



Newsletter September 2025

Welcome to the Spring 2025 edition.

Our last newsletter, almost one year ago, marked the end of our government funded possum elimination project through the Predator Free 2050 programme, and one could be forgiven to think that nothing much has been happening since. Far from it, the mopping up of some elusive possums continued with a small but dedicated team including members from the Halo Project, OPBG, and City Sanctuary. At the same time our operations manager, Paula, and the OPBG Trustees started planning the next steps in our journey to a predator free Peninsula. The end of government funding required a switch back to our previous model of sourcing external funding from several different organisations and time had to be spent writing applications to secure grants for specific projects. We have been successful and three new projects have started! Simultaneously the Sustainable Otago Peninsula project has been gaining momentum. **Read all about our new work, and opportunities for your input, below!**

Back On Possum Duty

Between 15 July and 30 September 2024, members of the City Sanctuary Team supported the OPBG Possum Elimination programme in Sector 5 — the area we consider the buffer zone between the outer Peninsula and the city (see map next page). OPBG has now resumed work in Sector 5, with several possums caught, all on the harbour side near The Cove. Notably, four of these were caught on a single property, currently considered a “hotspot.”

Our small but skilled field team (Paula Cross and Chris Arnison) with support from City Sanctuary’s Kate Tanner, and Halo’s Jonah Kitto-Verhoef (with his scat dog) and Marcia Dale, is moving meticulously through Sector 5 to detect and eliminate any remaining possums. In order to capture the remaining lone individuals, more than one method is required to outsmart our wary catch.



“Spiderman” possum, avoiding our traps...

- Trail cameras are used extensively to ensure no possum goes unnoticed.
- Novel traps unfamiliar to local possums are deployed, which helped us catch four cagey females.
- Targeted strategies for wily males, who are proving even more challenging to catch due to their trap shyness and lower food motivation.

This late-stage difficulty in elimination is not new; male possums are often the last holdouts. But past experience shows we *can* get them—we just need persistence.

Currently, we believe **2-3 possums remain** in Sector 5. We have not yet covered every bit of habitat, so this number may change, but we're down to the last few!



Nearly No Possums Left in Sectors 1-4

We have continued to chase a handful of trap-shy possums on the outer Peninsula, but it's safe to say (and celebrate) that your rosebuds, fruit trees, and vege gardens are now safe. The native bush is regenerating, birdlife is flourishing beyond belief, and we continue to keep the Peninsula TB-free. It has been an incredibly successful and rewarding project and we couldn't have done it without the wonderful community support and involvement by you! Predator Free Dunedin will continue to operate traps and monitor devices on some properties during this final phase, which is called "proof of absence".

Here's a tally of what has been caught over the past year; these individual animals were specifically targeted and eventually, with persistence, caught:

- **6 possums** in automatic traps (between Portobello and The Cove)
- **5 possums** via hunting or leg-hold traps
- **1 possum** in a Timms trap (Smails Beach area)
- A **suspected roadkill** possum that disappeared before it could be confirmed

- **2 possums** found roadside, presumed roadkill, were later discovered to have gunshot wounds—possibly a prank, as they were unusually skinny compared to our well-fed Peninsula possums, raising suspicions they were brought in from elsewhere.
- In addition, we finally gained entry to one previously inaccessible property, and with a full deployment of resources – various traps, trained dogs and hunters – **removed 17 possums!**
- There has been another possum confirmed around Smails Beach and one other sighted on Greenacres St, Macandrew Bay
- Halo's extensive dog sweeps over the last six months have turned up **no other fresh sign** of possums

This just shows that despite our high confidence of a nearly possum free Peninsula, we can still not afford to let our guard down and we are still very much relying on all of us in our Peninsula community to keep our ears and eyes open. If you suspect that you heard or saw a possum or possum sign, please let us know. The “**Report A Possum**” button on our website (<https://www.predatorfreepeninsula.nz>) will open up an email (possums@opbg.nz) where you can let us know so we can follow up.

New Work Streams for OPBG

Thanks to three new funding sources from successful grant applications, OPBG is expanding our **rodent control** and **multi-species management** in areas of high biodiversity value on the Peninsula.

With **Otago Regional Council** site-led funding we are working to establish and maintain traplines for multiple species including mustelids, feral cats, rodents and hedgehogs. These are focused on areas around Papanui Inlet and Sandymount.

With **Lottery Community Matters** funding, we've launched a new initiative to get 30% of Peninsula households backyard trapping for rodents within the next year. With fewer possums there can be more food in places for rats and mice. This is why controlling more pest species is essential as we enter our new post-possum Peninsula life. Removing pest plant species like *Bomarea* and *Banana passionfruit*, which provide a food source for rats and mice, also helps curb rodent numbers.

Our current focus area for supporting backyard rodent removal is Portobello to Broad Bay—with plans to expand into Harwood and Ōtākou soon. We are also supporting rodent work in Sector 5 where possum traps can still be ‘ratted’.

As we did not get full funding for our proposed work, we are starting a **Supporter's Programme** for residents and landowners to stretch our funding further.

How You Can Help

- **Volunteer:** If you're fit and able, we would appreciate help checking traps, cages, and cameras in Sector 5.
- **Trap at Home:** Rodent control in your own backyard makes a big difference! While we can't yet cover every area on the Peninsula, we are supporting rodent work where possums are still present.
- **Remove Pest Plants:** Species like *Bomarea* and *banana passionfruit* provide a food source for rats and mice—removing them helps lower numbers.

Why It Matters

Fewer possums means **more food for native birds**—but also **more for rats and mice**. This is why controlling all pest species is essential.

The **increase in tūī, kererū, bellbird, and rifleman** is noticeable, and **kākā** have been spotted visiting The Cove! Gardens are thriving and native bush is regenerating.

But as always, we need your help detecting them! Please report all possums seen or heard to possums@opbg.nz

The Sustainable Otago Peninsula



This new initiative is progressing, closely shaped by community consultation. Some of the first steps we're working on is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), structure, and shared tools (like bulk email delivery systems) to help groups across the Peninsula collaborate and communicate more effectively.

The Native Birds of the Otago Peninsula: Rifleman Project

While removing possums has been our high profile action so far, it is in fact only one part of our mahi around the Peninsula. We work in many ways to monitor and improve the habitats of other native species to give them a helping hand. This includes our insects, lizards and birds.

One of the projects OPBG volunteers have worked on is supporting the population of Rifleman (Titipounamu) on the Peninsula. This mahi started in 2020, in collaboration with STOP (Save The Otago Peninsula). The Rifleman is New Zealand's smallest bird, but we have been trying to give it a big helping hand!

In pockets of bush with resident Rifleman populations we have added 270 nest boxes, all built and installed by volunteers. The intention was to increase the population so that it will expand into new Peninsula habitats. So far things look promising. The removal of possums means that suitable habitats flourish with plants that are hosts to the insects that Rifleman feed on.



Bird monitoring transects where OPBG volunteers have collected data 8 times a year since 2010



Rifleman pair in natural cavity

Photo by Rod Morris.



Sites of nest boxes, with Hoopers Inlet bottom right of photo.

Nest boxes are checked in October to see if nest building has started. In May nest boxes are checked again (after nesting is finished) to see if a complete nest was built. Nesting material includes hundreds of feathers from a variety of birds, as well as twigs and leaves.



The skeletal remains of mahoe leaves can be seen in many nest boxes, and occasionally an unhatched egg. In 2021 a Rifleman pair decided a possum trap even made a good nest site (which we carefully closed off to protect them from interested possums!)



Possum investigating a trap which contained a nesting Rifleman!

As the table shows: nest boxes are increasingly popular and support successful nesting!

	Season 1 summer 2020/2021	Season 2 summer 2021/2022	Season 3 summer 2022/2023	Season 4 summer 2023/2024	Season 5 summer 2024/2025
Available boxes	157	206	255	250	269
Total # boxes utilised	30	66	86	110	107
Estimated successful nests	23	39	48	69	71
Success rate from complete nests	70%	72%	73%	78%	81%

These positive outcomes are a direct result of the OPBG bird monitoring, the dedication of members of STOP, and volunteers organised by former staff member Marcia Dale, who also volunteered her time and expertise in the fundraising, nest box building and monitoring. Kudos also goes to the landowners who continue to host, check and report on nest boxes.

How can you help the flourishing bird populations on the Otago Peninsula?

- Backyard trapping of introduced mammalian pests.....see earlier story.
- Planting natives in your backyard. Muehlenbeckia is particularly good for Rifleman who feed on the insect populations (especially butterflies and moths) that live on the plant.
- Removing weed species that outcompete natives and can take advantage of the absence of browsing possums. These include: Banana passionfruit, Bomarea, Darwin's barberry, Chilean flame creeper and Sycamore.
- Build a nesting box for Rifleman for your back yard, choose the "Resources" tab on our website: <https://www.predatorfreopeninsula.nz>
- Volunteer with track maintenance so trap lines are easier to maintain.

Introducing Chris Arnison

Chris has recently joined the OPBG and in doing so has singlehandedly doubled our staff contingent.

After quite a few years of volunteering he is OPBG's new Community Coordinator. This is a wee introduction in his own words:

I grew up on the Otago Peninsula and have spent many years exploring its hills and coastline, forming a strong connection to the landscape and its wildlife. I returned to live in Macandrew Bay four years ago and started volunteering for OPBG on a possum trap line near my house while I was undertaking postgraduate study. Now that I have finally finished up at university I am pleased to be working for OPBG helping catch the final possums in Sector 5 and starting work on the multi-species programme.



Grand Total of Possums Caught = 24,758

**Remember to Report a Peninsula Possum
DEAD OR ALIVE!**

Report a Possum Now:

possums@opbg.nz

For any questions feel free to contact:

Operations Manager: Paula Cross
operations@opbg.nz



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