

OPBG Newsletter August 2016

Working Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula since 2008



NEED TO REPORT A POSSUM DEAD OR ALIVE?

Contact Brenda Cameron at: brenda.wayne@xtra.co.nz

A lot has happened since our last newsletter and an update is more than overdue.....

OPBG's Operations Manager, **Bruce Kyle**, is currently cracking down on the annual possum winter migration. The Otago Peninsula's steep temperature gradient, from cooler remote coastal areas to warmer harbour side residential areas, results in highly mobile possums seeking food and shelter. As winter southerlies blast into prime possum coastal hangouts, such as Boulder Beach, possums literally head for the hills, seeking out gullies and tree belts of native vegetation cover. But these territories quickly become crowded causing possums to 'spill over' to the harbour side in search of alternative prime real estate, such as native bush, flowering gorse, veggie gardens, and compost heaps.

Bruce noticed this migration starting a few weeks ago, so **NOW** is the perfect time for everyone to set a Timms trap and assist OPBG in trying to reduce the current wave of possums. The best place to set your Timms trap is between a big 'play' tree (look for scratch or bite marks on the bark) and some thick scrub cover. Please bait it with apple, so it only attracts possums; a sprinkle of a lure around the trap usually helps attracting attention. A mixture of 1:4 icing sugar to flour with cinnamon and curry powder added has proven very effective. For more information, or if you'd like to join the control effort, phone or text: **021 263 0566** or email:

opbg11@gmail.com



Cathy Rufaut, our Project Manager of the last few years has left the group to focus on a different direction in her career. Fortunately she won't be lost to us completely as she would like to continue as a volunteer. However we owe her a big "Thank You" for her dedication and amazing work in bringing the project up to the level that we are at now.



At the same time we would like to introduce **Sarah Irvine**, our new Project Manager, who took over at the beginning of July. Sarah has experience in educational publishing and early childhood education as well as a strong interest in conservation, having done voluntary work for DoC. She completed a B.Sc. in Zoology at Otago University and is currently undertaking a Postgraduate Diploma in Wildlife Management. Sarah lives in Macandrew Bay, where her children attend local schools. OPBG is fortunate to have a person with Sarah's skills and enthusiasm on board as we press ahead to clear the Peninsula of possums and plan the control of other pest species. She certainly had to hit the ground running and we are looking forward to a close working relationship.

OPBG also welcomes **Carol Tippet** as the new educator for the Backyard Biodiversity Project. Carol is not entirely new to the team, many of us know her as the coordinator for the tracking tunnel volunteers, and we are all looking forward to the regular delivery of our tracking cards and tubs of peanut butter!

The Backyard Biodiversity project is a fun and innovative environmental education program that arms children with rodent, insect and lizard monitoring devices, which lets them check out what's roaming in their backyards at school and home. It was introduced last year and OPBG is lucky to have secured funding again this year from MBIE's 'Unlocking Curious Minds' local grant to continue this successful program through our Peninsula schools.



Chew cards – possum activity

OPBG Trustee and volunteer coordinator **Moira Parker** has been assisting Bruce by running a program of targeted monitoring of possum activity with the use of chew cards over the past few months. Chew cards are a cost effective and safe means (non-toxic) of detecting possums. Possums leave distinctive bite marks after trying to extract the lure from the edge of the card.

A total of 17 volunteers have put out and checked 484 chew cards. The cards are checked twice for possum bites at 7 day intervals. That represents 280 hours of volunteer time, a great effort. Thanks so much to everyone involved.

What did we find?

24% of the cards had a definite possum bite mark. In some instances this would be the result of one possum getting a taste for the lure and chewing on several cards.

However, it highlights the locations where possums are still present such as Paradise, District, Camp Rd and McTaggart St walking tracks as well as the favourable habitats of Colinswood Bush and the upper slopes of Glenfalloch Gardens.

On the plus side, chew cards in areas such as Leith Track, Broad Bay Slip Site, parts of Okia Reserve, NE face of Hereweka/Harbour Cone and many roadside strips of vegetation showed no possum bite marks.

Chew cards are a cheap and safe way to detect possums. There is no poison associated with the smelly lure packed into the sides of the card. **If you would like to be part of the chew card team and check for possums on or near your place, please contact Sarah at opbg11@gmail.com**



Follow up trapping

Its all very well knowing a possum is in the area, the next thing is to catch it. So, a huge thank you to the growing number of Timms trappers out there. You are doing a fantastic job and as a result there have been over **65 additional possums** caught. Well done to everybody. There's no way that our part time Operations Manager **Bruce Kyle** would have had time to follow up on all the positive possum bites by himself.

So anybody interested in joining the team, please contact Bruce opbg11@gmail.com



Bruce has also been trialing the new BaitSAFE stations with a cycle of prefeeding on certain days and with different non-toxic feeds before deploying the actual toxin. These BaitSAFE stations ensure that possums get used to seeing and handling the stations and are then comfortable to access the toxin. They are not accessible to other animals and are safe around stock and pets (see also video on our website and Facebook page).

Thank you to the **Otago Regional Council** for a grant of \$27,000 from their **Environmental Enhancement Fund** to fund expert analysis of OPBG monitoring data and materials for a trial pest aversion fence. In addition thank you to the **Bendigo Valley Foundation** for a grant of \$1,500, which has funded the purchase of inked tracking cards for one year of rodent monitoring and 1,000 chew cards for possum detection plus Victor rat traps. And thank you also to the **Lions Foundation** for \$5,000 for purchase of rat and stoat traps.

Almost 10,000 possums have been removed from the Peninsula in the past 5 years thanks to a huge effort from volunteers, residents, contractors, the team at OPBG, and our funders and supporters.

Great work but we need to keep going!!