

New Member to the Team



Jenilee Hill – Predator Free NZ Trust Apprentice for OPBG

Introducing our Predator Free NZ apprentice, Jenilee!

Jenilee has joined us as part of the [Predator Free New Zealand Trust](#) apprentice programme to grow the number of experienced animal pest control specialists in New Zealand. This programme supports New Zealand's predator free vision, and helps to support the projects of community groups.

Jenilee's role is predator control, where she will help us to achieve our goal of eradicating possums from the peninsula, as well as working with volunteers and other community groups on the peninsula. She will also have opportunities to work with the [Halo Project - Beyond Orokonui](#) and [City Sanctuary](#), whilst gaining industry qualifications.

Jenilee has always had a passion for wildlife, and she decided to turn this into a career. She completed her Zoology degree at [University of Otago](#) and joined us a few months later! We're so excited to have Jenilee onboard to help us achieve our important goals, and contribute to the conservation of New Zealand!

Operations - Bruce Kyle, Nicholas Kelly, Ben McConnell

The 2020 toxin operation in the northern sectors of the Peninsula (Cape Saunders area, Taiaroa Head area and Clarks/Sheppard's Hill) was carried out by external contractor CWAC (Contract Wild Animal Control) from July to November to achieve a broad knockdown of possums. During this operation a total of 1014 bait safe stations were deployed and filled with toxin, which was repeated twice, and the contents checked every time. The drop in bait take from 24% to 15% and then to 5.6% suggested that possum numbers were declining significantly.

To now capture the remaining possums in the 3 sectors the team installed a lean network of self-resetting AT220's and self-reporting Celium live capture traps throughout sectors 1,2 and 3. The innovative self-resetting and self-reporting traps allow us to respond to traps only when necessary. This saves a huge number of labour hours, so we can pool our resources more effectively. Since the installation of 224 traps, we have caught another 62 possums to date! This brings our grand total to **20,601** possums removed from the Peninsula (as at 07/07/2021)!



Sectors 1 – blue, Sector 2 – yellow, Sector 3 - red

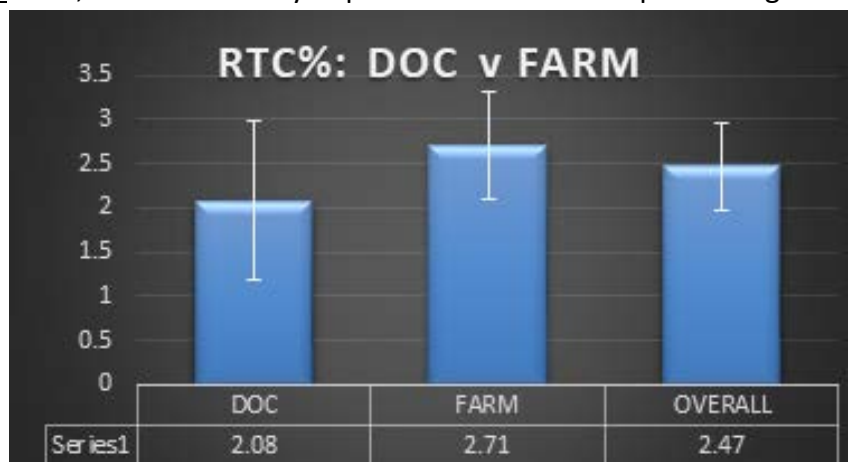
	Since Network Installation	In 2021
Mustelids:	9	8
Rats:	11	9
Possums:	62	51
Hedgehogs:	8	8
Mice:	34	34
Total:	130	116
Traps:	244	

Captures from AT220's and Celium Live Capture Traps

You can see a photo of one of the live cage traps with the Celium node attached in Micaela's report below.

The next stage of this year's operation has begun in Sector 4, which is the large area between Portobello South towards the Cove. The CWAC Contractor team are currently deploying bait stations throughout Sector 4, prior to putting in the first prefeed for this winter's operation. Southern Monitoring undertook pre-operational Waxtag monitoring in May, and reported a high level of support for the programme among landowners, many of whom are still out there trapping their properties.

The overall monitor result was 2.47% RTC \pm 0.5%, which means if you put out 1000 Victor traps for a night you'd catch approximately 25 possums, give or take. DOC areas sampled were not significantly different to FARM areas. As expected, possum abundance declined with altitude. This result came as a pleasant surprise as we hadn't done too much ourselves in Sector 4 over the past 12 months. It reflects a huge amount of work done by 'the four-legged stool' in recent years i.e. the landowners, the volunteers, the contractors and the previous ops team.



The huge drop in possum numbers is now being mirrored by the slow but steady rise in bird numbers and bird species as habitat recovers and a predator species is removed. It is so pleasing to hear that morepork, titi, tui, kereru and rifleman are reappearing on the Peninsula, and that kaka have zipped over from Orokonui occasionally for a look. It bodes well for other bird species and for other native species in general.

A Conservation Collaboration – Micaela Kirby-Crowe (OPBG Planner)

OPBG recently had the privilege of helping Franny Cunninghame and Graeme Loh from Forest and Bird to keep precious tītī chicks safe from predators, until they were ready to fly the coop. A number of live capture cage traps were deployed by the Forest and Bird team near Sandfly Bay with OPBG's Celium 'nodes' attached to them. The nodes are small electronic devices that send an email to our field staff when traps have triggered, which means live capture traps don't need to be physically checked every day. A wide variety of predators were caught in the Sandfly Bay traps including ferrets and possums, and a total of 65 tītī chicks were caught and banded before fledging. This level of success would not be possible if it weren't for the huge predator control efforts from the Forest and Bird team. A big thank you to Franny and Graeme for their hard work and to Celium Encounter Solutions for engineering such a useful device.



Micaela and Graeme attaching nodes to cage traps



Cage trap with node attached

Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Hub – Up and Running

We are in! After six long months of form-filling, meetings and negotiations, a major carpentry refit, and many hours of volunteer painting and shelf-building, we have moved in. What was once Portobello's home of Happy Hens (853A Portobello Road) is now the Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Hub, where OPBG operations are now based.

On 2 July we celebrated with a small in-house opening with representatives from other Peninsula biodiversity partner groups, who will also make use of the Hub for various activities including education and outreach. The partner groups who supported our successful application to DCC for lease of the building included STOP (Save the Otago Peninsula), SWAT (Seek Weeds and Terminate), the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust, the NZ Sea Lion Trust, and the NZ Marine Studies Centre. They have since been joined by the Otago Peninsula Catchment Group, as well as Forest and Bird (who are conducting a major seabird protection programme on the Peninsula). These groups are all in the process of displaying public education material in the Hub, along with OPBG.

Together we hope to make a place for people to learn, connect with local projects, and get involved with biodiversity conservation in a variety of ways. We also aim to enhance the existing synergies between our different projects by sharing this physical space. By the end of the year DCC should have completed the exterior recladding and we'll have new signage. We're looking forward to that and a grand public opening sometime this spring. Watch this space!



Community Engagement – Marcia Dale

TrapNZ

In April we were delighted to hit the milestone of 500 community traps on TrapNZ. It's not just possum traps, we have a mix of rat traps, mice traps, mustelid traps and cage traps too. Cage traps are an increasingly useful tool that can target a number of different pests, with the added benefit that you can release the neighbour's cat unharmed! Recently a Broad Bay local was using a cage to catch a wayward chicken and caught a possum instead! Bonus!

We've kept adding traps and are currently sitting at a total of 524. We know there are more out in the community that haven't found their way into our system, so if you know anyone who is trapping ask them if they are on TrapNZ and get them to email Marcia at guardians@opbg.nz if they would like to get on board.

If you are already a part of our TrapNZ project and you have additional rat traps or mouse traps that you're using inside your house or shed, you can add them into the project directly. It's really simple, you just go to the "Add a new trap" button in the Traps tab and fill in the details. You can name them whatever you want, my personal favourites are from a trapline in Pukehiki called Snapper, Crusher, Munter, Thrasher, Basher and Moosher



Great Peninsula Possum Dough Bake off

Our preferred bait for using in Trapinator possum traps is called “Possum Dough”. The strong smell of aniseed lasts for ages in the traps and is considered delicious by possums but disgusting by cats. Due to a major supply issue at the manufacturers our stocks of possum dough were dwindling rapidly. Yet at the same time, the number of trapinators and locals getting involved was growing. Eek! What to do?! The only thing for it was to declare it was time for a Great Peninsula Possum Dough Bake off!! Some of the Guardians (the group of trappers at the city end of the Peninsula) used their home baking skills to come up with a formula that needed to do 4 key things:

1. Be attractive to possums
2. Be sticky enough to attach to the bite block, but not so sticky that it attaches to your fingers
3. Lasts a decent amount of time in the trap
4. Isn't attractive to cats (nothing meat based or peanut butter based)

We tested out the entries on some wild possums that we'd seen lurking out the back of Glendevon Street on one of our trail cameras. The great news is that EVERY SINGLE ENTRY was gobbled up by our two judges, Grey Male and Black Female.

Night 1: In a demonstration of what our Ops Manager Bruce calls “first-day-itis” the possum dough trial board was completely ignored, with the



exception of a passing cat who took a pee on our efforts.

Night 2: ALL of the possum dough was eaten by our two judges.

Night 3: Again, ALL possum dough was eaten and the board literally licked clean. Also the trail camera was licked clean – must remember to wash the possum dough off my hands before touching the camera!

Night 4: Instead of sticking the dough to the board we threw it all inside two cage traps and caught both of the judges!



A wonderful result all round. All the possum dough seemed to be thoroughly enjoyed, but there was a clear favourite on both nights. Congratulations to Judy Rodda, who used an unexpected ingredient to come out as the preferred possum dough baking queen. She'd read that liquidised onions have a similar smell to possum urine (who knew??) so once that was added to her batch they just couldn't resist it!!

Thanks so much to all the bakers who whipped up some homemade possum dough for us to trial.

Judy's Award Winning Homemade Possum Dough Recipe:

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/chewy-toffees>

I decided to cut the process for making toffee and didn't use cream and instead used blenderised onion puree and soymilk. Not sure, but pretty strong link to this step and cleaning my fav saucepan with a chisel... my husband actually managed to refrain from teasing OR coming into the kitchen after he saw me go and find the chisel. 🤔😅🤔😅🤔😅

I took the mixture and added flour and peanut oil and 5 spice (half a very old Greg's size box), until the mix resembled a cookie dough. As it cooled it became increasingly hard yet crumbly. I took about 1/3 of the mix added ¼ cup nutella (a cheap version) and maybe 2-3tbsp coconut oil into my nutribullet. It turned it into a rather oily paste. I did the same with the other 2/3s. Still too goopy so I dug out the memory of children's playdough and just added cornflour/starch until it resembled what was submitted.

Having done a bit more reading I think I would first of all follow the toffee recipe but not worry about scorching temp of 125C and no substitutions! Then I would use maybe half and half cornflour and flour to give a dough-like consistency and stickiness from toffee. I have found that eucalyptus is a big proportion

of possum diet so either use essential oil or maybe gather eucalyptus leaves to blenderise in my concoction. The essential oil is a natural food preservative so may help stave off mould and rot from bacteria. Cinnamon and well, all spices in 5 spice scored well on a taste test published in Pest Science. I do not consider myself a creative cook but I do substitutions regularly and drive my husband Kirk a little crazy with recipes that are irreproducible 😊

My original dough is still ok though it needs kneading before it will adhere to the bait block. Checking traps later today and hope my winning dough has cut the rodent/marsupial population by a few!



The Archibald 8

We have been extensively trapping in Sector 5 for over three years now and judging by the way our birdlife and gardens are flourishing we're really making a dent into the possum numbers. So we were massively surprised when Scott, a backyard trapper on Archibald Street, saw the gleaming eyes of not one, but EIGHT possums shining out of the darkness at him! His backyard abuts the bush along Somerville Street, where we have one of our permanent traplines. We increased Scott's own traps from a single trapinator and cage trap to two trapinators and five cage traps. And that's when he got on a roll, catching 7 of them from June 20th to July 6th. The 5th possum that was collared turned out to have an actual collar on it! This was one of the four possums caught and fitted with GPS collars in Every Street as part of a Manaaki Whenua/Landcare Research study into urban possum movements. That one was released unharmed to carry on with its important contribution to science. The 8th possum of the Archibald 8 remains at large, although one rat and one blackbird have also been captured (the blackbird was deemed innocent and released unharmed).



Predator Free Dunedin

Predator Free Dunedin teamed up with Mitre 10 to take part in the International Science Festival. Staff from OPBG and City Sanctuary were on hand to help 100 kids build their own backyard rat trapbox. Mitre 10 kindly donated the space and tools and also all of the materials for building the wooden boxes. For every box that the children built Mitre 10 also donated enough material for an additional trapbox for Predator Free Dunedin. The kids and parents absolutely loved the hands on experience and went away all geared up to start trapping pests. Fun fact: 30 child-sized hammers might as well be 1000 hammers for the combined noise they make!!



Marcia and Jenilee from OPBG



Rifleman Project Update

In May our rifleman volunteers cleaned out the nest boxes so that they are all ready for this year's nesting season. We were hoping that when we did the clean out we would record a few more nests than we did during the census in October. This is because the rifleman will often have a second brood later in the season, and they build a second nest for this rather than reusing their first one. We understand that this is due to the risk of parasites and mites that have built up in the nesting materials. The chicks from the first brood will often help their parents feed their new baby brothers and sisters – such sweeties huh?

We have to cover some ground to get around them all now, with the efforts of our amazing backyard builders we now have approximately 150 nest boxes for the birds to utilise.

Well, we did record more nests – an additional 10 in fact! Which brings our total number of complete nests for the 2020 season to 29, a wonderful effort all round. The estimated number of successful nests was based on whether or not a “poop deck” was present in the nest and if any unhatched eggs were left behind. Interesting that some of the partial nests seen in October were then completed for the second brood.

We've had a few other properties ask to join in the project so we'll have another flurry of activity this winter, building and installing more boxes. How great would it be to get to 200 boxes? We need just a little bit extra to cover the costs of new boxes, so if you'd like to donate money for more materials The bank details are :

Save The Otago Peninsula Inc
03-0903-0595631-00

If you put in the references below and email stopincsoc@gmail.com when you have made the donation, you will be sent a receipt to claim on your tax.

Surname - Donation - rifleman



Left: nest with “poop deck” showing evidence of fledglings. Right: nest with unhatched egg.

Secrets from the Trail Cameras

We've been wondering for some time what creature has been stealing the peanut butter bait from our T-rex rat traps. A trail camera aimed at three rat trap boxes has revealed the culprit – the usual suspect *Mus musculus*, the house mouse. Turns out these guys are light enough to stand directly on the trigger plate without setting it off. However, the mouse in the tunnel on the right hand side has learnt the hard way that they can't safely jump down onto the trigger plate from the top of the trap, a lesson that the mouse in the middle also learned a few frames later.



It's not just pests showing up on the trail cameras, we're also getting some lovely reminders of why we're doing this work – making life safer for the native species who we share our peninsula with. Check out this pair of hoiho heading down to the beach for a spot of fishing!

Fight For The Wild

If you haven't already watched the documentary *Fight for the Wild*, then do check it out at <https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/fight-for-the-wild>

It's available as a four part video documentary and also as a podcast (with different content in each). Some of it is a hard watch seeing what we've already lost, but the last episode is aptly titled "hope" which is what we have in bundles for the future of the peninsula wildlife.

Artwork by Harriet Dale (age 5 years) inspired by *Fight for the Wild*. From right: Dada, Mama, big sister and Harriet with a big hammer about to "bop a rat".



SBS Bank donation

OPBG was the winner of the monthly draw at the SBS Dunedin branch for the third time now with a donation of \$500. A big thank you to the bank staff, very much appreciated.



Health & Safety

With our ever-growing team of field staff, there has been a good opportunity to review our health and safety plans and make any necessary adjustments for the current scope of work. The wealth of knowledge and field experience in our team and throughout the trust, means we have had plenty of invaluable input. A number of our health and safety plans have been reviewed and the chairperson of our H&S committee, Dave Chalmers, has written a detailed plan for our new premises – The Biodiversity Hub in Portobello. Thanks Dave for your tiresome efforts to keep the OPBG team and our hard-working volunteers safe from harm.

Winter is here and as you all know, the short days and low temperatures change the way we work in the field. Make sure you keep hydrated, have lots of warm layers, take extra care on wet and slippery terrain and carry plenty of energy-filled snacks (mmm chocolate) to get you through the day.

Stay safe out there!
Kia noho haumarū



Remember to Report-A-Peninsula-Possum –
possums@opbg.nz

Cumulative Grand Total (July 2021) = 20,601

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


Manager: Montie manager@opbg.nz
Bruce: operations@opbg.nz
Marcia: guardians@opbg.nz

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Contact Us

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