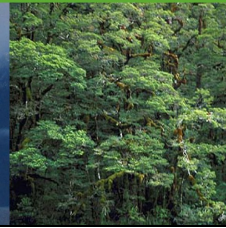
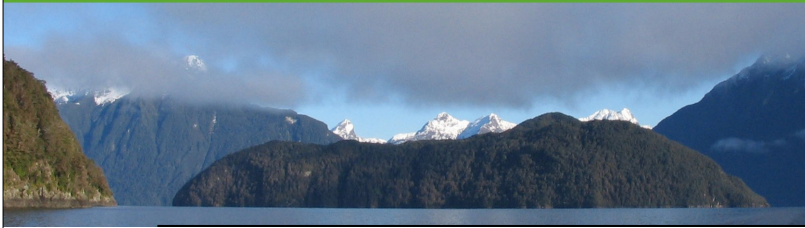


# Pomona Post



March 2014



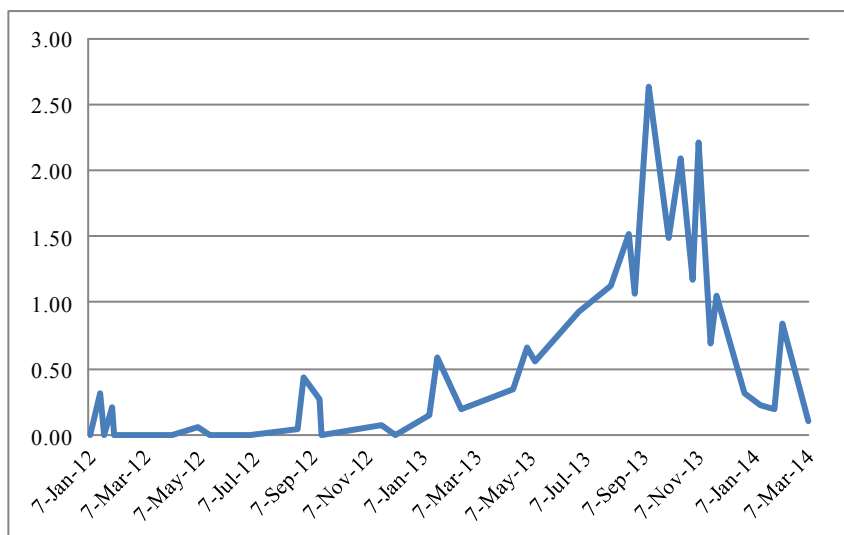
## Progress on Pomona

For the last two years, the Trust has been battling the return of rats to the island. Throughout 2013, rat numbers increased to levels not seen since before they were successfully eradicated in 2007. "It is amazing how quickly one or two rats can breed up" said Trust Chair John Whitehead. From catching single rats during a check of the whole trap network at the end of 2012, we caught a whopping 75 rats during one trap check in October 2013! We are now though starting to see rat numbers decrease.

The 172 trap sites on Pomona are complemented by 167 bait stations. This means that the whole island is effectively covered by a 100m by 100m grid of devices that can kill rats. "The combined approach of bait stations and traps seems to be working well" said Trust

Secretary and volunteer Project Manager, Viv Shaw. "For those rats that may be trap shy, there is the opportunity to eat the toxic bait".

In order that the rat data on Pomona can be compared with other sites in Fiordland, the Trust analyses its data using a 100 trap night comparison. The graph at the bottom of the page shows how the Trust has succeeded in reducing rat numbers on the island to very low levels. "There are some spikes in the data, because we are not able, every working bee, to check all 172 traps on the island" explained Viv Shaw. "If we do not have enough volunteers to cover the whole network in a single day, we concentrate on the areas that we know have the greatest density of rats." As a result the catch per 100 trap night rises. "Overall the Trust is really pleased with the progress on Pomona" said John Whitehead.



Pomona Island — Rats caught per 100 trap night comparison

## We can't do it alone.....

The Trust acknowledges that it cannot do the work on Pomona without the help of both volunteers and its financial benefactors. Over the past few years we have been extremely fortunate to have the support of the Gary Chisholm Family Trust from Christchurch.



Benefactor Gary Chisholm checks out his investment in traps (Photo: Viv Shaw)

Gary has donated significant sums of money that has contributed to the purchase of the additional traps and bait stations needed to keep the rats under control. Changing the bait in the bait stations is very demanding work. "The Trust decided that carrying heavy loads across very steep terrain was too demanding for volunteers" said Viv Shaw, "but with Gary's generous support we can continue this vital work using contractors".

Since the return of the rats to Pomona we have been impressed with the support we have received from the community. We have been averaging eight volunteers per working bee on the island. "It is great to have so many people come and help out when we most need it" said



Volunteers at the end of a working bee on Pomona. Birthday boy Gordon is second from the left.

Trust Chair, John Whitehead. People are even volunteering to spend their birthday on the island checking traps!! Thanks Gordon!

It is interesting that we have been getting so many people over the last year. When Pomona was pest-free, volunteer numbers dropped quite significantly. So Viv has been asking why? Liz Scott typifies the view of many when she says "it is more interesting now that we are catching things. It got a bit boring when the traps were all empty".

The fact that many of the new traps lines have not yet been cut and offer a more challenging experience on Pomona is also attracting volunteers. After the most recent trap check Sue Bennett finished the day with a big grin on her face having "had a thoroughly enjoyable day on the island". The fact that we only got six rats across the whole network added to the sense of achievement felt by everyone.

### Rona regresses

Whilst the situation on Pomona has been progressing well, Rona has presented the Trust and Department of Conservation with its own challenges. The first

batch of Haast tokoeka chicks for the year made its way to the island in late January. Having been a really good crèche island for five years for this critically endangered kiwi species, it was a surprise when a mortality signal was picked up from a chick. When the bird was recovered there were some signs of potential predation so it was sent away for a post mortem and DNA analysis.

"When you are dealing with threatened species, you do have to expect that not all individuals will survive to adulthood" explained Haast kiwi Team Leader, Jacinda Amey. This was before a further six kiwi were found dead on Rona. "It is gutting to lose so many of these beautiful birds" said Viv Shaw. "The first thing you do is to ask whether there is anything we could have done to prevent it".

The evidence, at this stage, suggests that we have been extremely unlucky as the post mortem results have not identified a single cause of death across the seven kiwi. One bird had a bacterial infection known as erysipelas, another had internal parasites, others had signs of emaciation and possible predation. The post mortem reports note that the predation is likely to be from another bird. This

potentially could be a falcon or a harrier. Falcon are known to nest on the Beehive opposite Rona and to hunt on the island. As this newsletter goes to print, analysis is being undertaken to see if the predator can be identified from DNA.

The two kiwi chicks that were still alive were removed from the island as a precaution and taken to Wellington zoo where they are doing well.

DOC, with input from the Trust, are undertaking a full investigation of the kiwi deaths on Rona to see what can be learnt from the experience. "All factors are being considered" said Jacinda, "including food availability on Rona, the condition of the chicks on arrival at the island and the health profile of each chick". Rona's future role as a kiwi crèche island will be considered as part of that review.



Haast kiwi chick being released on Rona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

### Rona challenges continue

The devastating news of kiwi deaths on Rona is not the only disappointing news from this island in recent weeks. During a routine trap check in January, Trustee Chris Shaw found rat poo in one motel, followed a short time later by a rat in another motel. "Rona has always been rat-free" said Chris "so finding rat in a trap was highly unexpected".

The body was retrieved and shown to a number of staff within the Department of Conservation. Based on the size of the body, there is a strong possibility that the rat could be a Norway rat. This is quite



unusual as all of the rats we catch on the mainland opposite Rona are ship rats. "At this stage" said Chris "the evidence points to the rat having reached the island by boat". Norway rats are very common on farms and it is possible that a rat has been living on a boat stored inside a shed. "To confirm this theory, we have sent the rat way for DNA analysis" said Viv Shaw. "We should be able to identify what species it is as well as its sex".

This raises the important issue of quarantine and the need for anyone visiting either Pomona or Rona Islands to ensure that their boats are rat-free. "It only takes one pregnant female rat to start a population on Rona" said Viv Shaw. "Given that we have never had a rat before on Rona, it would be devastating to the birds if a population was able to become established".

The Trust has swung into action to minimise the risk of rats establishing on Rona. We have increased the frequency of our trap checks and have also been running tracking cards. Neither the traps nor the tracking cards have shown any

evidence of rats. "We are keeping our fingers and toes crossed that it stays that way" said Viv.

### Saddleback translocation put on hold

In view of the rat incursion on Rona and the risk of spreading the bacterial disease, erysipelas, we have decided to put the planned translocation of Saddleback from Breaksea Island to Rona on hold. "Coupled with the strong likelihood of a beech mast event in Fiordland, the Trust has taken the right decision" said Lindsay Wilson, the Trust's DOC Advisory Trustee. "Saddleback are highly susceptible to predation so it is not a good idea to transfer the birds when we anticipate an increase in pest numbers in the area".

### Birds, birds, birds.....

In spite of the challenges being faced by the Trust, we have noticed a significant increase in bird numbers on both Pomona and Rona Islands. In February this year we did our summer bird count



This cheeky robin wants to share Viv's lunch (Photo: Viv Shaw)

on Pomona and recorded the highest number of birds ever during a summer count. A total of 450 birds were seen and heard with the most common birds being redpoll, rifleman, tomtit, brown creeper and bellbird.

Volunteers are reporting high numbers of robins on Pomona, especially at trap sites. "I kept having to chase them away" said volunteer Sue Bennett, "because I didn't want them going into the trap". Regular sightings of mohua are also reported after every working bee.

## Geoff Wells

The Trust was very saddened to hear of the death of Geoff Wells in October last year. Viv was invited to say a few words as Geoff's funeral and here is what she said:

"Geoff first got involved with the Pomona Island Charitable Trust back in 2007. He helped us with the two aerial poison drops to eradicate pests from both Pomona and Rona Islands.

As soon as we set up a trap line on the mainland opposite Pomona, Geoff asked if the Southland Trailer Yacht Squadron (STYS) could "adopt" the line. Not surprisingly, we said YES PLEASE straightway. That started a six-year relationship with Geoff.

Over those six years, Geoff took full responsibility for the trap line. He was a real asset to our Trust as he was so reliable. When we added another 48 traps to the line, Geoff helped put them out and was happy to continue servicing them. Even in the last few months, when we became aware that Geoff was not well, he organised for his STYS colleagues to check

the traps.

Geoff always referred to the trap line as the "M" line. I always referred to it as Geoff's line and will continue to do so. Geoff has put in a lot of hours as a volunteer for Pomona, for which we are extremely grateful.

Thank you Geoff and we hope that the STYS will continue the valuable work that you started".

Thank you also to Helen, Geoff's partner, for asking for donations to be made to the Trust at Geoff's funeral.



Geoff Wells helping to extend the mainland trap line opposite Pomona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

## Kids restore the Kepler

The Pomona Island Charitable Trust is just one of many community-led conservation projects in the Te Anau and Manapouri area. Kids Restore the Kepler is a unique project that involves all of the schools and early childhood centres in the local community as well as the Fiordland Conservation Trust. They do some great work, so check out their website at: [www.kidsrestorethekepler.co.nz](http://www.kidsrestorethekepler.co.nz)

Some of the Kids involved with this project have helped the Trust with bird counts, trap checks and the release of threatened species on Pomona. So when the Trust was given a "We're looking out for kiwi" sign, who better to donate it to than the Kids at Fiordland College who are involved with conservation on the Kepler! The Kids have created a display in the College's library to showcase their conservation efforts.



The kiwi sign takes pride of place in the middle of Kento Frew and Sophia Humphries' conservation display at Fiordland College (Photo: Tina Perry)

## Friends membership renewal

Included with this newsletter is a renewal form for Friends membership. Over the past year the Trust and its volunteers

have put in a huge effort on both Pomona and Rona to help protect the birdlife on the islands. We really appreciate the support that we get from all of our volunteers and financial supporters.

## Friend of Pomona

I would like to continue to be a Friend of Pomona ☐

## Friendship Fee (incl. GST)

Individual Friend \$25 ☐

Corporate Friend \$100 ☐

## Donations

\$25 ☐

\$50 ☐

\$100 ☐

Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## Payment Options

Total Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Direct to our bank account at:  
Westpac, Te Anau branch,  
Account Number: 031749 0044237 00

By cheque payable to:  
Pomona Island Charitable Trust

Address; P O Box 248  
Te Anau

Please note that donations over \$5.00 may be attract a tax rebate.

Please let us know if you require a receipt.

Thank you!