



Stewart Island / Rakiura Community & Environment Trust

for people for environment

SIRCET News

June 2018

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SIRCET's mission is to "pursue projects that will enhance both our community and environment"

About Us

The Stewart Island / Rakiura Community and Environment Trust (SIRCET), a non-profit organisation, was founded in 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, Department of Conservation, Environment Southland, and the generous support of a wide range of funders.

For more information please check out our website www.sircet.org.nz or our Facebook page.

Cover photo of Acker's Point: Jason Hosking

Project Administrator Update - Bridget Carter

There has been a wee bit on since the last update. The Trust thanks Shona Sangster for her enthusiasm and talents as Project Administrator and wishes her the best for the future. As new Administrator, it's been great to learn more about SIRCET's work. My husband Kev, daughter Quinn and I live on Stewart Island, I have background in conservation and I'm looking forward to helping out.



Volunteers come in all shapes, sizes and services. We celebrate our volunteers during National Volunteer Week June 17-23rd. SIRCET welcomes new auditors KPMG into the fold. Thank you to every individual, family, business, sponsor, agency and government organisation that support the Trust and its vision. We'd like to acknowledge the Department of Conservation, World Wildlife Fund NZ Habitat Protection Fund, Predator Free 2050 Community Fund and the Stewart Island / Rakiura Visitor Levy Fund for significant funding received.

It was awesome to be able to provide SIRCET's long term data to a mathematical modeller from Landcare Research in May. The team there are working to develop a national picture of biodiversity outcomes across the country and have asked for pest control and species monitoring information from groups like SIRCET. The team were particularly delighted to find our data included monitoring of a similar site without such intensive pest control and especially having information for so many years (2004+).

Heads up our Community Trap Library is coming! Come to the inaugural trap collection day on 23rd June (see page 11). We're looking forward to hosting a Know Your Natives plant identification course in July, specific for Stewart Island, held by the talented Jesse Bythell.

Well done and thank you to the Department of Conservation (supported by the Ulva Island Trust) to respond successfully to the recent rat incursions on Te Wharawhara / Ulva Island. We're excited about Mamaku Point Reserve's ideas for the future, congratulate Rakiura Maori Lands Trust on their possum control work at the Neck and warmly welcome further exploration of a Predator Free Rakiura. Exciting times for our biodiversity all round.

If you'd like to get involved or have any questions, please get in touch!

B

Contacting us

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www.sircet.org.nz

Field Update from Pest Manager - Willy Gamble

Rats

The last few months we have experienced extraordinarily high rat numbers between 1st Jan – 29th May 2018. The tally stands at 1,352, likely due to the long hot dry summer that we experienced here on the island. Resident volunteers have been working very hard to help keep on top of the problem. Over the summer nearly all our community lines were being checked weekly by resident volunteers and I was also able to assign lines to resident volunteers in the core / buffer zone.

Visiting Volunteers have also been busy building traps which is a great activity in adverse weather conditions and helps control rats in the wider community.

Recently our Goodnature A24 self resetting traps were rebaited and regassed. A huge thanks to Tom Harding from Environment Southland for his help with this, along with visiting volunteers Chelsea, Ina and Nathalie. We now have 123 A24's within our core area. Results for these aren't tallied, but we are observing a multitude of dead rats beneath them, with one volunteer recently finding six dead rats under a single A24.

Right: Willy with a possum caught using a Goodnature A12



Possoms

Our possum numbers have remained relatively low. Since July 2017 we have caught 17 possums in our Trapinator possum traps throughout the whole project area. Thirteen of these possums were caught between Jan and May 2018. I'm finding Trapinators to be most effective with a combination of peanut butter or smooth in a tube and extruded cereal pellets. We now have around 58 of these in place with approx 28 more to install. I'd like to thank DOC for the donation of 48 surplus Trapinators. Our past network of warrior traps are now disabled as these were deemed unsafe and we are gradually removing them and replacing with Trapinators. We also have ~50 Goodnature A12 self resetting possum traps and we have noticed the odd dead possum beneath them. Possum RTC (residual Trap Catch) monitoring is due in winter 2018, this will give us a percentage of possums present within our project area and will determine our next steps in possum control.



Feral cats

Feral cat trapping has continued with a focus during the breeding season of little blue penguin, kiwi and sooty shearwater breeding months. Since July 2017 we have trapped five feral cats. We are immensely grateful to members of community hosting live cage traps, which are checked daily. Big thank you to Sharon Pasco for checking the Golden Bay track! The community support means we can have traps open in more places, and for longer. The five captured this year was significantly less than the previous year, when 22 feral cats were captured.

Left: Volunteer Nathalie refreshing a Goodnature A24 rat trap

Community Nursery

We welcome Mamaku Point Reserve to the island and are grateful for the access to their shed to allow us to continue to manage the Community Nursery. Plants are for sale outside Glowing Skies and make an excellent addition to Rakiura resident's garden. A highlight has been using plants from the Nursery to revegetate Lonnekers Beach during the Love our Water Sustainable Coastlines day in August 2017. We always welcome new volunteers - please get in touch you can spare time in the Nursery. We haven't yet got a date for the relocation of the Nursery to Traill Park, we'll keep you posted.

War on Weeds Project - Letitia McRitchie



In 2017 DOC made available funding for community groups to undertake local weed control. SIRCET was successful in receiving funds and partnered with Environment Southland to deliver the work.

We concentrated on Darwin's Barberry and included some of the other Dirty Dozen weeds – Banana Passionfruit, Japanese honeysuckle, Buddleia and Old man's beard. The area covered was around the township, from Main Road over to Golden Bay, and through to Kaka Ridge Road.

Darwin's Barberry

Originally from South America, this weed was likely introduced to Stewart Island as a good hedging plant. Its rapid growth and prickly leaves make it ideal for this. Plants mature in 3 to 4 years and produce many seeds that are dispersed widely by birds. With its ability to grow rapidly, a liking for our weather conditions and being able to thrive in the bush it poses a serious threat to the integrity of our native forest.



The Job

To control barberry the most effective method is to grid search with a team of people and remove every single barberry plant. Each person carries a GPS so we can plot exactly where they walked and mark every plant they remove. Every landowner has to be contacted and permission sought to access their land. Any areas left unsearched will potentially result in barberry plants still being left to spread seeds



The Team

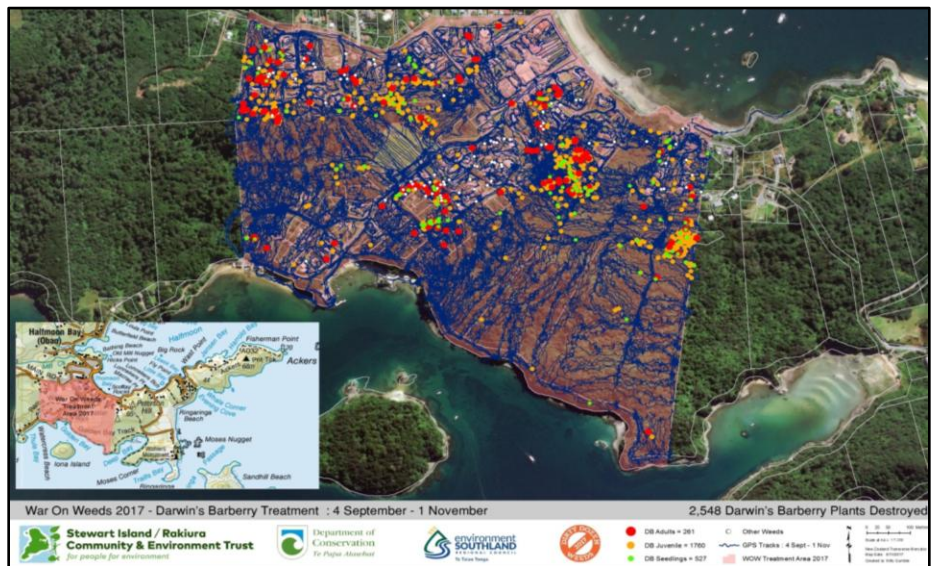
For September and October, 2017, we had a great team of staff, out there 5 days a week, come rain or shine. And there was a lot more rain than shine! The team had a lot of fun, learnt some new skills and got up close to our native forest. And they achieved the target they were set, an awesome effort!

Left: Team with souvenirs of the largest barberry of the season! L to R. Field Manager Willy, Team Leader Serra, Team members Laire and Pauline. Not pictured are temporary team leaders Kristy and Rebecca

Results

80 Hectares were grid searched over 2 months and the team removed 261 adult barberry, 1760 Juvenile plants and 527 seedlings. 146 Landowners were contacted and 134 gave permission for the team to access their land, a fantastic result.

Follow up to prevent Barberry gaining a hold again will be needed and we ask all landowners to help in this, please remove all barberry when you see it!



National Volunteer Week 17th - 23rd of June 2018

National Volunteer Week 2018 celebrates the 1.2 million Kiwis who are volunteering their time and skills to our communities every year. The theme this year, as voted by our members, is Volunteers – Heart of our Community, which captures the essence of what volunteering is about; how their efforts, compassion and time provide a significant contribution, enriching communities.

SIRCET will be celebrating our wicked volunteers all week!



COMBAT that RAT ATTACK!

Victor rat traps for sale, complete with wooden base and corflute covers.

Poison free and easy to use.

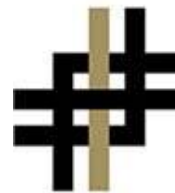
\$20 per trap.

Funds raised go towards trapping at Ackers Point.

Available at Glowing Sky or contact

administrator@sircet.org.nz

They work!



NEW ZEALANDER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Honouring the Best of Us

SIRCET received a **Certificate of Achievement** in the Mitre 10 New Zealand Community of the Year Category of the **2018 New Zealander of the Year Awards**. What an honour to have been nominated!

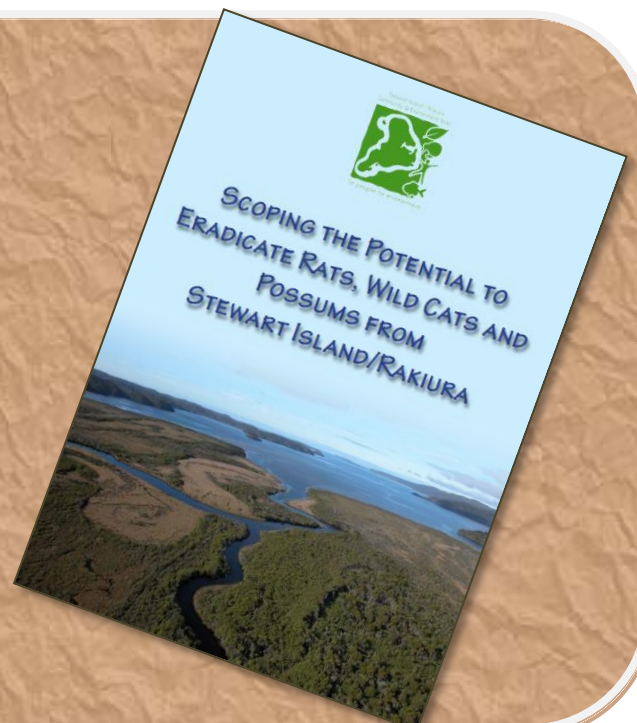
Looking back... and forward

Back in June 2008 SIRCET published a report scoping the potential to eradicate the big three: rats, possums and feral cats from Rakiura.

The idea was not new, but the report set some sparks alight that led to the formation of a Predator Free Rakiura concept and group.

The group commissioned a further suite of reports further exploring methods for predator removal, looking at options for a proposed predator fence and biosecurity options.

As predator control technology and momentum grows nationally, SIRCET are proud to have been part of the early conversations for Stewart Island / Rakiura and look forward to being part of future work.





Stewart Island Tokoeka Advocacy, Protection and Monitoring Project



Stewart Island tokoeka (kiwi) are naturally occurring within our 210 hectare Project area near the Oban township. An additional eleven adult kiwi were translocated in 2013. Our current kiwi project aims to:

- Provide enhanced protection for juvenile kiwi by trapping feral cats
- Undertake call count monitoring within and outside the Project area
- Provide two Kiwi Avoidance Training workshops per year to local and visiting bach owner's dogs
- Engage community and visitors in kiwi conservation through media, stories and events.

Presently we have twenty cat traps in the area. As they are live capture traps they require daily checks during months when kiwi, titi and little blue penguins are especially at risk. It was a tad scary to catch 22 feral cats in the Project area last year, which gave the Trust a sobering hint of the scale of the feral cat population. We host Kiwi Avoidance Training workshops on the island in April and October each year to help our dogs learn to avoid kiwi (significant nod to Sandy and Di for their volunteered time). It was wonderful to have a turnout of thirty or so dogs each workshop. What a wicked community!

There has been no formal monitoring of kiwi this season. We were pleased to see two kiwi on trail cameras deployed in mid-April within the core area of our Project area. One bird sported a metal leg band, the other not, which suggests the first kiwi is surviving following the translocation in 2013 and the second is likely a new recruit to the population. This is heartening as it indicates that some kiwi make it to adulthood within the Project area, or have safely travelled into the Project area.

We have formal kiwi monitoring scheduled in 2019; when we will undertake night bird call counts, which involves listening for kiwi, weka and ruru/morepork at set sites and set times. The idea being that changes in the population over time is reflected in the number of calls heard. The last monitoring was undertaken in 2015, which makes the monitoring next year exciting to understand changes over several years. Please get in touch if you're keen to be part of the monitoring, as it is awesome to experience the night in a different way, hones your senses and there could be chocolate. NB SIRCET can't guarantee auroras.



A Stewart Island tokoeka sitting on a nest at Long Harry. Photo: Brent Beaven

Thank you to Kiwis For Kiwi, Southland District Council, Te Anau Helicopters, Zane Smith, Sandy King and Di Morris for the support and effort to make this project possible.

What can you do to help?

Love your pets and your kiwi

Join our free Kiwi Avoidance Training workshop in October with your dog to help them steer clear of kiwi. Kiwi are particularly vulnerable to dogs. Encourage your pet cat from roaming. Control feral cats.

Love your kiwi from afar

If you're lucky enough to have kiwi encounters, please respect the birds by speaking quietly, keeping your distance (they may well walk up to you!) and avoiding lights. Don't use a flash if you're taking a photo. Remember every single kiwi encounter has an impact and we all have a part to play to protect our kiwi.

Crush the competition

If we all reduce rats, hedgehogs and possums, our kiwi have less competition for food and nesting sites.

Take it slow

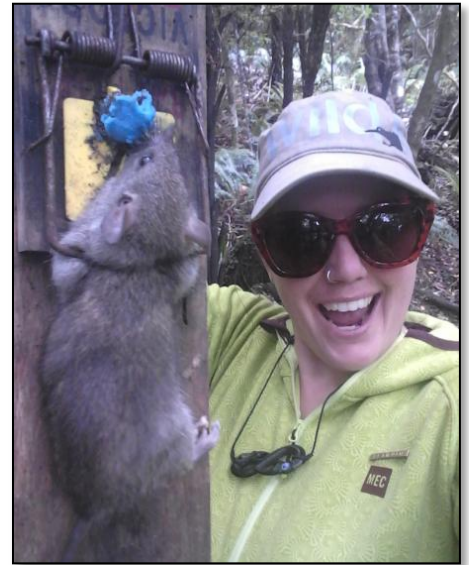
Reduce your speed when driving at night to avoid hitting wildlife.

SIRCET Volunteer Spotlight - Jennifer Ross

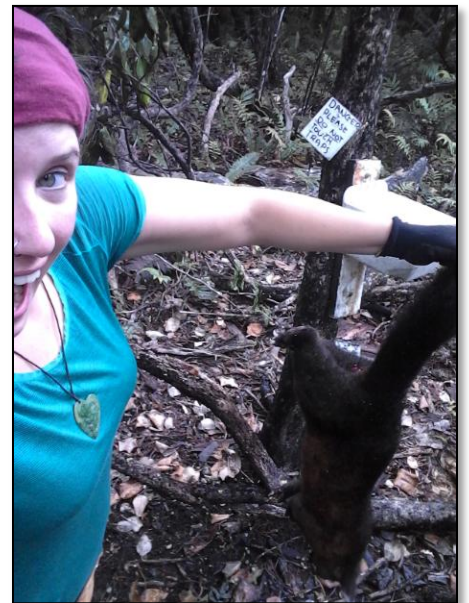
My name is Jennifer Ross and I'm excited to be writing for SIRCET's volunteer spotlight! I was born in Canada, lived in both Montreal and Calgary before moving to Wellington, New Zealand in 2011. I was based in Wellington for three years before getting a job with the Department of Conservation as the one and only Community Ranger on Rakiura! I had visited the island twice before and knew I'd love living here. At this point I knew very little about rats, feral cats, or possums.

I first found out about SIRCET through my role at DOC and in the three years I've been volunteering I still love the thrill I get when I first peek into a trap and see a rat's tail! My proudest SIRCET volunteer moments include catching a huge male possum in a Trapinator, working with Willy to get all the traps on my lines in great working order, and recently catching 20 rats out of my 75 traps in one weekly check! I like to think that my trapping is helping to give birds and seedlings a better chance of survival along the Golden Bay to Deep Bay track and two Peterson Hill lines (5 & 6).

I hope that one day SIRCET achieves its ultimate goal of having saddleback/tieke in Rakiura's backyard. It is a huge goal, and a lot of effort has already gone into working toward it. But just imagine if it were achieved! It is worth the effort. I also see an increased momentum among community members out trapping rats and I think SIRCET has a lot to do with that. I'm really impressed by Stewart Islanders taking the initiative – whether it is setting, checking, and rebaiting traps around their houses, checking cat traps daily, or signing up to check a rat line (it's great exercise)! I'm proud of our community, and the way trapping has become a regular and interesting topic of conversation.



I love trapping! Photo: Jennifer Ross



Possum proud! Photo: Jennifer Ross



I want to thank SIRCET for all that they do. Because it's not just about the trapping. SIRCET also run education events for Halfmoon Bay School and visiting schools, operate a native plant nursery, sell traps to community members, and will soon be opening up a trap library for the community. It's not easy running a trust like this but it is definitely important.

Why feral cat control is so important. Photo: Jennifer Ross



Neroli (left) and Nathalie (right) ready to trap rats in the core zone

Volunteers

We were lucky enough to have had many visiting volunteers help over the last few months as well as 20+ resident volunteers helping with pests, weeds and the nursery: Ina, Neroli, Jamie, Chelsea, Nathalie to name but a few. Nathalie stayed for 3 months and her help was invaluable to help stem the tide of rats in our core zone.

This year we've rolled out DOC's GPS enabled Walk the line' Smart phone app for visiting volunteers and have had huge success. It's very useful for navigation and also saves time, as there is no need to enter trap records back in the office and gives us an immediate picture of our catch rates. We'd like to express our gratitude to DOC for developing this system and allowing community groups to access it.

In December 2017 we opened up a trap line surrounding the golf course consisting of 52 traps. This has been one of our most successful rat lines with over 150 rats caught. Huge thanks to Anita Herbert and Sharon Pasco for checking these traps every week.



What's been happening?

August 2017 - Sustainable Coastlines Love Your Water Planting Day at Lonnekers Beach

October 2017 - Save Kiwi Month with Kiwi Avoidance Training and Great Kiwi Morning Tea bake sale

April 2018 - Kiwi Avoidance Training

April 2018- Wicked Weeds Walk



Halfmoon Bay School students checking traps (above)
Willy showing Queenstown primary students a catch (below)

Education

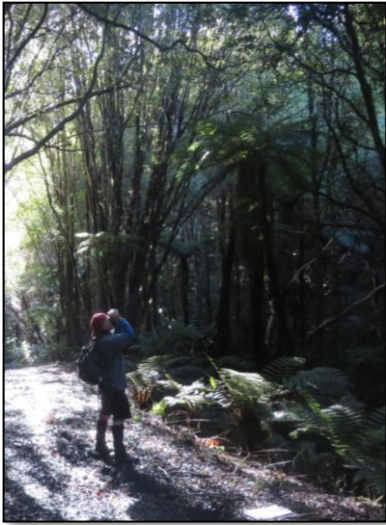
Our education programme has continued strongly, with more schools this year than last.

We've hosted Saint Gerard's School, Little Brown Kiwi adventure education, Queenstown Primary School, Winton School, St Thomas School, Cobham Intermediate School and the Ornithological Society Youth Camp. Our involvement with Halfmoon Bay School includes the school taking on a rat line which is checked weekly with the students. Fordland College students built traps, as well as taking cuttings and sowing seeds for our community nursery.



Monitoring

Brown creeper. Photo: NZ Birds Online



Bird nerd in the bush. Photo: Matt Jones

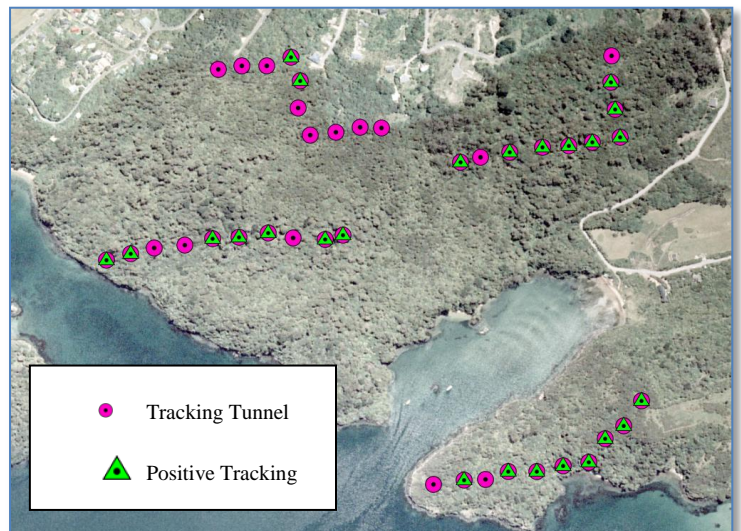
Forest bird monitoring

Our fabulous contractor Matt Jones has completed the annual forest bird monitoring for 2018. We monitor the number of native forest birds (specifically tomtit, fantail, grey warbler, tui, bellbird, silvereye, kereru, kaka, kakariki and weka) seen and heard at fifty sites around Acker's Point within our Project area and at fifty sites around Ryan's Creek. The method used is called a five minute bird call count. There are other methods to use; we use this one because it is easy to do, doesn't use many resources and helps us understand population changes over time. The objective is not to compare numbers of birds at Ackers Point with numbers at Ryan's Creek, but rather to compare how the numbers change over the years of pest control with how they change where there is less intensive pest control in a fairly similar Stewart Island forest environment. The initial indication is that the overall number of birds at both sites has increased. Tui, bellbird and silvereye remain the birds most encountered. A highlight was seeing a brown creeper for the first time in the Project area during forest bird monitoring started in 2004.



Rat monitoring

Rat monitoring tunnels were opened on the 26th of April 2018 in clear weather conditions in the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project area. The core, buffer and community zones and Ryan's creek were monitored. Results showed high rat numbers, despite the efforts of the trapping. Total results for the whole Project area (i.e. core, buffer and community zones combined) came in at 47% rat tracking, showing a huge increase in rat numbers, up from 17% in January 2018. The high numbers are not a reflection of a poor effort of existing trapping, rather the huge number of rats to combat. There were significantly more rats in the community zone this April, so we'd like some support to step up efforts to reduce the numbers. The next rat monitoring is due at the first suitable weather window from the 24th of July 2018.



Above: Community Zone Rat Monitoring Tunnels monitored on 26-27th April 2018

Titi / sooty shearwater monitoring

We have been undertaking monitoring of the tītī colony on Acker's Point since 2004 to gauge the response of this colony to the pest control in the area, by analysing its population dynamics over time. Nesting success is our main measure of the survival of this colony, and this has been monitored using mark-recapture (banding) initially, followed by burrow scoping in most years. It seems the offshore food supply is important for this colony. As this is out of the Trust's control at this time, we aim to reduce or remove any land-based reasons why these nests might not survive, giving the birds the best chance to produce a strong, healthy chick which will return to breed in years to come. Unfortunately, we did not find any pre-fledge chicks in four out of the last five breeding seasons, leading the Trust to question what is happening between the eggs being laid and chicks hatching and fledging.



BUSINESS SPONSOR A HECTARE

SIRCET is a large organisation to run, managed by volunteers but we employ one full time and one part time staff member and several contractors.

External funding covers some of our staff and contractor costs but without the generous annual sponsorship from individuals and businesses it would be difficult to fund the Trust's day to day expenses including:

- Management expenses
- Traps
- Rat bait
- Vehicle running costs

HOW ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS GETTING BEHIND OUR STEWART ISLAND ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS?

A \$250 Business Sponsor-a-Hectare entitles the business to display the SIRCET logo on their website and also have their logo in SIRCET's annual report, the Environment Centre and on our website. A Business Sponsorship for SIRCET supports the restoration of our environment which in turn makes our backyards a better place. Contact info@sircet.org.nz to participate.



Kereru / New Zealand pigeon

New Zealand / Conservation status: Endemic / Not Threatened

Population: Widespread throughout the country, found in forested areas, particularly where there is pest control

Threats: Predation, habitat loss

With the extinction of the moa and the huia, kereru are thought to be the only bird capable of ingesting the large fruit and berries of New Zealand's native trees, thus dispersing their seeds. Or do we think the humble weka has a greater part to play?



STEWART ISLAND BACKPACKERS

Conveniently situated in the heart of Halfmoon Bay, we offer friendly, comfortable and clean accommodation at competitive prices 365 days a year. We also have a huge camping area! Brilliant if you're going on one of the walks around the Island including one of New Zealand's Great Walks; the Rakiura Track.

Contact us if you want to know more!

www.stewartislandbackpackers.co.nz • +64 3 219 1114 • sibackpackers@gmail.com

Stewart Island Backpackers is OPEN over the Winter season

Community Trap Library Collection Day 23rd June 2018

10am 23rd June 2018 - Traill Park
Help protect the bush and birds in your backyard!

Operated on a voluntary basis, traps are free to loan. We can provide tips and tricks to get you started or perhaps introduce you to a new type of trap. We have a range of traps and bait stations. All have been well tested and have ethical approval for use.

Please contact Di on pete.di1@xtra.co.nz or 0277599773.

Know Your Native Plants Stewart Island Style

A beginner's guide to basic botany and plant ID
Workshop with ecologist **Jesse Bythell**

26th July 2018

contact administrator@sircet.org.nz



SIRCET receives award for work with Stewart Island tokoeka / kiwi

Across New Zealand, thousands of people volunteer their time, skills, money and enthusiasm to help kiwi populations survive and grow. To that end, Kiwis for Kiwi held an inaugural Kiwi Awards in June 2018 to acknowledge and thank the kiwi conservation projects and the individuals that support kiwi conservation. SIRCET were thrilled to receive the 2018 Good Egg award for work with tokoeka.



Photo: SIRCET Trustees, staff and whanau extras at SIRCET's Lonnekers Beach restoration site (left to right): Trustee Al Burns and partner Jennifer Ross, Trustee Di Morris and dog Dash, Trustee Jim Barrett, Project Administrator Bridget Carter and baby Quinn, Treasurer Anita Herbert, Chair Letitia McRitchie holding the Good Egg Award surrounded by Bella and Ryan McRitchie-King and Pest Manager Willy Gamble.

