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Halfmoon Bay, Stewart Island, taken from Ackers Point.
Photo by Spirit & Nature Photography

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GBI Environmental News

The publication of the Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust, whose trustees are: John Ogden (Chair), Jude Gilbert, David Speir, Liz Westbrooke, Jo Ritchie. Secretary: Fenella Christian.



Photo by Kari Beaven

Southerners Show the Way Caring for Birds • Hawaii Report

Mission Statement: Our vision is to protect native species through the eradication of rats and feral cats, to re-introduce species lost to the Island, and to work towards building an ecology-based economic framework for Great Barrier Island.

Guest Editorial...

by Jo Ritchie

I owe a lot to Great Barrier. In my past life as a naïve DoC recreation planner I spent two summers on the Island running the summer holiday programme. I had a great teacher in Don Woodcock and through his knowledge and experience I was able to take people for great walks and experiences across the Island. I learned quickly that this is a place of great contrast — the most memorable one being told that the weather was wonderful in summer only to come out and have three cyclones in six weeks and spend New Years Eve getting revelers out of their tents at Kaiarara Bay as the creek burst its banks.

It's nice now to be able to come and give something back to a place that taught me a lot about island life, the complexities of integrating people and conservation and the passion that people have for the place they live in.

The Great Barrier Trust has had a bit of a rocky ride. I can appreciate both sides of the

debate in the community—wanting to remove animal pests from the island and the concerns about wide scale use of some control techniques such as toxins in the environment. However the bottom line is that Great Barrier is a special and unique place. A lot of this is to do with the unwavering dedication of the people who live there to keep it a special place, but it also has a lot to do with its wilderness qualities and the fact that key animal pests which are wreaking such havoc on the mainland such as possums and mustelids are not on the island.

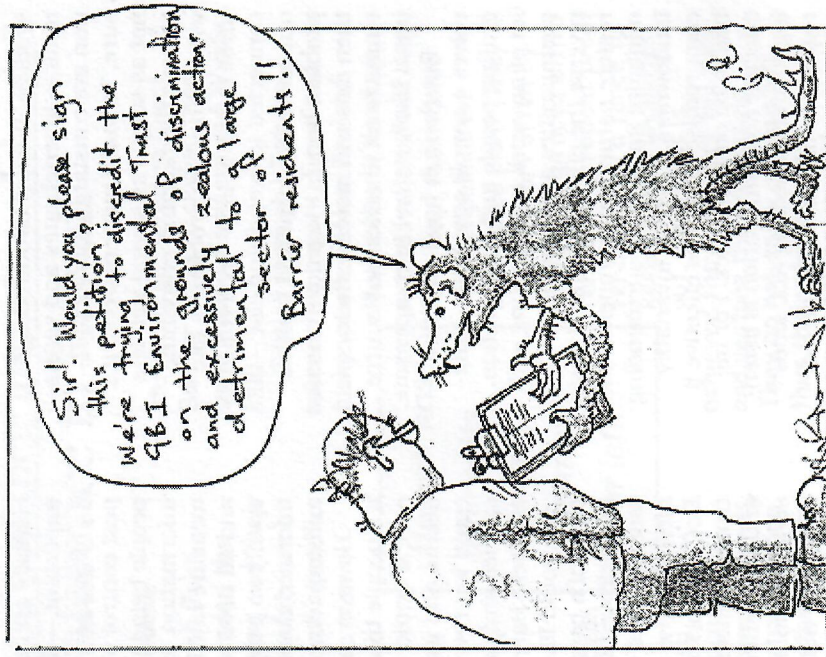
It's significantly important that an island the size of Great Barrier so close to Auckland, with minimal biosecurity measures and so accessible to visitors, has so few species of animal pests. However what this means is that the few that are present can take maximum advantage of their environment—a well-stocked larder in the forests, wetlands and farmland and superior housing with low competition from other predators.

JO RITCHIE works as an environmental planner and project manager, principally in the areas of restoration ecology and animal pest eradication. She has worked in the Auckland Region for nearly 20 years, this included 12 years working for DoC as a recreation planner and field officer. For the last 7 years she has run her own business and worked on projects such as the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary, a number of pest fencing projects around the country, prepared several restoration plans and worked with a wide range of community groups. Her emphasis is on practical conservation — the out there doing part and involving the community as much as possible.

Some would argue that minimal bio-security can work — look at Motuora Island, which has never had rodents but is easily accessible to the public who can land boats on the beach. However this is an anomaly and is more good luck than planning.

Biosecurity measures need not be disruptive to people's lives. It's more about valuing the uniqueness of a place and taking simple steps to ensure new pests do not establish. Boats are probably the greatest source of a new pest — rats are commonly known to stowaway on boats. This is a common cause of reinvasion onto offshore islands where eradication have been undertaken. Simply checking your boat on a regular basis and periodically setting and maintaining a bait station or trap is all that is needed. In practice all other biosecurity measures are this simple.

Animal pests in whatever form are NOT a part of our natural environment in New Zealand. Unlike other environments (e.g. Australia) our native species did not evolve with the ability to defend themselves against predators and competitors. As a result



New Zealand has experienced one of the highest extinction rates of native species in the world.

The sad thing is that with all our knowledge today this trend continues. Many native species only thrive on offshore islands where eradication programmes have been undertaken and where it is difficult for people to visit. On the mainland keystone species such as kiwi and kereru are in rapid decline. And it's not only the birds that suffer — unfortunately most animal pests eat anything that walks, crawls, flies or grows and so the basic life support

"Rats, Humans and their impacts on Islands" Conference in Hawaii

by Liz Westbrooke

At the end of March John Ogden and I attended the first ever 'Rats, Humans and their impacts on Islands' conference at the University of Hawaii. People working on rat eradication projects came from all over the world and shared information via some 51 papers presented and 20 large posters on display.

There were folks working in the Caribbean and the US Virgin Islands, various nationalities examining

the Seychelles, Madagascar, Canary and Mediterranean islands, bio-security specialists reporting on measures taken in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, Australians helping locals on Pacific Islands such as Viwa Island off Fiji, and German and US teams studying the deforestation of Rapa Nui (Easter Island). There were of course many Hawaiians since they were the hosts and there were lots of New Zealanders as this seems to be one of our specialist fields (70 islands eradicated now).

The presenters were a mixture of project managers, ecologists, archaeologists, linguists, anthropologists, botanists and DNA specialists! John gave an excellent and amusing presentation on the rat

Honesty and openness is also important — I have found that a lot of the issue around various pest control measures is a result of people being provided with limited information. Every pest control measure has advantages and risks and all need to be presented openly so people can make well-informed decisions about their use and impact.

However, at the end of the day it's people that make the difference. I would like to see more debate and innovation on how we could improve the lot for native species and natural environments on Great Barrier.

I would like to see the development of a community-led strategy for improved integrated management of all of the natural environments on the island — be they DoC, iwi, private or community trusts. Concerns about who pays and what effects it has on personal freedom and pockets do need to be addressed but I would argue that if such a strategy were developed that had the support of the whole community, funding sources would not be hard to find and the outcomes would be beneficial for both the local community and the environment.

systems of many of our ecosystems — invertebrates and vegetation are constantly under pressure. To make matters worse it's not as simple as saying well lets remove the rats and everything will be fine. The problem is like most things in life — everything is connected to everything else — take out one component and another problem occurs — remove rats and then cats will increase their consumption of another food source (most likely native) to compensate.

But there is hope and it involves a simple equation — integrating people and conservation. A lot of my work is in working with communities and groups to reverse the effects of animal pests, restore natural environments and minimize impacts on surrounding landowners. There is invariably compromise and to be effective it has to be on both sides. For me effective communication is listening to and respecting ALL sides regardless of whether I agree or not and then trying to work out some form of action plan that meets everyone's concerns — for me problems are challenges to overcome. This may seem overly simplistic or a bit dreamy but it does work and it works well.

Hawaii Conference Report

Continued from page 4

(e.g. miro trees), in wetter habitats, near food 'caching' spots, and in the lightly forested areas.

Of course that is all based on research done in other places. To be really effective

on Great Barrier Island however, we need to confirm these results by gathering specific information about rat behaviour and preferences in this particular micro climate and northern bush type. And then of course there are the mice... More research is needed.

statistics gathered on Great Barrier Island including those from Awana, Glenfern and Windy Hill.

Sitting through all these interesting papers, I realized how lucky we are in New Zealand.

Hawaii has little of its natural vegetation cover left, even their iconic coconut palm is an introduced plant. They have to start often by protecting an area with a fence, not a rodent proof fence, simply a fence to keep pigs and ungulates out. Once this is achieved they can start to study and restore the area inside. They do not enjoy our rainfall, thus their plants do not regenerate as vigorously as ours do. And they have introduced animal pests such as snakes and mongoose to contend with.

So what else did we learn that was new? Lots and lots of detail! The main conclusion I came to however is that everyone working in this area needs to integrate what is known about rat behaviour into the process. Effort must be targeted more effectively to trim cost and minimize toxin use. Rather than using strict grids of equidistant baits and traps, management control must intensify around rat food sources

Continued left on page 3

"Hawaii has little of its natural vegetation cover left..."

Successful community conservation in the Far South

This article looks at the Stewart Island Rakiura Community and Environment Trust (SIRCET) an environment restoration and protection trust whose activities in the Halfmoon Bay precinct of Stewart Island are gaining national attention. Our aims and activities here have many parallels with SIRCET and a closer examination of their history and activities is well warranted.

SIRCET is a Charitable Community Trust composed entirely of people who live on, or have a strong interest in Stewart Island. The Trust's principal conservation work, the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Restoration Project (HMB HRP) is focused firmly on the local community taking control of their own destiny and protecting the land that they live on.

This project aims to control possums, wild cats and rats (the full suite of introduced predators on Stewart Island), on private land around Halfmoon Bay. A recent survey of visitors to Stewart Island found that 30% noted the birdlife to be the highlight of their visit. The Trust wishes to maintain this drawcard as a basis for a growing tourism industry, and in doing so work towards a sustainable future for the Stewart Island community.

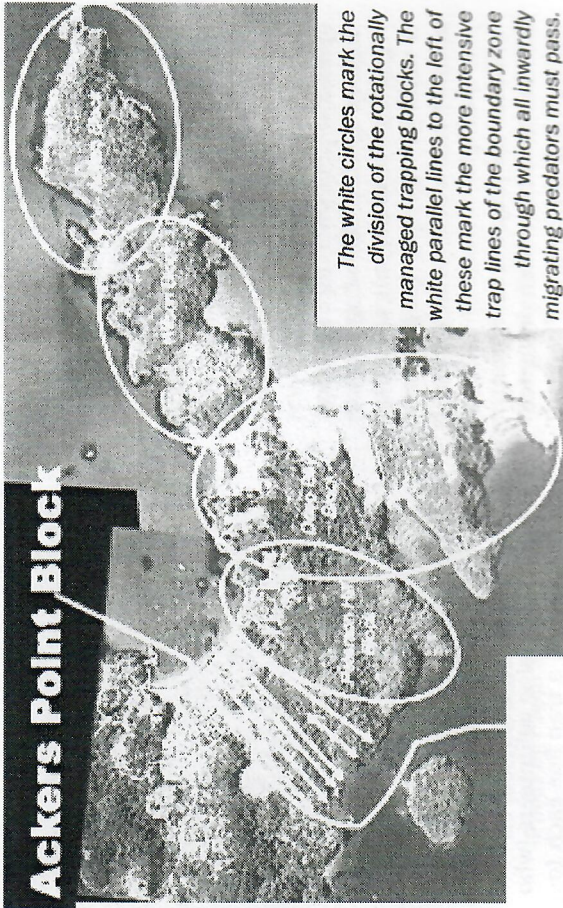
Ecology

The forest species in the Halfmoon Bay area are representative of the main forest cover found on Stewart Island, which is lowland temperate rain forest (kamahi, rimu, rata mix). Some unique

flora, eg. mistletoe and tree fuschia are also present.

The area is distinct in the numbers and diversity of bird life. These bird species include: tui (seasonal flocks of 100+), bellbirds (*korimako*), kaka (flocks of 12+), *kereru*/ NZ pigeon (occasional flocks of 15-20), kiwi, little blue penguins (*koraro*), a mainland breeding colony of sooty shearwater (*titi*), grey warbler (*riroriro*), fantail (*piwakawaka*), brown creeper (*pipipi*) and red-crowned *kakariki*. The only known Stewart Island population of long-tailed bats (*pekapeka*) occurs in the Halfmoon Bay area. Many of these individual species, let alone the combination, are distinctive at a national level.

Many species have disappeared from the area over time eg yellow-head (*mohua*), saddleback (*tieke*), Stewart Island robin (*toutouwai*), with some disappearing off the main island within the last ten years eg rifleman (*titipounamu*) and Stewart Island weka because of predation by introduced mammals.



Ackers Point Block

The white circles mark the division of the rotationally managed trapping blocks. The white parallel lines to the left of these mark the more intensive trap lines of the boundary zone through which all inwardly migrating predators must pass.

History

This project started in 2003, as a purely volunteer pest-control project. The foundational trust members and initial volunteers were able to take on 20 hectares at the very tip of the peninsula which forms the southern side of Halfmoon Bay (the township of Stewart Island/ Rakiura), called Ackers Point. This is home to a seasonal population of sooty shearwater (*titi*), and a breeding population of Little Blue penguins. It's a popular place for tourists and Islanders to walk the well-formed track.

Over time the HMB HRP project has expanded to cover some 200ha with possum, rat and cat traps at prescribed densities. Outside funding has allowed for a project manager and some assistants to co-ordinate volunteers and support the project effort.

The project operates almost entirely on private land, with "our

community taking action" being the main focus. This 'community' is made up of both residents and visiting crib-owners. If landowners choose to offer their land for inclusion, it is at no cost to them, and gives them greater ownership of the project. There are some small DOC or council-owned reserves and the Trust has permission to include them also.

Safety of domestic pets, children and the workers themselves, as well as maintaining people's privacy, has been a strong focus, to ensure the restoration work continues to be supported and to grow.

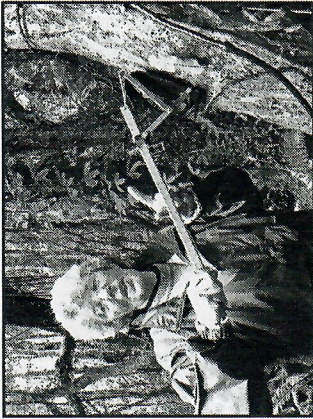
Community sensitive techniques

The pest-control side of the project operates entirely through trapping. It was set-up in that way so that any member of the community or anyone with an interest in Stewart Island can be involved (No special poison-handling licenses are

needed, and kill-traps reduce the time-investment versus gain.) To protect the Island's domestic pet population only live-capture cage traps are used with some selective shooting for wild cats. The need for support of the whole community, including pet owners, is considered paramount! The Trust's stance on domestic pets is to promote responsible pet ownership: keeping dogs on leashes, following council regulations and keeping cats inside & well-fed). They provide free cat collars (with a bell!) to help identify pets if caught.

Since the project's inception, 210 hectares have been protected through a grid network of seven hundred odd traps. There are approximately 5 possum and 5 rat traps per hectare, with a more intensive area of trapping around the border and the odd less intensive area (eg. the golf course). Due to the nature of wild cats and the method of control, cat traps have not been placed in permanent locations. Instead mobile cage traps are used to target areas in which wild cats are either known to be (through identifying cat signs using a trained cat dog) or in which special wild life exists (eg Little Blue Penguin colony).

Other landowners who are not within the current restoration area are also setting up their own pest-control projects. The Trust makes themselves, and their advisors available to provide advice and support to these projects wherever requested. So the total number of community traps working together towards a common goal is significantly greater than the Trust's efforts alone.



Volunteer Lee setting the 'Warrior' possum kill-trap. Photo: Kari Beavan

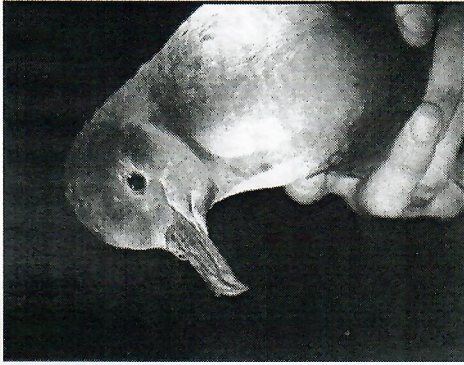
How many volunteers?

People help with the project in many ways. They have about 25 regular trapping volunteers (who have adopted a trap line each to check weekly), as well as those who help with finances, workshops and workdays, organizing important events and so on.

Volunteering isn't limited to the community, there are many people living around New Zealand who offer support, such as advice and critique by request, legal support and production of a website. The Trust is keen to involve anyone who has an interest in Stewart Island.

Achievements

Every year the contribution to the project increases, and so far, so have the results. Tui and bellbird numbers have shown a 71% increase over the last two years in the annual bird-call count monitoring within the restoration area. (Initial results from the 2007 monitoring show another very significant increase over the last year) In comparison, a nearby, unprotected area has shown no change in numbers over the same period of monitoring. Tomtits have



*Titi (sooty shearwater)
Photo by Paula Brown*

also more than trebled in that time and fantail numbers, which appear to have suffered a seasonal setback in 2004/05 in both areas, have begun to swell again within the protected area.

The predator control has allowed the re-introduction and successful breeding of Stewart Is. Weka (2005) and the introduction of the Stewart Island Robin (2006).

Two local businesses, (Stewart Island Flights and Aurora Charters) and the Southland Department of Conservation have sponsored these transfers, which could not have been achieved without the restoration work being carried out. Local members are excited to see the weka forming pair bonds and breeding around the local walks, in their backyards and beaches.

In 2005 they were voted to receive an Environment Award (Community Groups' section) by Environment Southland, a fantastic flip to all their supporters, sponsors and volunteers.

Funding

Clearly the SIRCET has substantial funding support from Biodiversity and Advice Fund, World Wildlife Fund, Community Trust of Southland but also excellent local business sponsorship and Tertiary support in species monitoring. Their aim is toward sustainable revenue streams and sound management to ensure the continuity and growth of the project.

Thanks to a rotational, intensive trapping strategy they have ensured that pest numbers can be kept low with minimal effort, making the best use of volunteers' time, and allowing for expansion of the area of protection or focus on areas of special need.

The funding has allowed SIRCET to employ two professional part-timers — an operations officer and an administration officer. Among a raft of responsibilities, they co-ordinate the work ensuring economy of effort and maintain information feedback to keep all well informed as well as recruiting new sponsors, volunteers and advocates. Their task is also to ensure the project has funding for the years to come, and that sponsors are given value-for-money in their level of involvement and exposure.

What makes this project work is its "closeness to home" for this community. People living here, and those who choose to visit, value having an abundance of native wildlife around their homes and gardens. Many earn their living from tourism, others simply feel that the sound of the kaka calling at dusk means 'home'.

Like many remote communities,

Caring for Birds

By Karen Walker

interested people here work together well, and that is the key to this project. No one person could achieve long-term pest control around the Bay; this project relies on a small amount of effort from each person, coordinated into a big vision. Kari Beavan, Operations Officer for SIRCET sums up the attitude of the local conservationist. "With an example like the world-renowned, pest-free Ulva Island on our doorstep, and a head start simply because of the nature of Halfmoon Bay, it's only natural to want to take that extra step to protect this area."

Comment

THE COHESIVENESS of the group involved on Stewart Island, as well as their enthusiasm is a model for Great Barrier. We will need to overcome the difficulties of physically separated communities and dividing power politics when asked to envision an island-wide perspective. The topographic scale of the HMB project lends itself well to the processes already embraced ie. using trapping methods alone to reduce predators to low levels works quite well on a small peninsular, where the reduction of the macro predators (cats and possums) has had immediate effects on breeding success and fledging of the larger birds and ground nesting species.

The dynamics of rats is less understood as we have discovered, and the response of the ubiquitous rat population to the reduction of the other competing predators (especially possums) will be interesting data to follow from Stewart Island. The annual peak in the rat population cycle here on GBI is limited principally by the abundance of the vegetative food available – it is most likely the same case on Stewart Island, although seasonal climatic variations may have a more dramatic effect. Data established here shows that trapping can reduce the winter minima but fail to limit the exponential booms of the rat population in the dry season. However, local experience has shown here that reduction of rat densities has improved outcomes for introduced robin nesting success. By using indicator species counts (and breeding success) as a measure of trapping effectiveness SIRCET can get relatively fast feedback on their trapping programme and make appropriate adjustments. The relatively small scale of their project allows for quick responses.

• **NEXT ISSUE** we will look at the Initiative of SIRCET in creating the Rakiura Environment Centre and how it has achieved its goals of community education, school and public (visitor) awareness programmes in rubbish re-cycling, composting and zero waste initiatives.

Their latest annual report will also reveal the ongoing progress of their predator control and introduced species breeding efforts.

We have a fantastic variety of bird life with which we share this island. How many people on the mainland get to chase kaka from their fruit trees, have fat kereru feeding in their gardens, morepork dueting outside, banded rails peeping hopefully in the door or vying with the kingfisher for your garden snails, pateke puddling in the bays, and a multitude of other land and seabirds as part of everyday life? This is what inspired me to learn how to care for sick and injured birds.

Even with the best intentions in the world you can do harm. I've made many mistakes myself so here are a few basic do's and don'ts to remember which will greatly increase a birds chances of survival.

The first consideration when dealing with wild birds is to remember they are just that – wild. Tempting as it may be they can never be pets. They have a right to freedom, to fly, and make a choice of environment, food, and a mate.

If you find a sick or injured bird it is important to keep handling and contact with people to a minimum as all handling causes stress. Any wild bird that is very quiet, appears tame or unafraid is a very, very stressed bird – it can't fly or run away in order to keep a safe distance. And stress is extremely bad news for birds.

Obviously in order to examine and treat birds, handling is necessary but if you haven't had experience of what to look for it is better to leave it to someone who has, thereby eliminating unnecessary handling.

Always keep domestic pets away, as natural predators they cause immediate stress with close proximity.

Because birds cant tell you what is wrong, it can be helpful to watch for a short time (if circumstances allow) and notice its general behaviour. Is it fluffed up, looking cold and miserable, not trying very hard to escape, can not walk, stand up or fly? Is it normally where you would see that sort of bird? All these observations can be clues for diagnosing the problem. You can always phone if you're not sure whether to intervene or not.

So what can you do if you find a bird that needs help? If a bird has flown into a window a quiet half hour may see it up and off, providing cats and dogs can be kept away. However, if the bird doesn't look like moving before dark something needs to be done. Same applies to any injured or sick bird that is in danger if left where it is.

A relatively easy method of capture is to throw a towel or sheet (or whatever you have with you) over the bird then pick the

whole lot up. This keeps a safe distance from beaks and claws, avoids chasing which is stressful, or grabbing at wings, tails, or legs. Be wary of beaks near your face and eyes, it is surprising how far a long neck can stretch - seashore birds such as gannets and shags have sharp beaks for hanging onto wriggling fish.

For safe transport a good choice, if possible, is a cardboard box, holes punched into the sides for air and big enough for the bird to turn around. Failing that, whatever is at hand to contain the bird without harming it. Scrunched up newspaper or material of some sort on the bottom avoids the bird slipping round, and place a cover over the top.

Then call Bird

Rescue.

Before I collect the bird or if you can't bring it round right away, put the box in a quiet place away from household noise and activity. Avoid anywhere hot - feathers are great insulation and birds can overheat easily.

A big 'no no' is cuddling, patting, kissing, or bringing your face close. This may not worry domestic pets but its really scary for wild birds, a face coming close means you're going to be eaten.

Never ever wash a bird with soap or shampoo. Birds may need

washing in extreme circumstances and only by an experienced person. Washing removes all the oil from the feathers which is what keeps birds waterproof. Without the oil birds get wet through to their skin and very cold. They're unable to keep warm or fly and can not safely swim. After washing, utmost care is needed until re-oiling is complete.

Experience is equally important when it comes to feeding. Wherever possible a natural diet should be followed - I'm forever digging up my precious worms, stalking round after insects, collecting berries, or delving in rock pools in my quest for food. Only with a very sick or defiant bird tube or force-feeding may be necessary - please don't try either. Its very easy for a stressed bird to inhale food which leads to respiratory problems and an otherwise healthy bird might die. A very hungry bird might eat what you put in front of it but because everything is strange, most will initially need help and encouragement.

If you find a baby bird which has fallen from its nest, been too enthusiastic trying to follow its parents or left behind, make every effort possible to find the nest or parents and put the bird

"...it is important to keep handling and contact with people to a minimum, as all handling causes stress."

back. If you need help with where to look or what to look for, I'm happy to do whatever I can or offer suggestions.

I know its really tempting to keep them - they're all so cute, but replacing the chicks gives them the best chance of relating properly to their own species and going on to raise chicks knowing what to do. It's really easy to give birds the wrong messages about who feeds them, where to live, what their mates should look like, and what type of food to eat.

The purpose of bird rescue is to help the bird recover, provide rehabilitation, then ultimately release it back into the wild.

Knowledge of each birds rehabilitation needs is essential for a successful release. Unfortunately, not every bird can be saved and some must be euthanased but each bird saved is well worth the effort.

I would like to thank all members of the public who have cared enough to contact me about birds in need of help. I can be found at 134 Puriri Rd, Tryphena, just past the stone bridge, or contacted on 4290478.



COVER PHOTO

The vision for Stewart Islanders is that endangered species, such as this Stewart Island Robin, become everyday residents around the local homes and gardens of Halfmoon Bay. Initial releases have seen the birds, which only occur on Stewart Island, returning to the Freshwater Valley soon after release; however, future releases are being planned with alterations to ensure the birds remain.

Just a bit of Sport

by David Speir

AS I SWITCHED on my head torch and turned towards the darkened grassy lawn, the cat's eyes glowed up, greenish yellow, luminescent in the gloom. Interestingly enough, they exhibit a range of colour — some are reddish, some distinctly fluorescent green while others tend through yellow tones. But light up they do, easily, at over 50 metres just from the meagre glow of my LED torch.

This time the cat was wary, one eye blinked out as the head turned and then, nothing. As I was naked and wet after a bath, and did not have an immediate response I left the hunt for another day.

Next morning, walking down the corridor of grass between the tall kanukas and totaras, the harrier hawk leapt into the air and flapped away. My eye was drawn to a dull reddish tone in the grass under the kahikatea where the hawk had been feeding. The olive and crimson feathers of the kaka were spread like a cloak on the grass. The carcass had been picked clean down the backbone as hawks do, but the wings and head had been separated — the mark of a cat kill.

There had been a female kaka and a fledged chick in this area for a month or so now — the mother was fearless in browsing at shoulder height in the fig tree, showing little concern at my



approach until she flew off at the last moment. The puriri was in flower too and the extended branches drooped right to the ground. She had most likely been feeding in those low branches when the cat struck.

I took this personally — funny that a few days previously I had been throwing my gumboot at this cheeky kaka as she ate a ripe fig.

I spotted the cat next evening stalking territory no more than 100m from the kill. Looking down a riflescope at a pair of yellow-green eyes is a disorientating experience. The feeble beam of the head torch didn't seem to spook the cat — quite the opposite. This feline was casual, almost indifferent to my presence 30 metres away. I didn't know it then but the cat's coat was jet



Local panther and top carnivore — *felis okiwi*

black — all I could see were the eyes, sometimes two, sometimes one and for brief periods nothing as the cat turned its head this way and that.

It was a lucky standing shot that took the cat; a big male, 4.7 kilos of muscle with wide shoulders and serious ivory. The kaka never had a chance.

I heard the chick's distinctive call over the next few days but for some reason didn't connect the two. There were anything up to a dozen kaka in the zone at that time, as the puriri flower and totara berry were prolific.

Nearly three months later, walking on the other side of the creek under a spreading totara I found the desiccated but completely intact body of the fledged chick. The strong overnight winds had dislodged it from the upper branches of the tree where the juvenile had

remained until it had starved to death.

DoC have been operating over 30 traps in the Okiwi Valley for some years now — two weeks on, two weeks off. They consistently catch cats, never less than 3-4 per fortnight, but this big male had walked right past several baited traps to get into my block. His stomach was full of rabbit — the kaka had just been a bit of sport.

IT IS A COMMONLY HEARD defence of wild cats that they only catch the easy prey like mice, rats and rabbits. Analysis of stomach contents of trapped wild cats almost never reveals feathers — they are very good at not eating them. But evidence like this and observation from experienced field operators reinforces the fact that cats are hardwired predators—they will and do take other prey.