



Newsletter *April 2023*

Welcome to the Autumn 2023 edition. We're ramping things up this year as we edge closer and closer to a possum-free Peninsula. We're so grateful to our team of amazing volunteer trappers who have now clocked over 5000 community possum catches. Incredible effort all round.

It's the Final Possum Countdown!

POSSUM TALLY

2 2 8 5 5



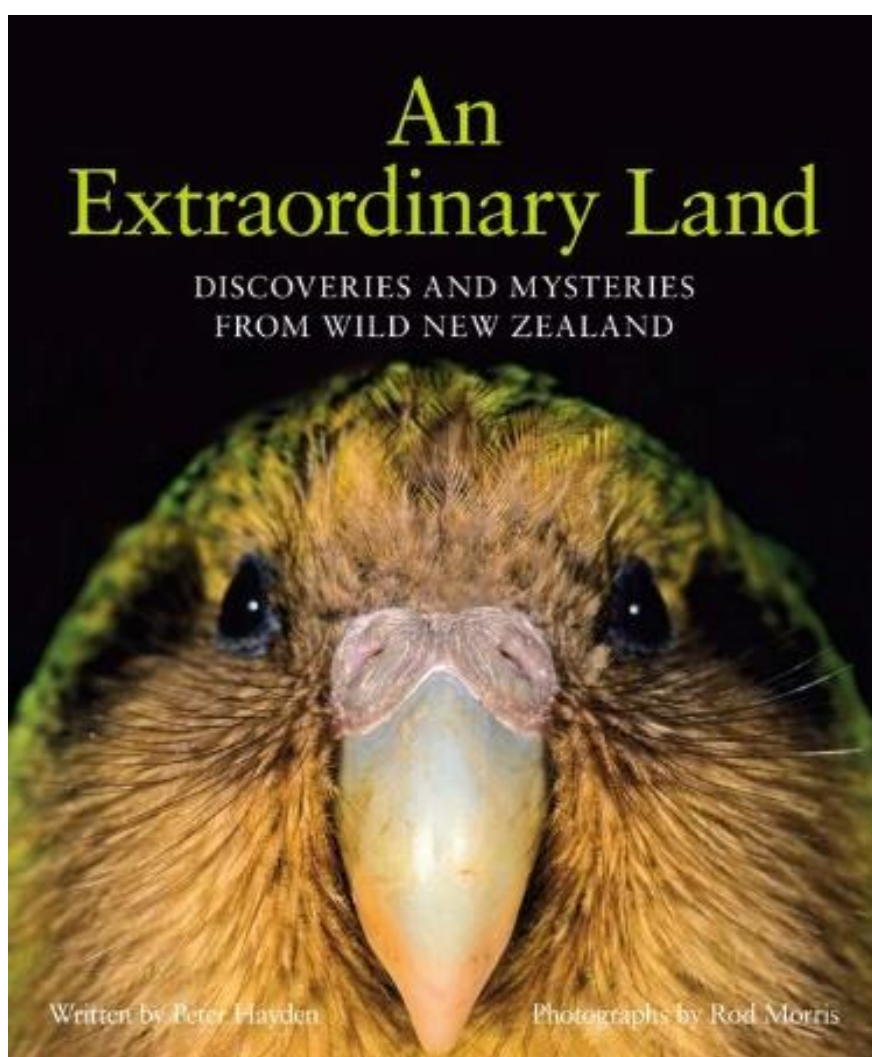
WHAT WILL THE FINAL NUMBER BE?
TELL US YOUR GUESS AND BE IN TO WIN!

We are getting closer and closer to our goal of full eradication of possums from the Otago Peninsula. But just how close are we? Our extensive monitoring of the outer Peninsula indicates we have between 10 and 20 individuals remaining in the area past Portobello. Our monitoring between Portobello and Musselburgh shows that possum numbers are tracking steadily downwards (yay!) but we haven't reached the stage yet where we can confidently predict how many are still left.

So with that in mind we've started up a competition to see who can guess the final possum tally! Click on the link below to fill out the details of your prediction, just make sure you include your name and predicted final number of captured possums. (Hint, it will be more than 22,855!). Bonus questions include; the sex, location, date and what device the last possum is captured by. Proving eradication is a long game that will only be confirmed 2 years after the final catch. But the glory will be worth the wait for our lucky winner!! Meanwhile, anyone who submits a guess goes into the draw to win a copy of the award-winning nature book *An Extraordinary Land* by Peninsula residents Peter Hayden and Rod Morris.

Good luck!

[Enter Here!](#)



What can YOU do to help get rid of the last possums?

- Freshen up the bait in your trap and use plenty of our scented/flavoured flour blaze to entice them in. Even if your trap hasn't had a catch in years (or ever), it is still so important to keep it ready just in case. We know that as possum numbers dwindle their movements change, so your trap could well become the vital link.
- Do some monitoring to figure out where possums are hiding. Ask your community coordinator for chew cards or step outside once it gets dark and shine a torch into your trees. A resident did so the other night to test out his new torch and spotted two possums!
- Report your sightings! We want to know about any possum you see or hear and wherever you are seeing signs of their presence - like bites on apples or chew cards, poop on your paths, or suspicious scratch marks on trees.
- Spread the word. Chat to your neighbours, ask if they're aware of any possum visitors to their place. Bring it up with your book group, your bowling club or walking group. Ask if they want to be on the mailing list – if they do, get them to contact Marcia at guardians@opbg.nz

How to identify a possum by the clues it leaves behind:

Leaving out chew cards is a great way to detect possums in any environment. Possums leave crushed margins on chew cards that can sometimes look like water damage. They can also leave moustache shaped teeth marks that are 5 - 7 mm wide.



Possum bitten chew card

Apples are a favourite treat for possums and their bite marks can be distinguished from birds if you know what to look for.

Possum teeth make a series of flat edges around the bite zone. The teeth marks make flat scrapes across the bite, which is much shallower than bird damage.

Beaks make triangle notches in edge of bite zone. Apple often hollowed out forming “caves” with just the skin left. Notice the pointy peck marks in the flesh.



Possum bites on apple



Bird pecks on apple

Possum poop varies but in most cases is a classic jellybean size and shape. One possum can excrete 100 pellets a night! Colour is often very dark brown, but will change with diet (for ex. pine pollen turns it pale yellow). If you find poop that is very black with pointed ends it is most likely from a hedgehog.



Possum scat, poop, nuggets, excrement. Left and centre: regular colour Right: pine-flavoured

Possums are territorial and like to leave notes on trees for other possums, like community notice boards. Look for a series of horizontal scrapes leading up a tree like rungs on a ladder. These are often easiest to see on mahoe trees. Their sharp claws will also leave long scratch marks along the trunks of trees that they climb.



Top row: Possum bite marks. Bottom: Possum scratches.

Spot the possum! This photo was sent in by a Murano Street resident after she saw a young female asleep in her broccoli. Our staff had a quick strategy session, raced to the address and had the possum caught by hand and dispatched in less than a minute after entering the property! Here's hoping the rest of the eradication goes as smoothly.



Sleeping it off after overindulging on the broccoli

Dog Team does clean sweep of outer Peninsula

To assist us in determining just how many possums we have left we contracted the team from Hoegh Hunting, who spent three weeks in January sweeping through the outer part of the Peninsula with their highly skilled detection dogs. One dog is used in the daytime to sniff out any sign of possum poop and then two other dogs are brought out at night to follow up and lead their human hunters directly to the possum.

From Sectors 1, 2 and 3 (the outer Peninsula past Portobello) they detected just 9 possums, which is a great result over such a large area. Of those 9 detections, their night shooters took out 7, and then our ops team trapped the remaining 2 within weeks. A further 5 were caught in the following weeks, which is something that the dog team have noticed with their work – after they have been through with their dogs it tends to shake up the resident possums and they are more likely to wander or change their habits. And luckily for us a change in their habits meant they decided to check out some of our traps. The team was impressed with the job we are doing and we found it encouraging that such a small number of possums were detected.



The team from Hoegh Hunting

If you want to see a few short videos of the incredible Peggy (Vizsla x German Shorthaired Pointer) in full detection mode check out the links below, she's such a good doggo!!

[Hoegh Hunting searches for possum scat on Otago Peninsula cliffs](#)

[Hoegh Hunting possum scat detection in Otago Peninsula native bush](#)

[Hoegh Hunting Peggy gets her reward!](#)



Peggy from Hoegh Hunting. Photo credit Hoegh Hunting

Rolling front approach

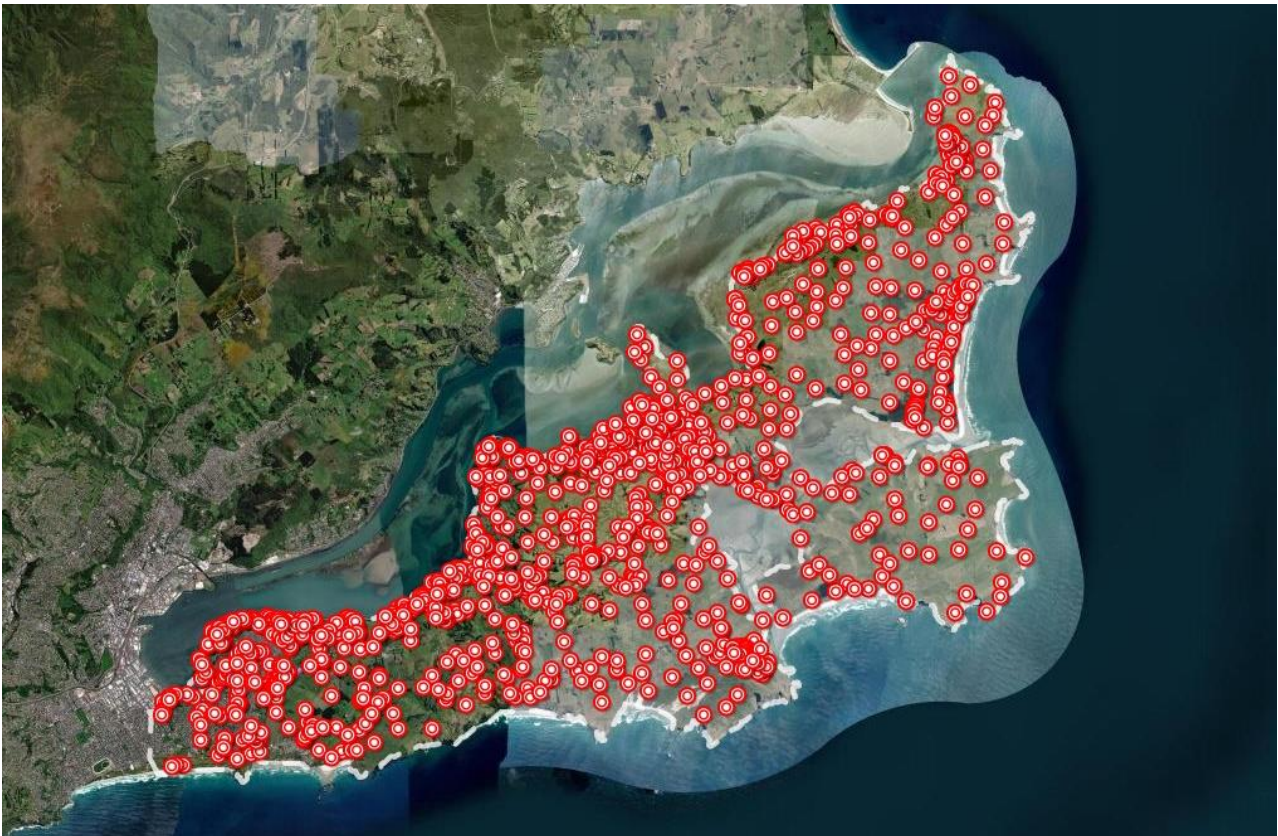
Our network of traps and bait stations are now in place and providing excellent coverage across the entire Peninsula. If we were aiming to just suppress the possum population to their current low levels then this would be the point where we'd all put our feet up and let the traps do the work. But we're aiming for eradication here folks! So we've got to keep up the pressure and narrow in on those hard to catch possums – some of which won't go near a standard trap.

In order to target the trap-shy possums we are proceeding with a rolling front approach. Our network of traps will all remain in place, so this work will be in addition to those fixed traps. Sector 4 (from The Cove to Portobello) has been divided into 7 Blocks and our staff will sequentially target each intensively using all tools available to them, as we sweep through after those hard to get possums. Keep your eye on your inbox if you are a rural landowner

in Sector 4, as we target each block we will be contacting you to arrange access and confirm appropriate catch methods (i.e. dogs, shooting, toxin).

Meanwhile, we'll do the same thing in Sector 5, sweeping across the harbour facing properties first, down through Vauxhall and Waverley, into Musselburgh and Tainui and ending up in Tomahawk by the end of June.

By July we will have removed a lot of the remaining possums and have a clearer understanding of the hot spots and challenging areas. We then plan on getting the dog team back for another detection round in July, focusing on Sectors 4 and 5. Luckily the clever dogs can pick up on scent from quite some distance away, so they can be worked along street lines instead of the more painstaking approach of knocking on everyone's door.



OPBG Trap Network

Te Rauone Bandit

To end things on a positive note - we finally got one of the dang Te Rauone possums that have been relentlessly taunting us with their presence. It was a young female (her mother is still at large) but the catch was thanks to Max and Peggy the dog finding scat in someone's backyard just below Te Rauone reserve. We put a cage trap near where the scat was found and three days later, we got a possum! Fingers crossed we get the old girl soon too. The Otago Daily Times recently had a cover story on our efforts to track down the Te Rauone Bandit, check out their April 11th edition. Further work to track down the remaining possum will be carried out in the coming weeks using thermal imaging and night shooting.

Wild Dunedin Festival

The 8th Wild Dunedin Festival is Coming in April

The Wild Dunedin team are thrilled to announce that our popular Festival is on again in the school holidays 14 – 23 April.

This year our Festival is focusing on whenua with workshops, open gardens, expert talks and activities about soil, compost, growing your own food and sustainability.

Festival guest Kath Irvine of Edible Backyard will be holding a workshop on pruning at Blueskin Nurseries on 17 April, one on keeping hens at the City Library on 18 April, and giving a talk on soil at Tūhura Otago Museum on 16 April.

The Halo Project is holding a Picnic and Planting Day at Wharerewarewa/Long Beach on 22 April, and the Wild Fun event at Portobello on 18 April will feature native plants and the Marine Studies Centre Aquavan. The Tomahawk Smaills BeachCare Trust are holding sessions on weaving marram grass pots on 20 April plus a Native Plant Sale.

In the Town Belt there will be two tramps plus Town Belt Kaitiaki are running a workshop on using iNaturalist.

Puketeraki Maara Kai at Karitane is running two workshops on organic kai and native plant propagation on 15 April, and also on 15 April Jim O’Gorman aka the Dirt Doctor from Kakanui is running a workshop on composting at the Botanic Garden.

Suzy Cato will be entertaining tamariki with music sessions at Toitū, Tūhura Otago Museum and she’ll also make an appearance at the very popular Wildlife ER sessions.

Kids go Free at Orokonui Ecosanctuary during the Festival, there are loads of free things for children at Tūhura Otago Museum including Bug Day and Penguin Day, plus deals at Larnach Castle, the Royal Albatross Centre, Penguin Place, Blue Penguins Pukekura, Monarch Wildlife and Cruises and Resistance Climbing Gym. There will be a Wild Swim at Portobello and Dive Otago are running a snorkeling experience exploring Dunedin’s kelp ngāhere for ages 8 and over.

Bookings are essential for many events. Go to the website where you will find the full programme and you can make bookings. Also become a Friend and follow us on social media. Pick up a programme at any library.

wilddunedin.nz



Grand Total of Possums Caught = 22,855

Remember to Report a Peninsula Possum possums@opbg.nz **DEAD OR ALIVE!**

Report a Possum now

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

Montie: manager@opbg.nz

Micaela: operations@opbg.nz

Marcia: guardians@opbg.nz

Paula: peninsula@opbg.nz



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