a good pace, with the outlook of completing many things on the 'to do list' prior to the next busy season.

The Community Nursery has had many hours of input, also thanks to Fiona Brownlie who has been on the island for the last few months, putting in a huge number of hours. This has enabled maintenance and re stocking to be completed in leaps and bounds! We look



forward to Fiona's return in a month or two. If you are looking for some plants for your garden, pop out to the Nursery and see what is there!

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Kiwi Advocacy Project



SIRCET have had the privilege of following the lives of the kiwi that were transferred from Ulva to Ackers in February 2013. This is part of our larger Kiwi Advocacy Project which Kiwi for Kiwis provide a large portion of the funding for.

The Ackers kiwi will continue to be monitored over the next year, thanks to the support of our funders. Jill Skerrett and Richard Wilson sponsored a raffle at the local shop for one transmitter and also personally sponsored another transmitter. The Air New Zealand Great Walks Biodiversity Project also funded two transmitters. These transmitters have now all been put on the kiwi, replacing their old ones. Thank you to Brent Beaven and Philippa Green (DOC Stewart Island) for proving the technical expertise to safely put the transmitters on. Catching the birds for transmitter changes gave us a great opportunity to check out the birds and they were all doing great!

Takiti and her mate are still in the same area between Ringaringa and Lonnekers. When we went to catch them in June to replace Takiti's transmitter, they were both sharing a burrow. Takiti snuck out the back entrance, leaving her mate behind to be caught and fitted for a transmitter. I'm sure that this pair will lay eggs this year and the burrow they were caught in looks like a good one to raise a family in!

Matatika and Ngaio were caught together in one of their favourite burrows and both now have new transmitters. This pair raised a chick last year and hopefully will be nesting again soon

TX 22 was finally caught in July. His habit of hanging out in crown fern and astelia made it hard to sneak up on him but Philippa did a fantastic job and nabbed him. He was with a female who took off and proved more agile than myself through the scrub. While I'm not sure who she is, I would assume that she's a fellow Ulva transportee! Another strong pairing and hopefully they too

will breed, maybe in a burrow rather than under vegetation!

We will continue to follow these birds over the next year and update the community on their activities with SIN articles. Other kiwi advocacy activities will be another kiwi avoidance workshop for local and visiting dogs during Labour Weekend. Wouldn't it be fantastic for the kiwi if we could get 100% of our local dogs to undergo this training?

We have recently purchased a second collar for this training. This collar is smaller and ideally suited to petite dogs. Funding for this and kiwi advocacy work was provided by the Mazda Foundation. Check out their website www.mazdafoundation.org.nz and see the awesome projects they sponsor. They liked our kiwi project so much they gave us more funding than we applied for!

Next article we will introduce you to our new Kiwi Monitor and let them tell you what the birds are up to.

Letitia McRitchie



Takiti and mate in burrow



New transmitter for Ringaringa male

MEDICINAL GARDENS PROJECT

The medicinal garden has a new home! The Council and Community Board have approved a planting plan for the former garden beside Glowing Sky.

This large triangular area was formerly planted in natives but had to be dug up when the drains underneath were repaired. The bare patch of earth is the perfect place to showcase plants that have medicinal qualities. While researching native medicinal plants for the area I realised that many of the plants are edible, so I've expanded the scope of the planting to include edible plants as well.

Planting is going to occur in early September and the area will be covered in eco-wool weedmat and mulch to keep the weeds down and give the plants a chance to grow. Thank you to the Council for funding this eco-friendly option!

Debs Dillon recently loaned me a book of hers "New Zealand Medicinal Plants; by Brooker, Cambie and Cooper. This has proved an excellent text and I will feature a couple of plants from the book in this article. For edible plants I have been referencing 'A Field Guide to the Native Edible Plants of New Zealand' by Crowe. The author has had a long interest in edible plants and gathered knowledge from many sources. He tested that knowledge with a personal survival test of 10 days alone in the bush with no food supplies. At the end of that time he had lost some weight and had a keen appetite!



Horopito (*Pseudowintera axillaris*)

Horopito or peppertree (*Pseudowintera axillaris*) is well known for its peppery taste and is even being used commercially as a gourmet pepper spice. Traditionally the leaves were steeped and the resulting liquid used to treat skin conditions and oral thrush. Leaves were also chewed for toothache. Modern testing has shown Horopito essential oil to contain eugenol, which is a dental analgesic. In conjunction with an aniseed extract it's been shown to be effective against oral thrush.

While spinach is a familiar vegetable at the table we have our own variation with New Zealand Spinach. Along with Cook's Scurvy Grass and Native Celery, NZ Spinach was one of the plants that Captain Cook fed to his crew to prevent scurvy. Other early captains followed his example and found these plants



Beach Spinach

highly effective in preventing and curing scurvy. While scurvy is not a problem now, NZ spinach is quite the gourmet green. I've seen Beach Spinach growing here and it can be eaten the same, either raw in salad or steamed.

Coprosma lucida is a common coastal plant here and with its glossy green leaves and bright orange berries it makes a great garden plant. The berries are said to be sweet and delicious (birds seem to think so too!). In the new garden there will also be *Coprosma acerosa* or sand coprosma and its blue berries



Coprosma lucida

are said to be the sweetest of all the coprosma's. But most fascinating for the *C. Lucida* is that the seeds can be roasted and ground into coffee. They are supposed to have an excellent coffee smell and a vague coffee taste. It would take a lot of the small seeds to get much coffee!





THE NURSERY FEATURE PLANT

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

Our nursery manager and 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....



Carmichaelia williamsii - William's Broom, Giantflowered broom

Two of these plants were at the SIRCET nursery for years and were thought to be a rare local plant.

When Letitia wanted to plant them in the town gardens, a quick bit of research revealed them to be far from home. One is now planted in the garden near the shop, a good place for a plant that likes dry conditions! Like other native brooms, the flat, green branches are photosynthetic and serve as leaves. These have an attractive sculptural quality as they are wider (about 15 mm) in this species than in other *Carmichaelia*, making it easy to recognise. The pea-like flowers are also atypical of the genus, being yellow rather than mauve or white, but they do have purple veins. In Dunedin, flowers appear in winter and early spring, and mature into chubby pods (25 mm long), the sides of which fall off when dry, revealing bright orange seeds suspended from the pod rim. It grows rather slowly into a spreading shrub 2 m x 2 m and needs light pruning to maintain its shape. It is rare in the wild - coastal areas from the Bay of Plenty to East Cape and on some northern offshore islands. However, it is surprisingly hardy and also drought, wind and salt spray tolerant. Cuttings have been taken and if you want this beautiful and unusual plant in your garden, they will be ready next year.



Community Native Plant Nursery Revamp

Nic and our super volunteer Fiona have been hard at work out at the nursery. They've had a thorough clean out and reorganisation.

Plenty of cuttings and seeds have been put down and with some tender care will be ready to plant next spring. We're also reorganising to highlight a great range of rare plants and those with edible or medicinal uses. The nursery is

located at Horseshoe Bay, corner of Lee Bay Rd. A selection of shrubs, trees and grasses are available for only a \$2 donation each, which can be left in the donation box or at the DOC visitor centre.



Plant Identification Course

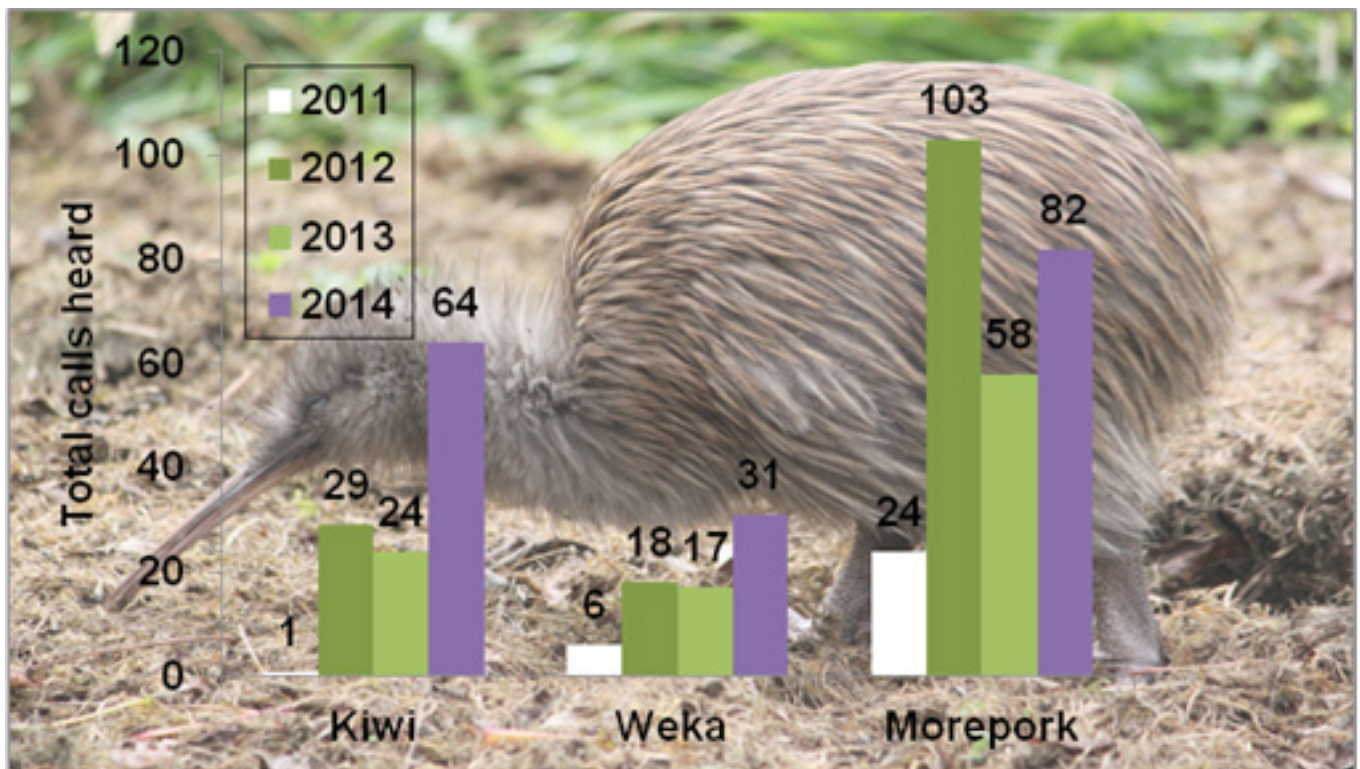
On the 7th and 8th of July I was lucky enough to be able to attend a Plant Identification course, run by Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology in conjunction with DoC who kindly allowed other interested people to attend free of charge.

The tutor was Beth Endres, who holds a Master of Science in Plant Biology. I found her to be a great teacher, with an engaging and accessible style. To my surprise it turned out that the aim of the course was not to rote learn or memorize as many long latin names as you can, but to give us all the skills to describe plants using the correct terminology (new favourite words include glabrous and obovate) and to figure out how to identify an unknown plant using all the tools at our disposal (like a dichotomous key). By the end of the two days were all feeling really confident and able to describe and identify plants with ease. Hopefully now I will be able to tell my coprosmas apart, and future newsletters will have less incorrect captions! A huge thank you to the Department of Conservation for allowing non-DoC staff to participate, and to Beth for being so passionate and generous with her time.



“I also discovered a passion for ferns on the course, so here is the lovely Asplenium Bulbiferum”

Kiwi/Weka/Morepork Call Counts



2014 count results

SIRCET conducts yearly Kiwi/Weka/Morepork monitoring. This year, as in past years, volunteers were recording calls at eight different locations – four within the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project area and four outside the project perimeter.

Monitoring involves recording the calls of the three target species (weka, kiwi, and ruru/morepork) heard at the site during a two

hour period, starting at least 30 mins after the official sunset time (around 6pm). Details of the calls heard are recorded including the species, time, directional bearing and sex when appropriate. The details of the environmental conditions are also recorded, such as wind level and direction, temperature, moonlight, rain, cloud cover and background noise levels.



		HMBHRP Area				
		Harold's Bay	Trail Road	Deep Bay	Obs Rock	Total
2014	Kiwi	12	5	2	19	38
	Weka	2	0	4	5	11
	Morepork	12	0	4	10	26
		Control Area				
		Ryans Creek	Back Road	Mapau Rd	Motorau Gards	Total
2014	Kiwi	5	4	17	0	26
	Weka	0	3	17	0	20
	Morepork	13	2	0	41	56

Table 1: 2014 count results

Total number of kiwi calls heard, 2011-2014

Kiwi calls were heard a total of sixty-four times across the eight monitoring sites in 2014. This is nearly triple the number of calls heard last year (24 calls). For the first time there was also more birds heard inside the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project (HMBHRP) area than outside. With many of the translocated birds staying at Ackers and around the township, this may help explain there was a much higher number of birds heard in this area. This is a fantastic result for SIRCET!

Kiwi calls were heard at seven of the eight monitoring sites in 2014, in comparison with being heard at only five sites in 2013. Five sites have seen an increase in the number of kiwi calls heard, the most significant of which is Observation Rock, which had no calls reported in 2013, and in 2014 has become the site with the greatest number of kiwi calls heard. Likewise, kiwi calls have not been heard at all in previous years at either Trail Road or Ryans Creek but in 2014 they have each had five calls reported.

Weka 2014 saw an overall increase in the numbers of calls heard from these smart, cheeky, curious and famously feisty flightless bird. The increase in number of weka calls outside the Project Area from 2013 to 2014 is particularly notable, while the number inside the Project Area saw an increase of 10%.

Morepork/Ruru

– At dusk the melancholy call of the Morepork can be heard in the bush as it calls to other Ruru and claims territory. While there has been an increase in the number of ruru/morepork calls heard both inside and outside the Project Area since 2013, neither area has yet returned to the heights they were at in 2012.

Overall, both inside and outside the project area, target bird numbers appear to be increasing. A huge thank you to all our volunteers, who braved the cold to get this data! Also a huge thank you to Jo McClelland for managing this project the second year running and collating these fantastic results



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



Pete Ross Automotive



Ulva's Guided Walks
Ulva Island Bird Sanctuary - Stewart Island - New Zealand
www.ulvas.co.nz ulva@ulvas.co.nz (041) 03 219 1214



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.

AURORA CHARTERS

Imagine cruising through crystal clear waters, taking in the spectacular views of Rakiura National Park. Walk through native bush and listen to the song of native birds all around...

Aurora Charters offers wonderful group scenic trips aboard the 'Aurora'. They also specialise in pelagic bird trips and promise a trip to remember. This family business is owned by Colin Hopkins, a 5th generation Stewart Island resident and his wife Margaret. Daughter Emma is a nature guide and her partner Ty Jenkinson is skipper of the catamaran 'Aurora'. Their combined knowledge of natural and local history, plus a commitment to providing top quality service to clients, makes a day out on the 'Aurora' a memorable one.

Aurora Charters recognise that they are privileged to operate in one of the most special places in New Zealand and are committed to supporting conservation projects on Stewart Island. They often assist the Department of Conservation by transporting gear and personnel if they are working in areas they need to access, particularly for New Zealand dotterel research at Port Pegasus, pest control and hut



maintenance in remote areas. They also support the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust (YEPT) by transporting personnel to remote sites around the Stewart Island coast for their on-going penguin monitoring work.

Aurora Charters hold a Department of Conservation guiding concession and a marine mammal watching permit which allows them to show and educate visitors about some of Stewart Island's unique plant and wildlife communities.

For more information please visit www.auroracharters.co.nz.