

April 2021

Delivery Partner for  Predator Free Dunedin

## New Additions to the Team



### **Ben McConnell – Trap Network Technician (TNT)**

Ben joined the OPBG team coming from a background with extensive experience in pest control and local knowledge of the Otago Peninsula.

This includes two years of pest control work throughout the lower South Island through Otago Pest Services as well as the planning and implementation of Penguin Place's predator control operations.

Alongside his experience with volunteer groups at Cleveland Trust, he also worked for two tourism companies based on the Otago Peninsula, introducing the public to some of New Zealand's most endangered animals in a safe, informative and accurate manner.

Ben is driven by a passion for conservation and a genuine love of the outdoors. When not working you are likely to find him in the Otago high country, fur trapping, hunting or photographing wildlife.

### **Nicholas Kelly – Trap Network Technician (TNT)**

Nicholas is a graduate of the University of Otago with Master of Wildlife Management (MWILM) and a Bachelor of Commerce. Through his environmental science qualification, applied science background, and roles as a wildlife tour guide at the Royal Albatross Centre and Monarch, he developed a strong understanding of the Otago Peninsula biodiversity. He was involved in a number of conservation projects along the Otago Peninsula including performing mark-recounts of New Zealand fur seals, micro-chipping little penguins, supplementary feeding albatross, and monitoring various sea bird populations. Many of these projects have involved the detection of pests and protected species via trail camera monitoring and using GPS to collate and analyse data.

## Operations Manager - Bruce Kyle

Staff have been maintaining the Lean Grid, primarily in Sector 2 and close to road corridors. There are still a few teething problems to deal with but the catches are happening and the 'celium' sensors on the corridor traps provide immediate, reliable remote monitoring, which means we can check them, when notified, very promptly.

The monitor cameras continue to give us good presence/absence information, both for possums and other species. We are keener than ever to hear of any possum activity from residents, and urge people to pick up the chew cards from the Portobello store. They're free and come with instructions. We are also looking forward to getting into the Biodiversity Hub (the ex-Happy Hens building) to make use of the storage space and to have a dedicated office space. Many thanks to all who have helped make this happen. As we and our volunteers and contractors go about our work, checking very large numbers of devices at times, we absolutely realise that our presence on private property requires respect, responsibility and flexibility – particularly at critical times of the farming calendar.

To help us engage with landowners and the community, we welcome you to drop into the Hub for a coffee, a chat and to look at the large-scale operational maps that will soon adorn the walls. We will also, hopefully, have pest control tools and information available for residents and landowners to use. We are currently planning our next hit of Sector 4, using 'Double Tap', a relatively new, humane and non-persistent toxin. This month we will be sending out a letter to landowners, advising details and seeking consent. A Fact Pack will also be available to read or download on the OPBG website. Sector 4 has always been the 'fly in the ointment', but we are hoping.... well.... planning to make another big inroad into achieving Possum Free status.

Thank you all again for your support.

## OPBG's new Home on the Peninsula

Renovations are almost complete, and we are planning a working bee for interior painting. Work on the outside will take place in the near future, so watch this space for the after shot.





## Community Engagement – Marcia Dale

### Bolstering the Buffer Zone

Over the next 6 months the possum eradication will be ramping up in the rural zone of Sector 4 and getting closer to the urban boundary of Shiel Hill and Waverley. The Guardians of Sector 5 need to strengthen efforts in the buffer zone between sectors in order to keep the possums contained, as we don't want them re-invading a cleared area. Our possum aversion fence is now looking spectacular due to a team of mesh peggers who helped bang some pegs into very hard dry ground uphill from Tomahawk lagoon. The combination of mesh and hot wires helps to discourage possums from crossing to the other side.



That section of the fence now stretches from Tomahawk lagoon up to a property on Highcliff Road. The next section of the fence will continue down the other side of Highcliff Road down the harbour side nearly to Portobello Road. There will be gaps in the fence where roads pass through, so we will fill the gaps with a barrage of traps and detection devices. Marcia installed a trapinator in a backyard last week approximately 5 metres from where the fence ends and was delighted to have a NZ falcon watching over her – they are still pretty rare on the Peninsula. Just downhill from where the fence ends is one of our buffer traplines, the White Line. The falcon flew off towards it, presumably to look for some tui or bellbirds to eat – yet another reason why we have to keep increasing their numbers by knocking out the possums! Hopefully their main item on the menu is starling, they seem to be the most numerous bird species in that area.

A few weeks ago there was a working bee on the White Line to tidy up the track and lay out some devices for a trial we're currently running. Thank you to the good folks who came along to help, we ended up with 9 people assisting on the day. We were massively surprised to find 4 possums had been caught in the trapinators, generally we only get zero or two at the most. Morris tells us he switched the bait to pears, which could have played a part in luring those possums who don't like apple. We also found lots of koura (freshwater crayfish) in the stream, which kept the kids entertained, and some of the grown-ups too.





Alongside checking the possum traps we also installed chew cards, ink tunnels and ground based bait stations. We've been having big issues with the trapinator bait being stolen, so we wanted to test whether poisoning rodents would have an effect. The toxin we are trying is called Double Tap, which is relatively new, but simply a combination of two toxins that have been around for a while, Cholecalciferol and Diphacinone. The benefit of Double Tap is that it is more humane and less environmentally persistent compared with similar toxins such as Brodifacoum, which is the commonly sold household rat poison. Double Tap targets both rats and possums, so we're going to be using it in this next phase of the possum eradication too.

After a week we took the ink card and chew cards in and were very much surprised that all we recorded in the way of rodents was one lone mouse! Instead we had a massive amount of hedgehog sign, as well as weta footprints and one cat's paw print. The owner of the neighbouring property tells us that there is now a breeding population of the little owl in the area. Up to four of them at a time come and hang out on the roof of his barn. He says he first noticed them around 4 months ago and believes it's directly related to our possum control.





## Peninsula Update – Mike Stuart

To obtain community help in catching those possums hiding in urban areas, OPBG staff have been door-knocking about Harington Point, Golf Course Road and Harwood. Thank you to those people who have responded by hosting a possum trap in their back yard. Several trap lines have also been established or extended about the northern peninsula, and we are currently in need of a volunteer to maintain 11 traps on the Hoopers Inlet side of the Leith Walk and through bush to Allans Beach Road. If you think you fit the bill, please contact Mike at 021 2424 944.

It is presently possum mating season, which would account for recent reports of groups of noisy possums, particularly about Harwood and Otakou. Response to possum reports and ensuing trapping activities over the past month have trapped three possums and two were shot by a local. The trapped possums included a female that has successfully evaded being shot or trapped for some time. With further reductions in possum numbers, it is anticipated that the survivors will be harder to catch...survival of the fittest. It is pleasing to know that we humans can still out-wit the most fit possums.

Possums are presently feasting on ripening fruit in backyards and orchards and will also be eating Macrocarpa, Pine, Kanuka, and Tutu over the next couple of months. Grass and clover are also on the menu, with a protein burst provided by invertebrates such as insects and snails.

## Predator Free Dunedin

Predator Free Dunedin has received seed funding from [Predator Free 2050 Limited](#) to scope an expansion that would accelerate predator control across Dunedin. You can find details here:

<https://pf2050.co.nz/news/predator-free-projects-receive-new-funding/>

<https://www.predatorfreedunedin.org/news/2021/3/31/seed-funding-provides-opportunity-for-expansion>

The team got together with the other delivery partners of the Predator Free Dunedin project for a field trip around the Peninsula.



## Public Information meeting Feb 2021

OPBG held its first public information meeting at the Portobello Coronation Hall in February. It was time to introduce our new people and give everybody an update on what has been happening during the past year on the possum front. The current traps that we are using were on display and great interest was shown so Montie and his team were kept busy talking.





## Volunteer BBQ 2021

Another year and another successful BBQ with our OPBG volunteers and we snuck it in just before yet another Level 2... A massive Thank you to our helpers on the day, especially our lovely raffle girls, who did such a great job giving out the spot prizes. We would like to acknowledge our volunteers for making such a huge contribution over the years to achieve this incredible total of 20,000 plus possums removed from the Peninsula.





### SBS Bank donation

Once again, for the second time, OPBG was the winner of the monthly draw at the SBS Dunedin branch and was given a donation of \$500. A big thank you, very much appreciated.



### HELP NEEDED

**Would you like to become a volunteer for OPBG but can't tramp around the hills or don't really feel like setting traps. Or perhaps you already are a volunteer but looking for something different. There are many ways to help out.**

**The Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group is looking for a volunteer who can spare a couple of hours in the evening once a month to take the minutes at our Operations Committee meetings, plus some time after for writing up. They take place at our new Peninsula base in Portobello, the former Happy Hens building, on the first Monday every month.**

**If you are interested, please contact Marita on [secretary@opbg.nz](mailto:secretary@opbg.nz).**



## Events coming up

Join us again for Wild Dunedin week – 22<sup>nd</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021. Covid 19 put a stop to the festival last year, but it is all back this year, bigger and better. OPBG is proud to support the event at the Portobello Coronation Hall on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April and we are looking forward to seeing many of you there:

# WILD DUNEDIN AND THE OTAGO PENINSULA BIODIVERSITY GROUP BRINGS YOU: POST POSSUM, YEAH RIGHT!



Woo hoo – Otago Peninsula is (nearly) possum free! This means big changes to plant and animal life down the bay.

Come along and hear what that means to you.

What you can look forward to?

What you can do now?

What's next?

Start the evening with an OPBG sausage sizzle at Coronation Hall, Portobello on Monday 26 April at 5.30pm. From 6pm in the hall hear from our panel of local experts hosted by Peter Hayden.

Cost: **FREE** (sausages gold coin koha)



## Health & Safety

As always, we need you to be mindful of working safely, especially now with track maintenance and trapping in full swing. Wintry conditions are becoming the norm and it is important that you are well prepared when working remotely, especially in changing weather conditions. 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)**

**Cumulative Grand Total (March 2021) = 20,174**

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

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## Contact Us

For more information visit our website:

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