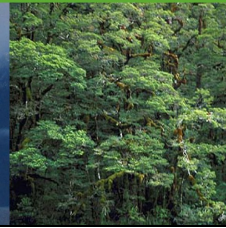
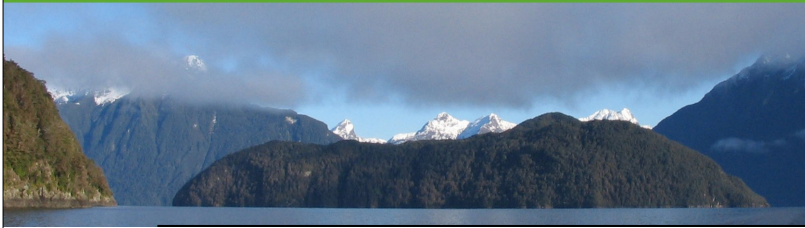


Pomona Post



October 2015



Mice—the next frontier

In recent years the focus for conservation in New Zealand has been on finding ever more efficient ways to deal to the major predators such as stoats, rats and possums. By comparison, much less attention has been focused on the impacts of mice and ways of controlling them. In Fiordland, that is about to change as the Trust embarks on a major ground-based mouse control/eradication project on Rona Island.



Mouse on Rona Island (Photo: Viv Shaw)

“When mice first re-invaded Rona, no one was sure exactly what effect they might have on the native flora and fauna” said Trust Secretary, Viv Shaw. “We knew that they could potentially wipe out the geckos that had just been discovered on the island, but we did not think that they would have much impact on kiwi”. However, the Kiwi Recovery Group recommended that Rona no longer be used as a crèche site for the critically endangered Haast tokoeka because of the perceived competition from mice for food. Without mouse control, the Trust would lose its ability to involve the local community in helping save our national icon. “Helping to save one of New Zealand’s rarest kiwi species has

been really important to us” said Trust Chair, John Whitehead, “so the decision was made to go ahead with a mouse control/eradication project”.

With funding from DOC Haast, the Trust put together a comprehensive report on mice, their impacts and the options for eradicating or controlling them to low numbers. “Ground-based methods were chosen”, explained Viv “because they offer greater flexibility and provide greater protection to native species already present on the island” The network will also act as a comprehensive biosecurity response for future re-invasions.

Working with our contractor (Contract Wild Animal Control Ltd), the Trust has established a network of over 460 bait stations on Rona. Over the Spring, the stations will be baited with brodifacoum on a monthly basis. “Whilst the risk to kiwi from bait in bait stations is low” said John, “all toxins will be removed from the island before any Haast tokoeka chicks are released in the summer”.

The Trust acknowledges that its mouse project is experimental in nature, but it is exciting to be involved in something that Lindsay Wilson, DOC Fiordland Biodiversity Manager describes as being “at the forefront of the next big challenge in conservation in this country”.

Support for mouse project

Financial support for the project has come from Gary Chisholm and the Meridian Energy Manapouri Te Anau Commu-

nity Fund enabling the Trust to purchase the bait stations. Fund Chairman, Matt Bayliss, said that “Meridian is proud to support the Trust’s rodent eradication project and is very excited at the prospect of the endangered Haast kiwi returning to Rona Island”.

The opportunity for members of our community and Meridian staff to interact with kiwi cannot be underestimated. Having been present when the first kiwi were released on neighbouring Pomona Island, Meridian’s Brand Manager, Lizzy Baker, described the occasion as “one of the highlights of my career”.

Monitoring mice

Given the experimental nature of the mouse control project on Rona, monitoring its success is extremely important.



Liz Scott laying out tracking tunnels on Rona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

"To get an understanding of mouse activity on Rona before the bait stations are filled" explained Viv, "we've put in place a network of tracking tunnels". Cards are placed inside each tunnel for one night and the number with mouse prints on provides an indication of mouse abundance on the island.

Volunteers ran the first set of tracking cards in September, with the data showing that 23.8% of cards had mouse prints on them. "It will be interesting to go back two weeks after the first bait fill to see how the mice are tracking" said John. "We'll keep you posted".

Pomona Update

Our work on Pomona continues with regular trap checks and quarterly bird counts. "We are succeeding in keeping rat numbers to very low levels" said Viv "and are still hopeful that we will once again eradicate them".

The winter bird count was slightly down on the previous year, but the long, cold winter is likely to have had an impact on their food supply. Falcons have also

been active across the island. "These magnificent birds have a habit of turning up completely silently and just watching you" explained Trustee Chris Shaw. "That is an awesome experience".



Falcon watching Chris Shaw on Pomona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

The Trust was successful in its application to the DOC Community Conservation Partnerships Fund for "Project Work-safe". The funding will allow us to employ a contractor to cut 10km of tracks.

"Servicing the trap network on Pomona is quite challenging at the moment" said Viv "so this grant will make it quicker and safer for volunteers to check the 172

trap sites." It will also open up opportunities for volunteers who are more comfortable on cut tracks rather than the current more challenging routes.

Trust turns ten

In July this year the Trust turned 10 years old. "It is incredible to think that we have been going this long" said Trust Chair, John Whitehead, "but it's a good time to take stock of what has been achieved on Pomona and Rona in that time and to look forward to the next 10 years"

Over the last ten years our volunteers have taken literally thousands of photos. A small selection of pictures from across the years appear on the next page.



Thank you to everyone who has supported us over the last 10 years.

Pomona Personalities

The Pomona personality featured in this edition of Pomona Post is the New Zealand clematis. Hybrid clematis are popular with gardeners, but next time you are on Pomona or out in the bush look out for the native variety *Clematis paniculata*, known in Maori as puawhananga.

Clematis Facts

Clematis paniculata, like all clematis, belongs to the buttercup family *Ranunculaceae* and is the best known of our native varieties. With masses of white flowers, this plant lights up the forest on a sunny spring day. Like many New Zealand plants, this white clematis changes its leaf shape as it grows. The adult leaves are dark green, up to 10 cm long and 5 cm wide. Clematis stems can be up to 10 cm in diameter and twine around supports, growing up to 12 meters in height. There are both male and female plants with the males producing larger white flowers than their female counterparts. After flowering, the plants produce distinctive seedheads which look almost as pretty as the flowers themselves.

(Source: Dawson & Lucas, 2000).



Clematis paniculata on Pomona Island (Photo: Viv Shaw)

Celebrating 10 years of restoration on Pomona and Rona Islands



Photos courtesy of Viv Shaw, Barry Harcourt, Bruce Fraser, Tracey Tibbles, Helen McPhail, Neil MacKenzie