

## New Additions to the Team

### Matthew Montgomerie (Montie) – Manager

OPBG would like to introduce Matthew Montgomerie (Montie) our new Manager. Montie was most recently involved with Biosecurity work for Auckland Council, specifically the plant pathogen Kauri Dieback – (*Phytophthora agathadica*). He has a variety of work experience, ranging from making snow on Mt Ruapehu to recruiting Staff for Restaurant Brands. Montie is originally from Clevedon, he grew up on a farm that borders the Hunua Ranges. He has made a recent return to Dunedin where he had previously studied commerce at the University of Otago. Montie is joined by his Partner Susie who is originally from New England, USA and their lab-mix Tigger.



### Robert Ashton – Trap Network Technician (TNT)

A recent arrival to Dunedin, having arrived from Nelson 2 years ago. Rob has a background in Marine Engineering most recently working in Singapore and Western Australia. Instead of drilling holes in the sea bed or cleaning the bilge Rob can often be seen working with the herd of donkeys and small horses at Gills corner or setting the new AT200 auto resetting traps around the Peninsular .



### Micaela Kirby-Crowe - Trap Network Technician (TNT)

Micaela recently moved back to Dunedin from Invercargill and has fallen in love with the Peninsula, thanks to spending a good part of this year living in Broad Bay. She completed a Master of Wildlife Management in 2015 and since then has mostly been working for DOC in Invercargill as well as spending a year living in Munich drinking beer, eating cheese, and hiking in the alps. At DOC she spent three summers doing biodiversity monitoring, followed by a year working with the Maukahuka Pest Free Auckland Island team. Micaela loves all the weird and wonderful wildlife that the natural world has to offer and is looking forward to eliminating mammalian predators from the Peninsula, allowing our native species to thrive



## Bruce Kyle - Operations Manager

The end of year milestones are looming large and operational work has become increasingly urgent.

The possum aversion fence is 99% complete on the Tomahawk side, and OPBG are most grateful for the support and patience of landowner Edwin Chapple, and the expertise of the Custom Fencing team. It remains now for the rabbit netting to be pinned down and the bottom end of the fence connected with the lagoon.

The 'lean grid' of self-resetting traps continues across sectors 1, 2 and 3, with 109/117 of them in place. Self-reporting small Victor leghold traps are being rolled out in prudent locations, near roads so they can be quickly accessed. Providing some extra necessary coverage for the lean grid, the Victors will not be situated within 150m of any dwelling. They are set high on ramps to avoid any problems with livestock.

Since our new 'Trap Network Technicians' (TNTs) Rob Ashton and Micaela Kirby-Crowe came on board, they have been kept busy with the ongoing work, taking over from Frank Pepers. Frank's experience and pragmatism were, as ever, much appreciated during the roll-out and he made sure that Rob and Micaela got off to a flying start. A big Thank You, Frank.

The team is now deploying trail cameras and lure devices to monitor animal presence/absence and to see which species are more attracted to the egg mayo lure.

We also have CWAC monitoring possum levels in sectors 1,2 and 3 following their brodifacoum operation. We are hoping the levels come in close to zero.

Thanks again for the great support from Peninsula residents, and we wish you all a safe and happy Christmas break!

The Ops Team



## Peninsula Update – Mike Stuart

Young possums (joeys) that have been growing in pouches over winter and early spring will be spending more time riding on their mother's back until they reach independence towards the end of summer. Over October-November possums will be eating Kowhai, Pohutukawa, Eucalyptus, Willow, Poplar and gorse flowers, with an added protein boost of bird's eggs and nestlings.

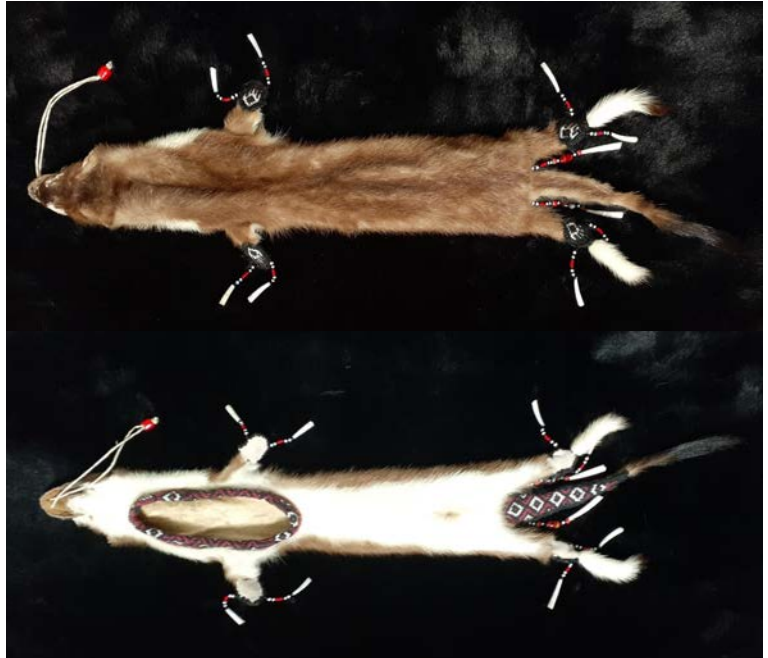
A roadkill possum was recently reported on Portobello Road between each end of Marion Street. We had received reports previously of a possum living in the area but hadn't been able to catch it in a trap. A big thank you to whoever did the job for us. So, if you see, hear or run over a possum, please report it at [possums@opbg.nz](mailto:possums@opbg.nz).



## Mike in Lockdown - Making Good Medicine from Bad

Readers of our April newsletter will possibly recall that Mike spend some of the Lockdown tanning a stoat skin that he just happened to have in the freezer. Well, Mike has provided an update of what became of the stoat skin. It was made into a Native American medicine bag to hold trinkets evoking good memories of some of the great people he has known. Good medicine.

In Native American tradition, the weasel and stoat feature most predominantly within the traditions of various tribes of the Anishinaabe, a large and diverse group of Algonquian-speaking peoples of North America. This includes such commonly known tribes as the Ojibwa (Chippewa), Cheyenne, Arapaho, Black Foot, Gros Ventre, Shawnee and Delaware. For the Ojibwa (Chippewa), medicine bags made of a weasel or stoat skin are associated with initiation into the Mīdē'wiwin (Grand Medicine Society). These bags are the emblem signifying first-degree membership to the Mīdē'wiwin ceremony and within which each member kept 'power' or 'medicine'. The bag was carried by members during ceremonial dances and people were buried with it when they died. Hence very few bags have made their way to collections. People often joined the first-order degree of the Mīdē'wiwin to obtain long life.



So, the question begs. Is Mike looking to obtain a long life through the medicine bag? If so, then here's hoping the bag contains particularly good medicine.

## Cutting trap lines and setting traps

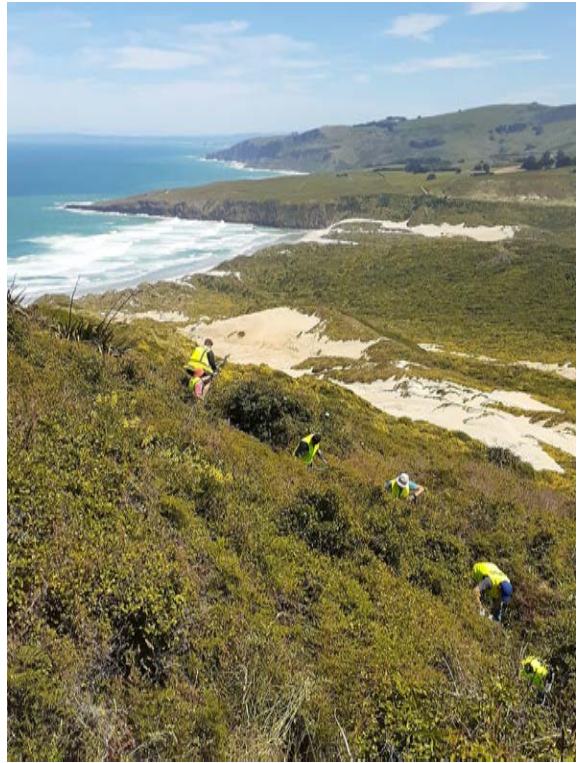
A trapline of Trapinators (photo attached), Timms and Trex traps has now been established along the Otakou Golf Course and through to Stepney Avenue at Harwood after 340 meters were cut to re-establish an overgrown track along a disused fence line. Chew cards indicate at least one possum is present, but it has alluded the traps. Two hedgehogs (Timms) and a rat (Trex) were not so fortunate. Before and after photos below:



## Fisher & Paykel Volunteers

Our Peninsula Coordinator Mike spent a couple of days with a crew from Fisher & Paykel re-cutting our tracks at Sandymount. This is vital work that helps us keep our access to bait stations and trap lines open. It is backbreaking work, but who would complain with this view?

A big Thank you to the Fisher & Paykel volunteer group!



## OPBG's new Home on the Peninsula – Jenny Rock

After years of scattering our gear, materials and meetings across the Peninsula, finally we have a centre-point for our operations and interface with the community. In December we take over the lease of the old Happy Hens DCC-owned building next to Portobello's Coronation Hall.

The property will be our operations base for staff, volunteers and trustees. It will also serve as a drop-in centre for the public, providing information, education, and materials for community involvement.

The site will also be used by at least five other biodiversity conservation groups operating on the Peninsula, serving as a hub for community engagement, and generating synergies across our work. These include STOP (Save The Otago Peninsula), YEPT (Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust), The Sea Lion Trust, SWAT (Search out Weeds And Terminate), and the NZ Marine Studies Centre.

In future, OPBG aims to grow further opportunities for community use of the site, in offering a trap library, meeting space, and a venue for hands-on involvement.

After some renovation work, we hope to be moving in near the end of summer. Watch that space for the new Peninsula Biodiversity Hub!

## End of season gathering for the Bird Monitors



The OPBG bird monitoring volunteers gathered for an evening of drinks and nibbles to celebrate the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> year of bird monitoring. Peter and Jeannie Hayden were kind enough to host us at their beautiful property in Portobello. It was wonderful to see both new volunteers who have completed their first season and others who are in their 11<sup>th</sup> year of counting and still going strong. Thank you so much to everyone who contributed to our growing data set.



## Peninsula Rifleman Nest Box Census – Marcia Dale

During the last week of October our rifleman supporters conducted the first ever Peninsula Rifleman Nest Box Census. Landowners and other volunteers checked each nest box and recorded any signs of nesting activity. During the census period we found 16 active nests and 5 partial nests. That's a wonderful result and a satisfying reward for everyone's efforts, massive thanks to all the builders, installers, monitors, donors, landowners and supporters.

Here's a breakdown of the results:

- 15 of the active nests were in nest boxes, the other one was underneath a building.
- 10 of the active nests were in new boxes installed this year, 5 were in existing boxes
- Three of the "partial" nests were complete and feather lined, but had no eggs in them at the time of the census. There is a good chance they will have been used for a second brood later in the season.
- The active nests were all located within the Dicksons Hill/Hereweka/Hoopers Inlet area. There were no nests east of Allans Beach Road or in the bush areas from Broad Bay to Glenfalloch this time round. Give it time though 😊
- The average clutch size is 3.5 eggs, so we have a potential population boost of 56 new birds with the first round of broods from the season.
- Based on the date of first laying, the first chicks would have fledged from about the 20<sup>th</sup> of November. The adults are generally very prompt with starting a second brood, in another box. If there are other boxes in their territories they will use those.

Nest box #94 was the first confirmed active nest so a trail camera was installed to see what the nesting birds get up to. We hoped to get some good photos and video footage from it. And with 3500 files downloaded so far, it's proving a good location! Here are some of the highlights:

- Confirming the date of hatching – the proud parents started bringing in food for the newborns on November 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- Seeing what a goofball the male can be, he misses the entrance hole a few times and falls off. It's mostly in the morning, any parent can relate to how hard mornings with young children can be! On another occasion he proudly arrives with a big white feather, promptly drops it, then attempts to enter the nest. Ever seen those home videos of a dog trying to enter a kennel with a stick far too large? This is the rifleman equivalent. He gets there in the end, albeit with a bit of feather sticking out the hole... but then, three hours later the female is seen removing the giant feather from the nest box, while the male is clinging to the side of the box noisily trying to convince her how awesome his gift was.
- Hearing a shining cuckoo calling in the background
- Seeing a possum rub its scent glands on the tree in the background – possums will often use particular trees to communicate with other possums, either via scent or bite marks or both. That tree is an excellent candidate to install a trapinator on (tree mounted possum trap).

The trail camera was taken down after the nest was emptied. It was a heartening sight to see the product of everyone's efforts – a family group of six rifleman flying overhead.



Female and Male perched on nest box #94

## Fiona Morrison – Volunteer Extraordinaire

Volunteers are the backbone of groups such as OPBG as we all know and there are quite a few biodiversity groups active on our Otago Peninsula. Most people have a look around and then take a pick which one of these groups to join as a volunteer. Occasionally you get somebody special who just cannot decide where their interests lie and end up being active everywhere.

Meet Fiona, unstoppable and definitely powered by Nature:

Hello, I'm Fiona and I've been volunteering for OPBG for 18 months. As an Aussie ex-minerals exploration geologist, I started out knowing nothing about local plants and fauna! So the first step was to learn to count birds at a golf course with my fabulous boss Marcia Dale in September 2019. I am now a Deputy Associate Head Gardener at Sandymount and have a small fan club on the Peninsula for my cakes, but more of that later!

I also volunteer for three other groups on the Peninsula in addition to OPBG. And I know of at least six other groups on the Peninsula where I could volunteer but haven't investigated them yet. I'm rarely home although I'm officially "retired". Since lockdown ended, I've spent about 100 hours a month doing work I really really love in our spectacular wildlife landscape.

Some of my work is at set working bees with groups of folk, but I also have the freedom to work independently and



safely at places like Sandymount and the Harbour Cone Block. If it's a Wednesday I'm at Sandymount tidying tracks and uncovering bait stations from lupins (and other advanced gardening), if it's a Thursday I'm weeding and planting and coprosma on the hills around the harbour bays for STOP\* and if it's a Friday I'm out with SWAT\*\* eradicating pest weeds like banana passionfruit and bomarea from farms, house gardens and road verges around the Peninsula. Every second month I check an OPBG possum trapline in Shiel Hill, I still count birds with Marcia in spring and recently I helped at an OPBG rat trap box making workshop. Last month I took on the role as Treasurer for the Hereweka Harbour Cone Management Trust and I have started a project for them tidying up an old farmhouse site near Harbour Cone.

It's been a crazy 18 months! I've met so many interesting and inspiring people, I've learned an amazing range of skills, I've accumulated a vast array of tools and kit in my car boot and I've totally loved being outdoors

in all weathers being connected with the land and learning about our unique and awesome people, flora, birds, history and fauna. And I've had to expand my repertoire of cakes as the Friday SWAT group has appreciated my morning tea offerings and wants more. Jestings aside, I know that every bit of fieldwork (and gardenwork) makes a difference and I send a big shout out to all the other nature loving volunteers on the Peninsula. And it matters not whether you are an official volunteer or you're someone who helps out mightily by having a water dish for birds, a rat trap, a nectar feeder or a kōwhai tree in your backyard. It all counts.

As we approach the end of this most unusual year, it's an exciting time at OPBG now with multiple work programmes in progress. We're moving into the Happy Hens property in Portobello and it will be fabulous to have

a community biodiversity hub where general public and volunteers, managers and Trustees from all groups on the Peninsula can meet to swap stories, attend workshops, present data and maps and generate ideas. There will likely be cake too.

So, don't sit at home on the Peninsula next year thinking "I'd like to do something wilder with my life but what?". Regardless of whether you have a couple of hours a month to offer or a couple of days, give us a shout at [volunteers@opbg.nz](mailto:volunteers@opbg.nz) and we can link you up to activities you could explore that you may enjoy doing. Just for starters, OPBG will be looking for folk for track work at Sandymount in the first half of next year. And also looking for folk to sit at computers to assess camera images from trap sites for the presence of predators. And it would be my great pleasure to meet you out in the bush on the Peninsula one day soon!

For further adventures check out the video of my OPBG colleagues Craig and Kim explaining the magic of volunteering in this Predator Free Dunedin video <https://youtu.be/87CcbkNnptk> And check out the other Backyard Trapping Stories on the Predator Free Dunedin YouTube channel while you're there! And then come and join us in 2021!

My warmest thanks to Marcia Dale, Moira Parker, Lala Frazer, the SWAT team and Bruce Kyle for their ongoing support and encouragement.

\*STOP – Save the Otago Peninsula Society (STOP) Inc Soc: holds working bees on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday mornings (contact: [stopincsoc@gmail.com](mailto:stopincsoc@gmail.com))



Building rat trap boxes working bee for the OPBG Guardians group

\*\*SWAT – Seek Weeds and Terminate: holds working bees on Friday mornings at various locations around the Peninsula (contact : [imaginarycrayfish@gmail.com](mailto:imaginarycrayfish@gmail.com))

### Events Coming Up

**Public Information Meeting** – *scheduled for Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February at 7pm in the Coronation Hall, Portobello*

**Field Day and Volunteers BBQ** – *scheduled for Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> February at Hoopers Inlet Hall*

Watch this space, details available in the New Year!

### Health & Safety

As always, we need you to be mindful of working safely, especially now with track maintenance and trapping in full swing. Summer is here and it is important that you are well prepared when working remotely. Volunteers are encouraged to get familiar with the H&S plans relevant to your work.

**Remember to Report-A-Peninsula-Possum –**

[possums@opbg.nz](mailto:possums@opbg.nz)





*We would like to wish you all a wonderful festive season, stay safe and healthy and enjoy this beautiful environment that we are privileged to live in!*



**Cumulative Grand Total (December 2020) = 19,658**

Apart from our general contact emails, you can contact our team under:

Manager: [manager@opbg.nz](mailto:manager@opbg.nz) Bruce: [operations@opbg.nz](mailto:operations@opbg.nz)  
 Marcia: [guardians@opbg.nz](mailto:guardians@opbg.nz) Mike: [peninsula@opbg.nz](mailto:peninsula@opbg.nz)

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For general enquiries:

[info@opbg.nz](mailto:info@opbg.nz)

To report a possum:

[possums@opbg.nz](mailto:possums@opbg.nz)

To find out more about becoming a volunteer:

[volunteers@opbg.nz](mailto:volunteers@opbg.nz)

021 0237 5970