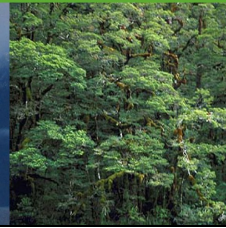
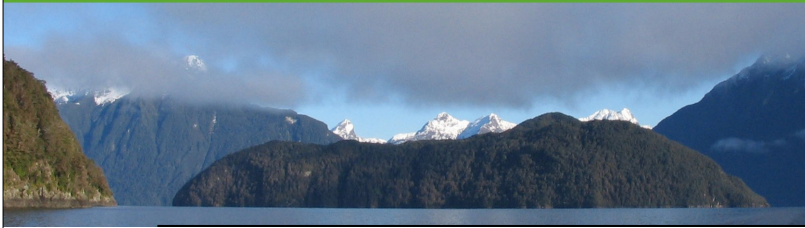


Pomona Post



November 2019



Kiwi breed on Pomona

The Pomona Island Charitable Trust is pleased to announce the arrival of baby kiwi on Pomona! Ever since the release of a permanent population of the critically endangered Haast tokoeka on the island in 2011, volunteers have been asking have the kiwi started breeding yet? "We can now answer that question with an emphatic yes!" said Trust Chair John Whitehead.



Baby kiwi caught on camera on Pomona

The Haast tokoeka, the rarest kiwi taxa in the world, are known to be slow breeders so we knew it would be a while before Pomona-born kiwi would start appearing. The key question was how would we find out that the kiwi had successfully hatched an egg?

Project Manager Viv Shaw takes up the story: "Knowing that the kiwi were successfully breeding on Pomona was important both to the Trust and to DOC. After all, the reason for having kiwi on Pomona in the first place was to provide a breeding population as a back-up to the main population at Haast. With funding from Kiwis for Kiwi and the Meridian

Power Up Community Fund, we set up a project to monitor adult kiwi on Pomona. First we had to catch the kiwi! At night! Fortunately we have just the right people here in Te Anau to do that. By calling in the kiwi, our contractor, Pete Kirkman, was able to catch five kiwi and fit them each with a clever "chick timer" transmitter. We then monitored these kiwi over the 2018/19 breeding season".

As reported in previous editions of Pomona Post, four of these kiwi did incubate eggs, but sadly none of the eggs hatched. This is not uncommon for the Haast tokoeka as it takes a while for these kiwi to get the hang of breeding successfully. Viv continues: "we decided to extend our monitoring for a second year. Transmitters were changed on the kiwi already in the project and additional birds were caught, increasing the number of kiwi to be monitored to eight. Having had cameras across Pomona made it relatively easy for our contractor, Jane Tansell to work out where best to catch the new kiwi for the project".

When released on Pomona, all Haast tokoeka were fitted with a microchip so



Viv monitoring kiwi (Photo: Barry Harcourt)



Pomona-born juvenile kiwi being released sporting a transmitter (Photo: Jane Tansell)

that individual birds can be identified. Having caught two birds already, Jane was pleasantly surprised when the third kiwi caught did not have a microchip.

This could only mean one thing—the kiwi had to have hatched on the island. "This was really exciting" said Viv "as this was our first clear indication that the kiwi on Pomona had successfully bred". But the news only got better when Jane found a second kiwi without a microchip.

Cameras never lie!

But the good news doesn't end there! Two of the cameras deployed on Pomona have also picked up clear photos of small kiwi, further evidence of successful breeding on the island. "Good news comes in threes on Pomona" said John Whitehead. "During the 2019/20

breeding season, our monitoring has picked up a kiwi incubating an egg" The big difference this year though is that the egg has successfully hatched bringing the total number of kiwi known to have been born on Pomona to five. "Given that not all birds are being monitored" said Viv Shaw "I think we can be confident that there are more Pomona-bred kiwi on the island".

Beech mast havoc

Whilst the kiwi breeding is a really positive story for Pomona, the latest beech mast event is creating absolute havoc on the island. The size of the mast has resulted in a lot of seed being available to rats on Pomona. Whilst the kiwi are not



Beech flowering (Photo: Viv Shaw)

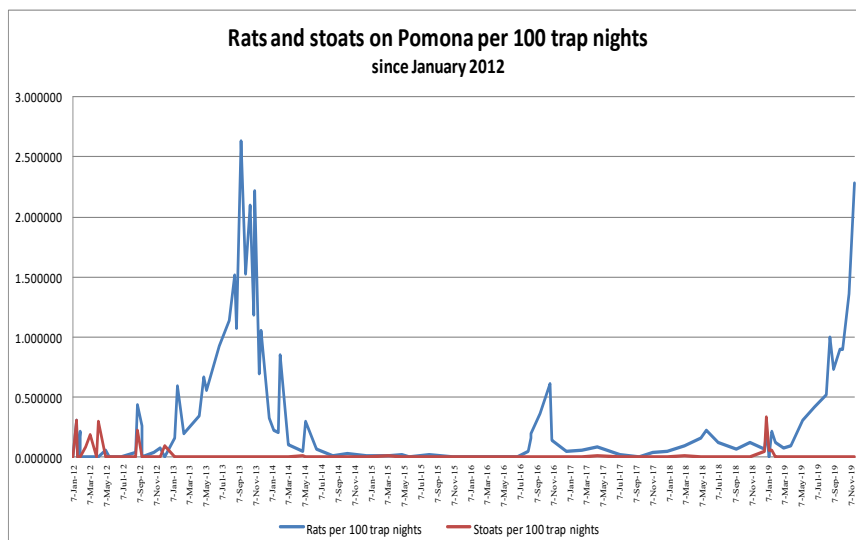
at risk from high rat numbers, other bird species such as mohua and robins are extremely vulnerable to predation. "We made a huge effort" said John Whitehead, Chair of the Trust "to get the rats down to very low levels before the seed



Two different colour morphs of ship rats caught on Pomona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

started to fall, but sadly their numbers got a way with us". Pomona is now experiencing its worst rat plague since 2013. "With up to 60 rats being caught each visit, we've upped our trap check frequency" said Viv. "Rats are filling the traps almost as quickly as we empty them. Volunteers are even reporting seeing live rats on the island".

However, we have a new tool in our toolkit as DOC has just given the Trust permission to deploy brodifacoum in our bait stations network. "This is not a toxin we use lightly" explains John, "but given the high rat numbers and the need to protect vulnerable bird species, a one-off bait station operation is our only real option to reduce rat numbers back to undetectable levels". The use of brodifacoum will have the added benefit of, hopefully, dealing to the elusive stoat that still appears to be on Pomona.



Stoat eludes dog

Following the unprecedented stoat incursion on Pomona last summer, a stoat has intermittently appeared on our cameras. Stoat prints have also been seen on some beaches. So in October, thanks to DOC, stoat-dog handler Ange Newport and her dog Macca spent five full days on the island looking for the elusive stoat.

Whilst the weather wasn't the best, Macca did pick up one set of stoat scents. Unfortunately no stoat was actually found. This led Ange to conclude that "Pomona is clearly not overrun with stoats, but the scent picked up suggests a stoat is living in a very small area". Ange thinks "the most likely scenario is that there is a pregnant female stoat still on Pomona". Because there is so much food available, with so many rats and mice on Pomona, the stoat does not need to move far to source food for any kits she might have. Hopefully this means that she is not doing too much damage to the birdlife on the island.



Ange and Macca on Pomona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

Throwing everything at the rats

Over the past few months, the Trust has been throwing everything at the rats on Pomona. Trap checks are happening more often and self-resetting A24 traps have also been deployed. Thanks to funding from the community and the Meridian Power Up Community Fund, 100 of these traps have been purchased. Meridian staff and Sam Gibson, from Goodnature (the manufacturer),



Kaitlin from Meridian Energy installing an A24 trap (Photo: Viv Shaw)

helped to install the traps, complete with kea-guards to prevent any of these iconic birds from killing themselves in the A24s.

With the sheer volume of natural food on Pomona, it has taken time for the A24s to record their first kills. However, the counters on some of the traps are now recording up to seven kills. According to Sam from Goodnature “85% of pests killed by A24s are scavenged by other predators”, which apparently explains why you don’t see heaps of dead bodies below the traps.

Rona rat

Sadly Rona Island has also seen a rat incursion—another example of the havoc wreaked by the latest beech mast. Rat prints have been found on tracking cards on three separate occasions. “At this stage, it is hard to know how many rats are on Rona” said Project Manager, Viv Shaw “but we are hopeful that it is a single rat”. Again with so much natural food available, it is proving hard to catch the rat. To increase the chances of catching the rat, 15 new traps were deployed on Rona in the vicinity of the rat prints. “The rat appears to have developed a taste for peanut butter” observed Trustee Lynley King, “so fingers crossed it has gone into one of the new traps smeared with fresh peanut butter”.

Robins and tieke galore

The presence of a rat on Rona is worrying. However, monitoring of the tieke and robins released on the island show that they appear to be doing well. During the last working bee on Rona, 11 tieke were seen—five adults and 6 jackbirds. In addition 14 robins were seen—six banded and eight unbanded. “Given that only 16 robins were released on the island in May this year” said Viv Shaw “they have



Volunteer Paul King loaded up with traps to install on Rona (Photo: Lynley King)

well and truly made Rona their home”.

Funding success

“With the constant challenges faced on Pomona and Rona to protect our native species, raising funds to continue our work is important” said John Whitehead. “We are really grateful to the DOC Community Fund, Kiwis for Kiwi and the Meridian Power Up Fund for their financial support as well as to our Friends of Pomona”. Thanks also to our volunteers for your willingness to handle dead rats!

Pomona Personality

The Pomona personality featured in this edition of Pomona Post is our newest Trustee: Lynley King. Lynley is a former Environmental Studies teacher at Southland Girls High School who has retired to Te Anau. Lynley became a Trustee last year and, together with husband Paul, has been an active volunteer on Pomona and Rona Islands.



Facts

Name: Lynley King
Age: the youngest Trustee!
Occupation: Eco-warrior
Favourite Bird: rock wren
Favourite plant/tree: all plants except stinging nettles! I’m inspired by our mountain herb fields and alpine flora such as the Mount Cook buttercup.

We put the following questions to Lynley and here is what she had to say:

Q. Favourite place on Pomona or Rona?

A. The beach on Pomona by trap K04M is an excellent place to hang out at the end of a day checking traps.

Q. Best memory of a working bee?

A. Seeing close-up the first unbanded tieke on Rona and managing to get a decent photo of it.

Q. Funniest moment on the islands?

A. Watching fellow Trustee, David Fortune, go underwater diving, without a wetsuit, to successfully retrieve the Rona quarantine sign that had been thrown in the lake.

Q. Why do it?

A. It’s a great opportunity to visit a unique environment on a regular basis and it’s a privilege to be able to help preserve it. After a night camping on Rona the dawn chorus is amazing!!