



Newsletter *Spring 2023*

Welcome to the Spring 2023 edition. What an exciting time to be working on the eradication of possums from the Otago Peninsula! We've had some big wins over winter and are happy to report that progress is going extremely well with dramatic drops in possum numbers Peninsula-wide. Can you believe we've now surpassed 24,000 possums?

There's no time for complacency just yet though folks, these last remaining possums are the cleverest ones and we're going to have to use all our collective smarts, combined with different capture techniques to get right to zero.

OPBG Staff changes

This winter we said farewell to two valued members of staff, our Manager Matthew Montgomerie (Montie) and our Operations Manager Micaela Kirby-Crowe. We would like to thank them for everything they contributed to our ongoing project and wish them well with their future endeavours. We know that both Montie and Micaela will be cheering us on until we all achieve possum eradication.

Paula Cross has stepped up from her former role as Community Coordinator and has taken over from Micaela as our new Operations Manager. We've welcomed a new addition to the team, Maggie Evans who has now replaced Paula as the new Community Coordinator. Confused yet? Here's a table to show you the team along with their roles!

Role	Former	Current
Manager	Matthew Montgomerie	<i>Position retired</i>
Operations Manager	Micaela Kirby-Crowe	Paula Cross
Team Leader Community Engagement	Marcia Dale	Marcia Dale
Team Leader Trap Network	Ben McConnell	Ben McConnell
Trap Network Technician	Lisa Campbell	Lisa Campbell
Trap Network Technician	Lou Flight	Lou Flight
Data and Field Technician	Jenilee Hill	Jenilee Hill
Community Coordinator	Paula Cross	Maggie Evans

Rolling Front

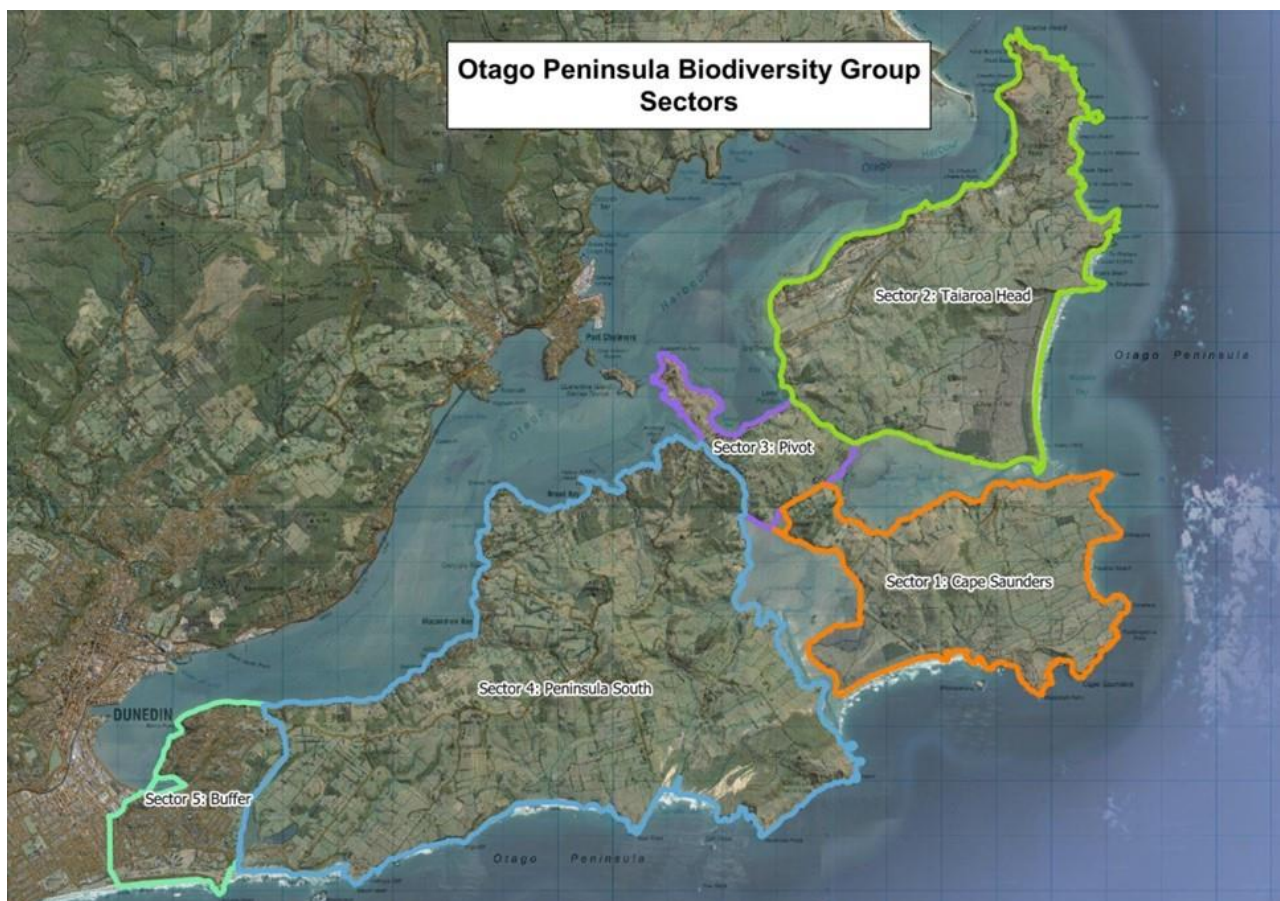
Our main possum knockdown for this year is now completed and we're really happy with the results. The team worked extra hard and pulled out all the stops to make this operation run as smoothly and successfully as it did.

What was the issue?

We knew that most of our resident possums were hanging out in our largest management unit – Sector 4. This area runs from Portobello right through to the urban end of Waverley and Shiel Hill. Our possum numbers are now very low beyond Portobello (Sectors 1, 2 and 3) so we wanted to limit reinvasion into those areas. We also wanted to limit the flow of possums into the urban backyards at the town end of the Peninsula (Sector 5) as we are more limited in the tools we can use there. We needed to get the possum numbers right down to low levels across all of Sector 4.

What did we do?

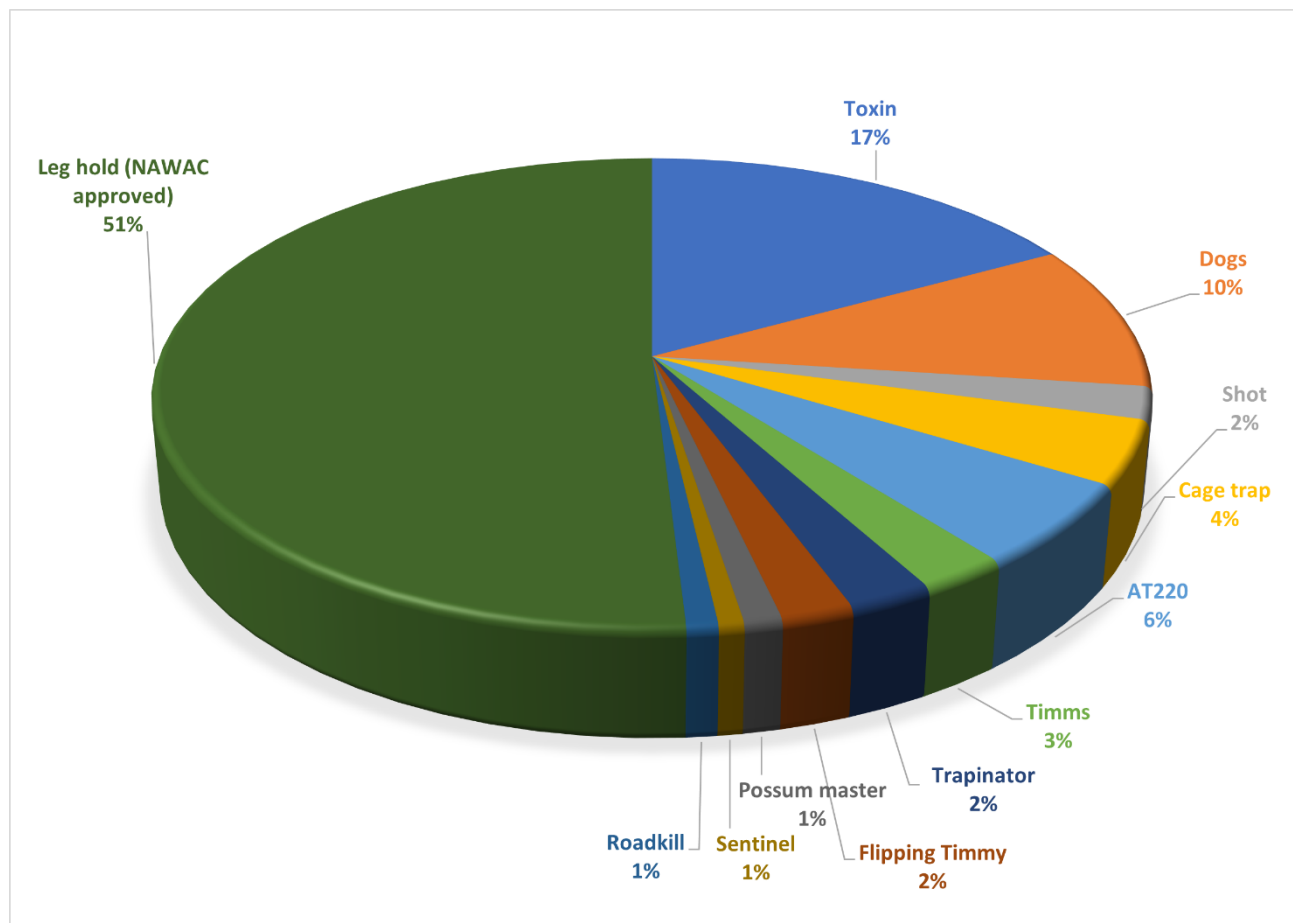
We pulled together all our resources, staff, contractors, dogs and a plethora of different devices and got cracking. All landowners were given a list of control techniques to choose from and we used whatever was most effective and appropriate for each property. The team needed to work in with farm animal safety requirements, penguin movements, wide ranging pet cats, difficult terrain and angry goats. Well, just the one angry goat to be fair. The team started from The Cove on March 27th and worked their way systematically across all of Sector 4 to end up in Sandymount at the end of August.



How did we do?

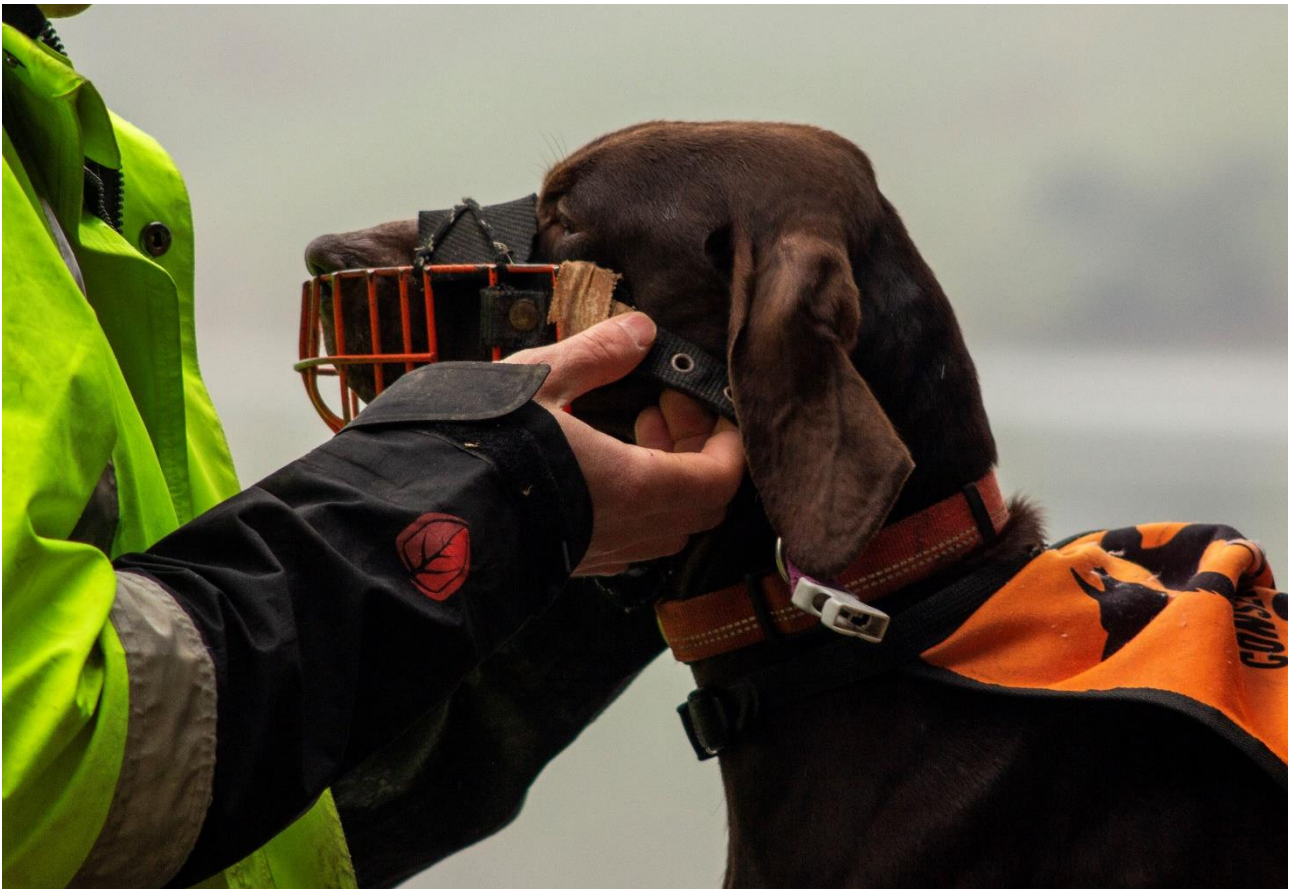
Over the duration of the Rolling Front the operations team and the contractors managed to remove a total of 1024 possums from Sector 4. Our community volunteers contributed an extra 93 catches, bringing us up to a total of 1117 possums. Ground based leg hold traps were by far the most effective device, accounting for 51% of the rolling front captures. Toxin and dog-led detection and kills were also effective tools. Kill traps only accounted for 15% of our total catches, indicating that we need to be more proactive in order to capture the majority of remaining possums.

A good indicator of the decreased numbers is the drop off in community catches. Prior to the rolling front the average community catches across the whole Peninsula was 48 possums per month. In August that dropped down to 3. It's still early days but so far the only community catch for September is our chairman Hoani Langsbury successfully swerving to get one on the low road! Excellent commitment and leadership!



Percentage of Rolling Front possum catches by device. AT220, Timms, Trapinator, Flipping Timmy, Possum Master and Sentinel are all types of kill traps. NAWAC stands for National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee.

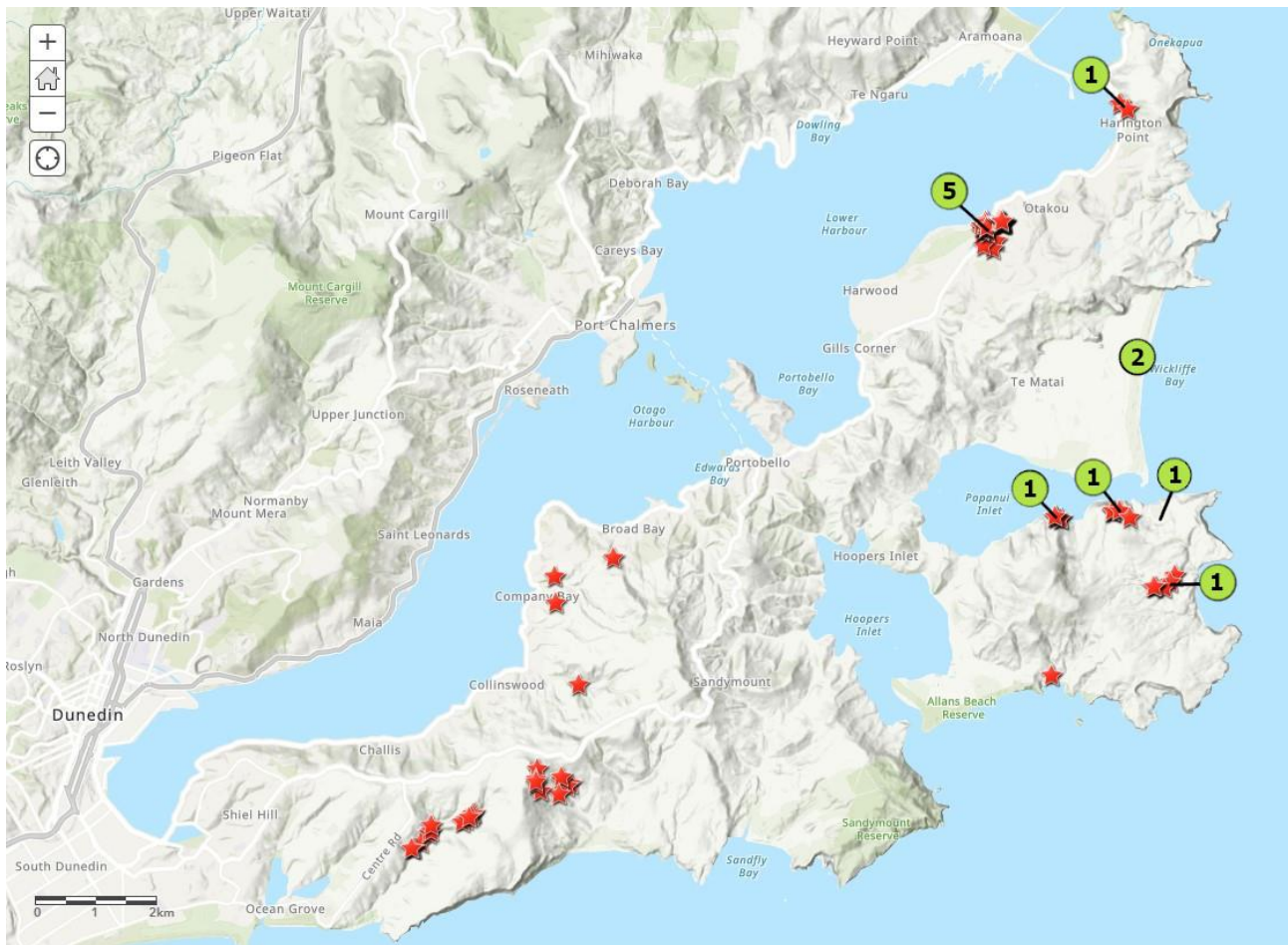
Hoegh Hunting returns to the Peninsula



Peggy from Hoegh Hunting gets ready for action.

The team from Hoegh Hunting were back down in July for a second visit to the Peninsula this year. Back in January they spent 3 weeks with their scat detection dog focusing on Sectors 1, 2 and 3 (the outer Peninsula past Portobello). During that visit they detected 9 possums and subsequently, between their hunting efforts and the ops team's work, 14 possums were removed.

This time around they detected possum scat from 6 locations in Sectors 1, 2 and 3 and 12 possums have subsequently been removed. Of those, 4 were removed with the help of their other dog Jepto, who finds the possums at night and leads the hunter to them. They also spent a bit of time on some properties in Sector 4, narrowing in on other locations of interest. If you look at the map below, the possum detected near Allan's Beach was not captured and we caught 2 in Okia where scat was not detected. As with all methods, using a scat detection dog will not capture 100% of the possums alone, but it does get us very close and is one of our most vital tools. The Hoegh Hunting team have worked throughout the country with their dogs and they are confident that we will make it to zero possums here. We plan on getting them back next year for a final sweep.



Scat detection map: Red stars indicate where the scat detection dog found possum scat. The numbers in green circles are where possums were removed from Sector 1, 2 and 3 following the detection dog work.

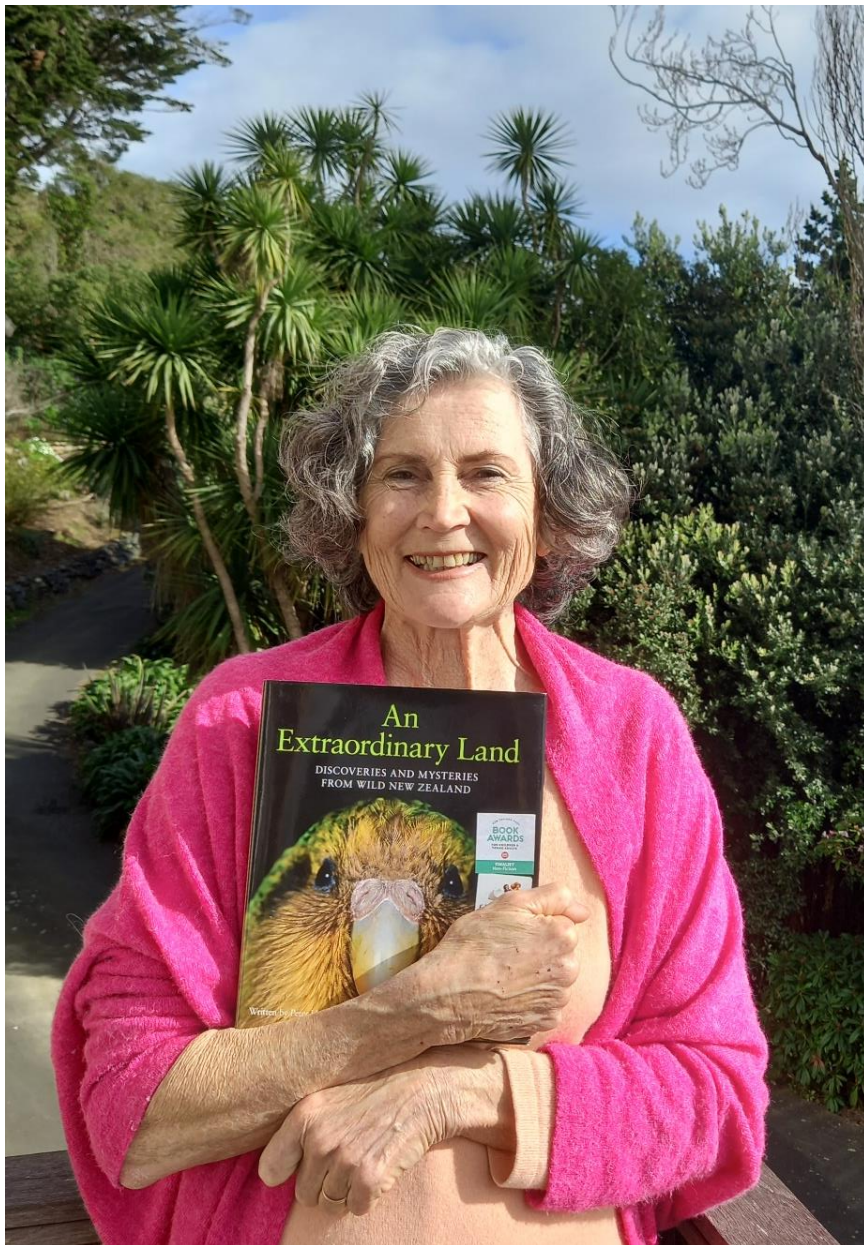
Drone technology

Detection dogs aren't the only tool we're using to narrow in on the remaining possums. We've also been making use of drone technology with the help of the team at High Country Contracting. On a clear night in August the team used their drone to cover almost the entire area within Sector 3, flying in a programmed pattern to ensure total coverage. The drone has thermal imaging capability as well as a heavy duty spotlight. As it scans the terrain it sends a live feed directly back to a screen, which is monitored in real time. The team have their motorbike and shotgun at the ready, prepared to deal directly with any possums spotted by the drone. After a few hours of flying the drone had completed its survey of Sector 3 and did not come across a single possum. The team then headed over to Otakau Golf Course in Sector 2 and began to survey there. This time their preparedness with the bike and gun came in handy, as a possum was detected and very swiftly tracked down and dealt with. Drone technology will become increasingly important as we clear more areas of possums and seek the remaining individuals.



The results of a successful drone operation. Photo credit: Khan Adam, High Country Contracting Ltd.

Possum countdown winner – Jean Grace



Well done to Jean Grace, who is the lucky winner of Rod Morris and Peter Hayden's book *An Extraordinary Land*. Jean's name was drawn out of all the entries of people's guesses for the final tally of possum catches. Jean's estimate has been surpassed now by roughly 500 possums so the game is still on for who gets closest to the mark when we reach our end goal of zero possums. 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!! We are still accepting guesses for our final tally, just add how many you think are left to our current total of 24,029, simple as that!

[Enter Here!](#)

Tūi at Harrington Point

Harrington Point resident Nicola McGrouther has shared with us a photo of her bird feeder becoming a popular café for visiting tūi. She counted seven of them this winter all having a crack at the feeder at the same time. In the quite recent past these types of sightings would have been unusual across many Peninsula locations. But we are getting more and more residents reporting increases in our birdlife over the last few years. Have you noticed any changes? Please share with us any photos or observations you've made about changes happening in your backyard or in places you've visited on the Peninsula. Please send your stories and photos to Marcia at guardians@opbg.nz, thank you!



Seven Tūi on bird feeder at Harrington Point. Image credit: Nicola McGrouther.

More dogs!

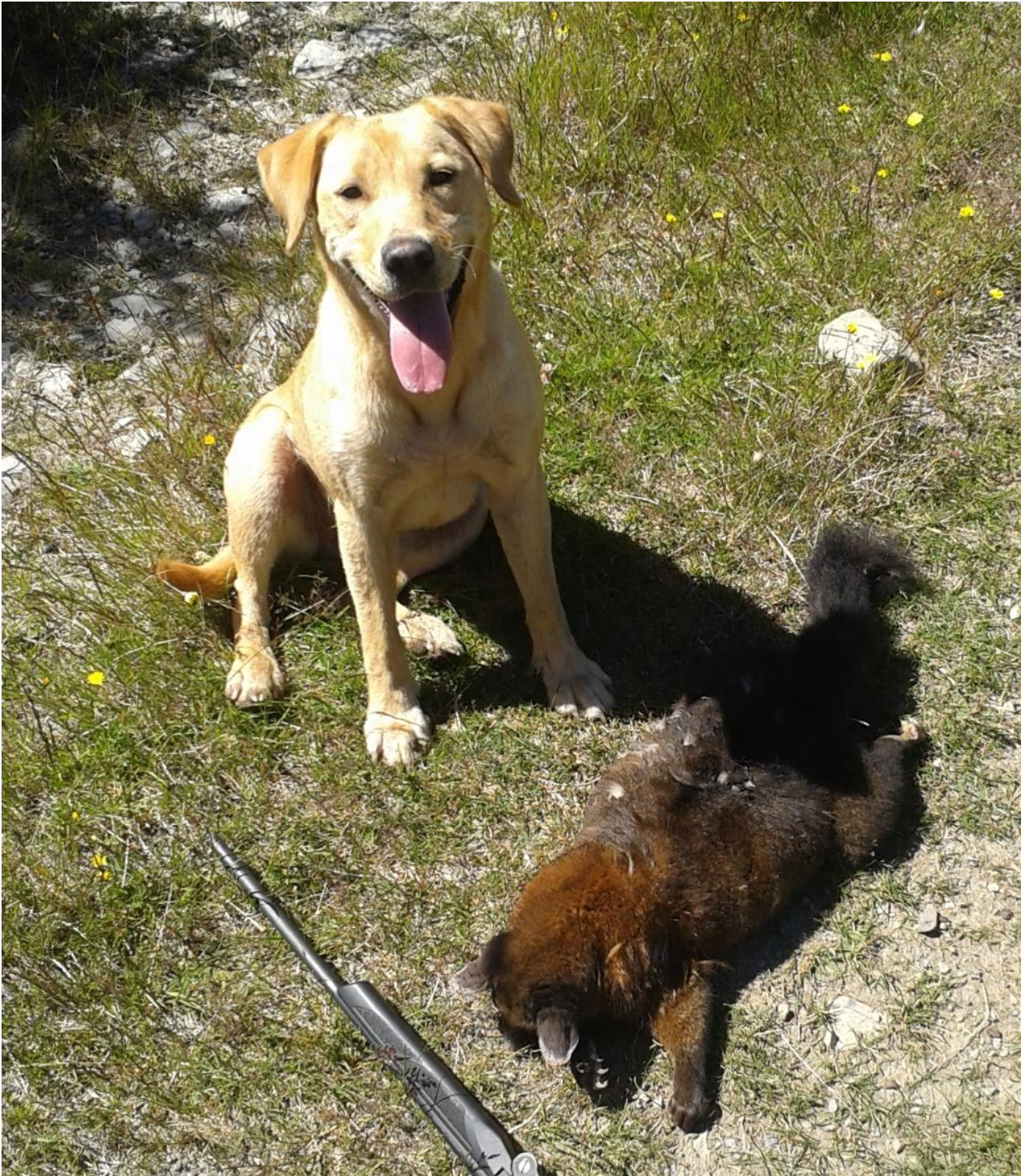
We should really have called this newsletter the dog edition, they have played such a vital part in our work this year and will continue to be vital to our success over the coming year. Please enjoy our tribute to the work of these loyal dogs over the following pages.



Magnificent Dax, owned by staff member Ben. On the ground most days helping to find possums and hunting and retrieving when appropriate. Also loves cuddles and joining us for staff meetings. Photo credit: Ben McConnell.



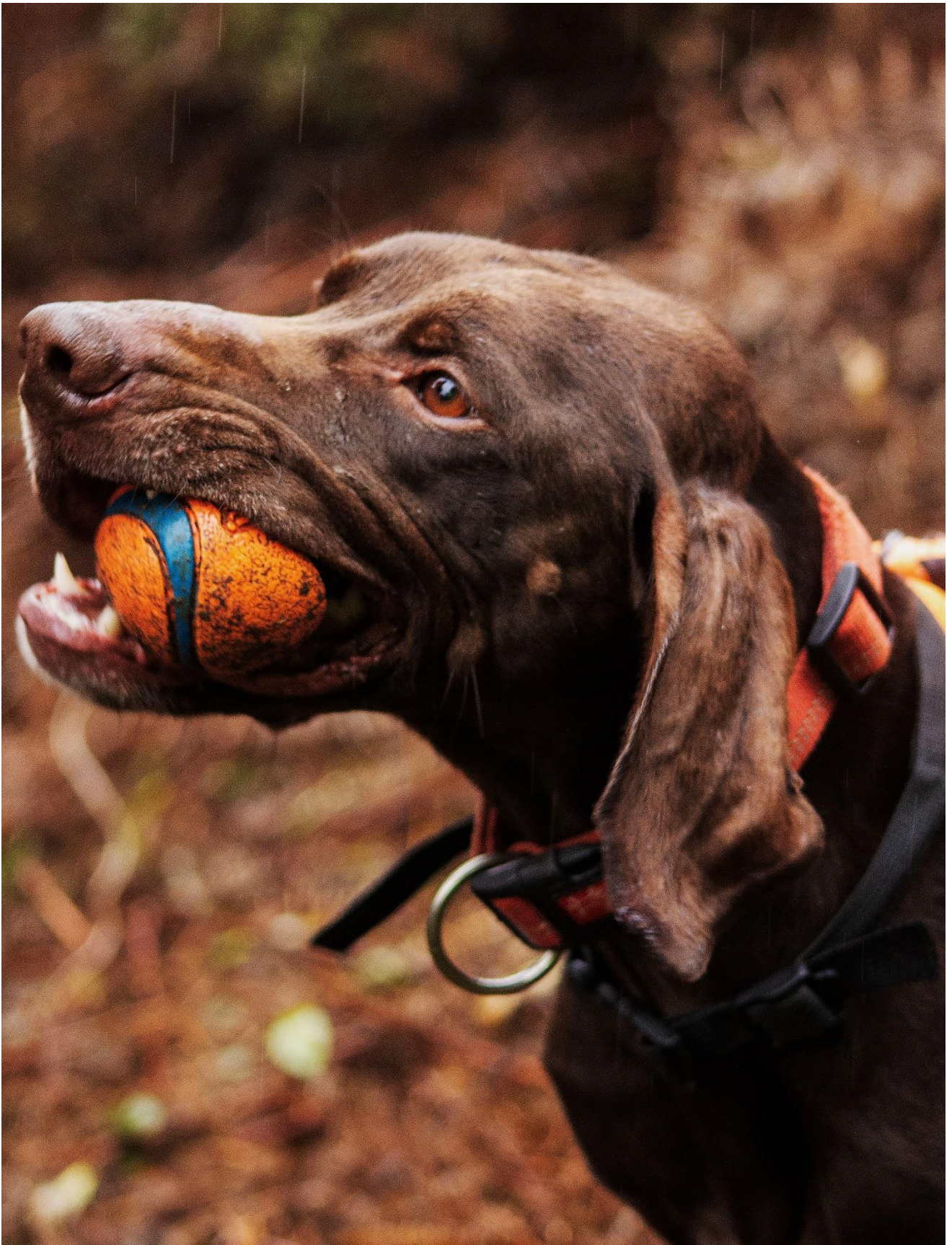
Collie Soph with owner Joe from Summit Contracting. Photo supplied by Joe Hughes



Joe's labrador cross Tui looking very pleased with her work. Photo supplied by Joe Hughes



German shorthaired pointer Jepto relaxing at home after a hard night on the hills. Photo supplied by Hoegh Hunting



The only thing Peggy (Vizsla x German Shorthaired Pointer) loves more than finding possum poo is getting the play with her ball reward when she finds some. Photo credit: Jenilee Hill



It's not just professional dogs doing all the work, Mikey here from Vauxhall has been putting in the hard yards alerting his owners to any night visits from possums. His ferocious barking makes it very clear that he has spotted one. Photo credit: Helen Gee.

Until next time...

Thanks everyone for taking an interest in the work we're all doing to reach our possum eradication goal. If you are currently volunteering, trap checking, bird monitoring or allowing us access onto your land we can't thank you enough for your continued support. This project is a team effort and we couldn't get there without you.

If you are wanting to get involved with more conservation volunteer opportunities on the Otago Peninsula this Spring then please have a look at the table below to see what appeals to you. Thank you to Fiona Morrison for compiling this table and sharing it with us.

In the meantime, happy trapping and keep sending us your possum sightings!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ON THE OTAGO PENINSULA THIS SPRING

DAY	TIME	WORK TYPE	LOCATION	GROUP	CONTACT	EMAIL
FRI (Fortnightly)	9 - 12	Track cutting	Sandymount	OPBG	Maggie	peninsula@opbg.nz
SUN and TUES	9:30 - 12	Tree releasing, trackwork	Top of Bacon St, Broad Bay	STOP	Lala	stopincsoc@gmail.com
TUES and THURS	10 - 4	Potting up, seed sowing, weeding	TSBT Nursery at 470 Tomahawk Rd, Ocean Grove	TSBT	Nicole	beachcare@zoho.com
WED	9:30 - 12:30	Prep native plants for planting	YEPT Nursery at 12 McTaggart St, Company Bay	YEPT	Louise	nursery@yeptrust.org.nz
FRI	9 - 12	Pest plant control	Various, changes each week	SWAT	Moiria	SWATweeds@gmail.com
LAST SAT OF MNTN	9:30 - 3:30	Planting, weed and pest control, other	Quarantine Island (via boat transfer)	QI/KT	Claire	secretary.quarantineisland@gmail.com
TBA	tba	Planting, track cutting, other	Okia	YEPT	Ranger Ben	ranger@yeptrust.org.nz

Do you have a few hours to spare each week and would like to help a project on the Peninsula?

Check this list for a day and work type that interests you. Email the contact person for more info. Some groups provide tools and equipment and morning tea, others may not. Some groups run formal working bees, others do not. Any offer of volunteer hours gratefully accepted. Showing up at a working bee is a great chance to meet new people, learn new skills, have some fun and feel like you are making a difference.

STOP – Save The Otago Peninsula, TSBT – Tomahawk Smaills BeachCare Trust, YEPT – Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust, SWAT – Seek Weeds and Terminate, QI/KT - Quarantine Island/Kamau Taurua Community Inc Charity, OPBG – Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group

Grand Total of Possums Caught = 24,029

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

Report a Possum now

Feel free to contact our team:

Operations Manager: Paula Cross: operations@opbg.nz

Team Leader Community Engagement: Marcia Dale: guardians@opbg.nz

Community Coordinator: Maggie Evans: peninsula@opbg.nz



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