

Pomona Post



Summer and the rata is in flower , Rona

Kia ora Volunteers and 'Friends of Pomona'. Here is the latest edition of Pomona Post. Enjoy. See you on the next trap check!



NOTES FROM TWO SMALL ISLANDS



Pomona

Rona

News brief

The Trust has had another donation from 'Fiordland Jet', from clients using their boat trips on Lake Manapouri. This generous donation has again helped support the work volunteers do on the islands. For example, the Trust has just purchased 5 new cameras to replace cameras that have been damaged, by keas and water. Cameras are an essential tool for effective monitoring to be carried out on the islands.

Thank you Fiordland Jet



Klaartje and Rick clearing a trap on Pomona during February's trap check

Thank you to Myell Smith who has once again donated money to the Trust. Your support Myell is always appreciated and as the battle against invasive species is always ongoing, your donation will help the Trust to carry on trying to win the battle.

'Shadow' the caught kiwi taking a rest with Ranger Heath.



Looking at the trail camera data from the two trap checks undertaken this year on Pomona, show lots of busy kiwi roaming around the island. For example out of 10 cameras every one had multiple kiwi sightings. One camera had zero rats seen in two months but numerous kiwis seen. That is how it should be - just photos of our special fauna.

Results from the trap checks this year are: 9th Feb, 23 rats out of 202 traps, 13th April, 17 rats and 1 stoat from 181 traps checked. Rat numbers following the bait station 1080 operation in Dec 2023 have stabilised at around 25% (+/-5%) cameras showing one or more rats per day. At the peak of last years high rat numbers this number was 80%. Most pleasing was to finally get a stoat in a trap. The most recent camera stoat sighting on 11/4/24 indicates there is probably at least one stoat still at large on the island.

Now that Deer A young stag was seen by contractors on the island before Christmas. All volunteers had a careful look for any sign of the animal still being on the island, however no deer sign was observed. It is now possible the stag has swum back to the mainland to join up with other deer as it was lonely on Pomona.

The last two trap checks by the Southland trailer yacht squadron were 37 rats, 10 stoats, 2 mice, Jan, 11 rats, 4 stoats 1 mouse March. Totals since 20/03/23 ie one year are - 15 stoats, 128 rats. Diagram below shows where the stoat captures on the mainland have been



Kiwis on Rona



Over the last 6 months Rona has been providing a forest floor food supply for four kiwis. In January they were all in good health and ready to go home to the whenua of the Haast Sanctuary. So on the 26th three birds were caught by the DOC rangers and their 4-legged friends and successfully released back in the Sanctuary. Meanwhile back on Rona the trail cameras were picking up a kiwi without a transmitter. A message was sent to kiwi ranger Heath in Haast. He told the dog "she needs to be on her 'A' game". So on the 12th Febuary the game was on....What an 'A Team' the kiwi (Shadow) was caught, admired on the boat by Skipper Nick and she was back with the whanau in Haast in less than 24 hours.... 'Just another day in the office' Ka pai 'A Team'

Kiwi Ranger Heath with the 'caught' kiwi : Photo by Nick Key

Rona has been a busy place over the summer months. Volunteers were out to the island doing trap checks for the stoat, drilling hundreds of holes in the bait stations for pegs to hold in the poison bait blocks, and keeping up with the tracking tunnel monitoring of the geckos. Then on the 26th February the mouse incursion response started. You can read about this and the stoat on page 3.

Kev & Mush cleared the mainland traps in February. Only 1 stoat and 4 rats. A lot less than the 10 stoats in Dec. We have been using golf balls in place of eggs in the traps on the mainland for a few months now. These are working well as the predators are still going in the traps. Rats have been known to eat the golf balls!! Ka pai Kev & Mush

Gecko monitoring for the 2023/2024 season is now finished. As expected the gecko tracking was less than the last two seasons when there were no mice present. See photo below of a tracking card showing gecko tail and foot prints among all the mice prints.



VIPP.. Very Important Pomona Person ... Remembering Fay



Fay undertaking track work on Rona

In March the Trust lost one of our dedicated volunteers and John's wife.... **Fay Edwards**. At a memorial service for Fay, Paul King spoke (see text below) about her contribution to the islands over 12 years.

I would like to say a few words about Fay on behalf of the Pomona Island Charitable Trust.

First of all, I would like to pass on sincere condolences to the Edwards and Whitehead whanau for the loss of Fay.

The Pomona Trust looks after Pomona and Rona Islands on Lake Manapouri and Fay has been actively involved as a volunteer for the past 12 years. In that time, Fay completed many trapping rounds of both islands, filling bait stations, servicing cameras, helped John with track work, tracked and caught kiwis in freezing July fogs, and chivvied the volunteers when needed. In fact, she was the person to make the phone calls to get the pest control going again after Covid interrupted and nearly stalled the operation.

Many happy afternoons were spent in Fays kitchen at Ramparts Road preparing for the next day's trap check. Fay graciously allowed us to cut up rabbit and duck meat in her kitchen, but drew the line at John boiling salmon lure in the house. Crisis point came when frozen stoats in the fridge were judged to be stinking out the whole house and were summarily removed to the workshop. There was always laughter and cake at these sessions. Speaking of cake, Fay was an amazing cake chef and produced a baked creation for almost every trap check, to be eaten on the return boat journey. There were iced father Christmas shaped cakes at Christmas and specially iced ones for birthdays. They were much appreciated by weary volunteers.



Out in the winter fog...'kiwi monitoring'

On many visits to the islands, Fay was responsible for Health and Safety of the teams and one always got the feeling that she really cared about everyone's welfare. She was also devoted to the idea of preserving the islands, and always came home with an interesting photo of a plant or insect, or an observation on the state of the bird life. Summer was Fay's favourite time on the islands, with the native orchids in flower and perfuming the air. The Trust will certainly miss your dedication to the cause, your fastidious preparation for trap checks and your positive and cheerful nature.

POMONA PLANT HOTSPOT

This edition of Pomona Plant Hotspot is the beautiful orchid -

***Earina autumnalis*, Easter orchid, Raupeka.** This sweetly scented, orchid was a favourite of Fay's and she would always be delighted with the delicious sweet fragrance drifting pleasantly over her in visits to the islands in autumn. Fay always knew she would be in for a treat when she stepped of the boat on either island in autumn. As Rona is a small island, in autumn the vanilla fragrance of *E. autumnalis* scents the air. Seeing the Easter orchid cascading over the forest floor in full bloom, the air filled with a sweet scent and beautiful birdsong, Fay thought Rona was a perfect place .

The filtered dappled light of the bush or on rocky north facing banks, with no browsing mammals present, creates the perfect conditions for Easter orchids to thrive.

Raupeka is a species of Epiphytic orchid that is endemic to NZ. It is commonly found growing in rainforest of all four islands of Aotearoa. It flowers at autumn and Easter time. Always a delight for the senses while doing the trap checks in autumn.



Paul and Fay preparing for a trap check



Photo showing a bank of Easter orchid on Rona in full bloom



The orchid's Maori name is Raupeka or Pekapeka-a-waka, hinting at an association with our native bats. No doubt the bats and native bees in the forests were attracted to the white, waxy flowers with their strong, spicy nutmeg/vanilla fragrance and acted as pollinators for the plants.

The fragrance often gives away the presence of this orchid before they are seen.

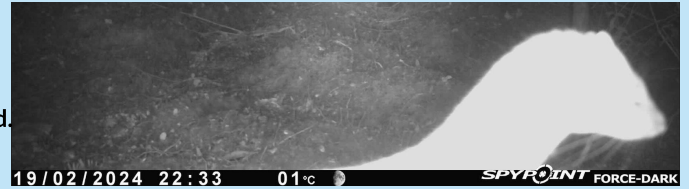
A FOCUS ON RONA



It's been a busy old summer on Rona..... especially so if you were a stoat intent on hunting out all the saddleback/tieke who have made Rona home since their translocation in 2018 from Breaksea Island. Sadly Rona - like the Orokonui Ecosanctuary in Dunedin, (where a single stoat in 2015 wiped out an entire population of 50-60 tieke), also appears to have had its tieke population wiped out by a single stoat. The stoat first appeared on a trail camera on the 21/12/23 and then spent the next 3 months visiting trail camera sites 17 times before visiting a trap sometime at the end of March. South Island saddlebacks are extremely vulnerable to all predators



due to their tendency to nest, forage and roost on or low to the ground. As Rona Island is approx 600m from the mainland- a distance easily swum by a stoat - the Trust and volunteers always hoped that a stoat wouldn't take the swim. But swim it did and it was quite clear that without the trail cameras we use for monitoring, we wouldn't have had a clue that a stoat was on the island. Questions would have been asked.. What has happened to the tieke? Is it the falcons again? Because of the mouse incursion response, volunteers have been out, tramping all over the island many times and no tieke have been seen since early January. One bird was heard in March but now that loud, penetrating cheep-te-te-te-te ('chatter song') is gone from the forest song. So for all those folk out there who question the time and \$ spent on predator incursion responses (the Chalky Island stoat) it does not take long for a species to become extinct if nothing is tried. On Rona it was interesting to note that the trap the stoat was found, only had an egg in it due to the mice eating all the meat lures and the stoat only went into a trap when nearly all the mice had gone. The caught stoat was a female and once again - as far as we know Rona is stoat free again. A few more camera checks will tell..... and David Cary's audio moths will give us a clearer picture on the tieke.



Simon Marwick with the dead tieke hunter



The stoat caught on camera at R16 checking out the lure



The mouse incursion response 2024

After finding mice footprints on a gecko monitoring tracking cards in February 2023, it has taken a year to get permits & paperwork completed and the kiwis taken off the island before the incursion response could start. Well done to the Trust for persisting with getting the permissions because we don't want a 'Million-Mouse Island'

Volunteers put out brodifacoum blocks (2 per station) on the 26 /02/24. A check 3 weeks later revealed a 60% bait take. So new blocks were put in all stations. The final check and bait - take - in revealed a bait take of 8%. That is a definite knock-down of mice.



A bait station showing the brodifacoum blocks on the spikes ready for the mice to have dinner in a out-door covered eatery.

Tracking cards to monitor the presence or absence of mice were put out across the island in the final check 7/04/24. Results aren't finalised yet..... the tracking cards will tell the story. We suspect it might not be an eradication this time. Why? because of these big windfall areas the island now has (new areas in last September's storms) they are prime mouse hangouts. It is an impossible task to service bait stations in these places. Aerial drops are the only way here to get every last remaining mouse even though we have put out new bait stations along the southern shoreline to target every area. A big thank you to Skipper Nick Key and his boat 'Adventurer' for helping us in every way possible with this incursion. Once again Nick, looking after the islands is only possible with you and your boat.



Nick and the 'Adventurer' coming in for pick-up on Rona . One of the amazing summer days which can happen in this part of the world.



The 'A Team' and their awesome knees have done the job !!

To our 'A Team' of volunteers... AWESOME mahi !