



Newsletter *June 2026*

Welcome to the Winter 2026 edition.

Since our last newsletter we can now report on a major milestone and a year full of wonderful achievements and also outline our next goals!

Local residents established the Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group in 2008 (later registered as a Trust in 2010) with the goal to protect the local environment by removing introduced mammalian predators from the Peninsula. A genuine community-led initiative, the main focus was to target possums. In recent years funding through Predator Free 2050 allowed us to expand for a short period in terms of equipment and staffing to allow the final push to the remaining few possums on the Peninsula which have been systematically removed one by one. This makes it one of the first inhabited, landscape-scale areas in Aotearoa to eliminate possums.

Achieving a Peninsula free from possums has been a historic achievement with community volunteers involved from the start to the end.

How was this milestone achieved?

Take a few minutes to look at our updated **OPBG Story site** – it is full of sound clips, videos, pictures and more which tell the inspiring tale of this community group. <https://arcg.is/HfHuD0>



The last phase after 15 years of trapping, from June 2025 to January 2026, involved the Halo team, as delivery partner for Predator Free Dunedin, mopping up a few remaining possums in Sectors 1-4 and also installing and servicing new automatic traps for ongoing monitoring work. Meanwhile OPBG focused on Sector 5 – the last remaining stronghold for possums at the gateway to the Peninsula.



In Sector 5 two large clusters of females and males were knocked back – one in Glengyle Street and the other between Waverly and the Cove. With two additional males caught in Tomahawk and Waverly, a total of 22 possums were removed from Sector 5. Extensive monitoring with trail cameras and scat dogs confirmed the absence of possums.



Monitoring of the final possums in Sector 5



The last known possum on the Otago Peninsula posed for this photo back in November 2025



It was fitting that the final possum was caught by local resident and former OPBG trustee Rod Morris.

Possums were officially declared eliminated on 10th March 2026, with a total of 24,792 possums removed.

This has only been possible thanks to the input of many individuals and groups. Thanks to hundreds of volunteers who gave thousands of hours of time to install traps, check traplines, help with clearing tracks, local residents who hosted backyard traps, plus landowners who gave permission for us to work on their properties.

For the last 16 years OPBG has also successfully operated under the millions of hours of volunteer effort from a host of tireless trustees.

Thanks also to everyone who reported possum sightings, our scientific advisors and researchers, mana whenua, Dunedin City Council, Otago Regional Council, the Department of Conservation, and our delivery partners (Halo, City Sanctuary and Predator Free Dunedin).

We remain ever vigilant for reinvasions and a Biosecurity plan has been developed to protect against reinvasion. As ever this relies on the community to sound the alarm to any possible signs of a rogue possum.

You can help by:

Call or email OPBG or report via: www.reportapossum.nz for any of the following:

- **Sightings:** If you think you see a possum, crossing a road, in a tree etc.
- **Roadkill:** Report any roadkill possums as soon as you see them
- **Scat:** Any suspected possum scat
- **Sounds:** If you think you hear possums calling out. <https://bit.ly/possum-sounds-video>

Our buffer zone for protecting the Otago Peninsula has been Sector 5. This is the most urban area of the Peninsula but it also contains some steep slopes and pockets of bush – in all, a difficult area to remove possums from. The Guardians group of residents have been instrumental in the elimination of possums here, and while we no longer need the regular meetings and newsletters specific to the Guardians, we know they will continue to encourage their community in maintaining a possum free status by remaining vigilant for any invasions and reporting these to OPBG.

Farewell to Paula Cross

The big Sector 5 effort was carried out by two OPBG staff members: Paula Cross and Chris Arnison, alongside volunteers. Even after officially stepping down from the operations role at the end of 2025,

Paula continued to monitor the status of those last few possums. For every staff member, volunteer and trustee there is real passion needed to keep work progressing. Paula is exemplary in this, she worked with OPBG for 4 years in a number of roles and was a pivotal link with the wider community, volunteers and other stakeholders. We are indebted to Paula for her dedication to the role through the final years of possum elimination.

We are also delighted that she continues to volunteer with new multi-species work and appreciate her experience and expertise. This also means she can keep



working with Chris who she first brought on board to OPBG as a volunteer. Chris now fills the

Operations Role – responding to call outs, co-ordinating volunteers, rolling out back yard trapping and the new multi-species work, writing funding applications and reporting to the trustees to mention a few. We are utterly appreciative of the skill set and commitment Chris brings to the role.

Biodiversity outcomes and the benefits of possum removal

The difference is already being seen and heard across the Peninsula. Possums compete with native birds for food, as well as preying on their eggs and chicks. As possum numbers have fallen, forest bird numbers have risen.

Tūtī, korimako/bellbird, kererū, pīwakawaka/fantail, riroriro/grey warbler, titipounamu/rifleman, mātātā/fernbird, kākā, and tauhou/silvereye are all becoming more common across the Peninsula. With possums now removed, we expect the Peninsula's native bird populations to continue increasing. How do we know this? Of course a lot of anecdotal and qualitative findings - but also through the Bird Surveys. These long-running surveys also involve a lot of volunteers, currently overseen by Marcia Dale, who has been processing years of data and we look forward to sharing some of the key findings in the future.



Tui checking out a successful rat trap

What is OPBG doing now?

The goal of OPBG has long been the removal of introduced mammalian predators. Possums were targeted, and with them rats who were devils at removing possum lure, but along the way we have been working on other species. Now we are ramping the OPBG Multi-Species Programme. Our approach uses the same model as was successful for early possum work: suppression of numbers which is largely volunteer-led. The species being targeted are: rodents (rats/mice), mustelids (stoats, weasels, ferrets), hedgehogs, and feral cats.

We have secured some funding from the Otago Regional Council to first address two areas of high biodiversity. These are called our “Site-Led Projects”: (1) Papanui/Okia, and (2) Sandymount.

In the first 5 months of 2026, volunteers have performed over 1200 trap checks with 294 predators caught, roughly a 25% success rate.



1. Papanui/Okia: Anyone driving around the back bays or walking out to the Pyramids may have seen our wooden trap boxes on the shoulder of the road. These are primarily targeting stoats, hedgehogs, and rats and aim to protect vulnerable birds and lizards in the area. Traps are serviced by our dedicated volunteers, who bait them with rabbit meat, eggs, and/or salmon oil. One pair of volunteers have caught 10 stoats in the last year using roast chicken.

We have been seeing increasing numbers of sea lions on the road as we work around the back bays, including one that had sadly been hit by a car. *-A good reminder to stay vigilant when driving out that way.*

2. Sandymount: Here we are targeting the full suite of introduced predators with kill traps and toxin. DoubleTap toxin is being used to control rodents. We have chosen this as the active ingredients have a very short half-life and are metabolised quickly by target species, so it doesn't persist in the environment and therefore the risk of secondary poisoning is very low. Toxin is fixed in closed bait stations preventing access by non-target species. We also run lines of rat and stoat traps throughout the reserve.

More and more fernbird are being seen in the reserve, along with bellbird, tui, fantail, and grey warbler. We hope their numbers will continue to increase as we suppress predators. Volunteers check traplines regularly and we have working bees every Friday morning where volunteers clear tracks, install bait stations, deploy toxin, and assist with predator monitoring.



One of our regular volunteers Peter Simkins surveying the Sandymount terrain (Hoopers Inlet and Harbour Cone in background)



Stoat on camera at Sandymount

What about trapping on the rest of the Otago Peninsula?

Mustelids (stoats, ferrets, weasels)

There have been many reports of stoat activity over the summer. We encourage residents who see stoats, ferrets, or weasels to let OBPg know as we're maintaining a database of sightings to help map their distribution and identify hotspots for future trapping. As we source more funding this will be used to determine where new traps and traplines will be established and at that point we will also be looking for more volunteers!

Chris with a stoat trap at Allans Beach





Stoat sighting in Broad Bay

Backyard Rodent Trapping

This programme is designed for residential and lifestyle block residents living on the Peninsula between Macandrew Bay and Taiaroa Head. For a small supporters fee, we can provide rat traps and/or toxin and bait stations. We can also provide advice on where to best place these and assistance in setting them up. Now that winter has arrived and it is getting colder, rats and mice will be looking to move indoors, so it is a perfect time to start trapping them before they cause damage to your property. If you are interested in joining the programme, we would love to hear from you. Likewise, if you are already undertaking rodent control on your property, please let us know as this helps us build a clearer picture of the collective effort underway across our community. Thanks to Community Matters for supporting this initiative.

- **For current members of the rodent program:** Please get in touch if you require more bait or would like to purchase a top-up of toxin.
- **Large property owners:** We're currently controlling rodents on several large properties near Portobello with regenerating native bush. If you own a large section of native bush and would like rodent control undertaken, please get in touch. We ask for a donation to cover the cost of toxin and bait stations but will undertake the work at no cost.

Sustainable Otago Peninsula - SOP

This umbrella group is gradually formalising its framework with key stakeholders. It seeks to build a collaborative community of sustainable programmes with the initial three entities: Rūnaka Ōtākou, Otago Peninsula Trust and Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Trust.

Led by mana whenua, SOP marks the beginning of a 200-year vision to restore ecological balance across the Otago Peninsula.

There are many other groups that have registered interest in this collaboration following the community consultation in 2024-2025. A SOP Website is under development and we are grateful to the Otago Catchment Communities for support with this.

An initial project: www.epa.govt.nz/community-involvement/open-waters-aotearoa/community-groups/#teaomu. This project focuses on ephemeral wetlands located on Māori land. These wetlands, some of which have persisted for years, are increasingly recognised for their ecological value. SOP aims to compare them with permanent ponds to understand their role in freshwater ecosystems. Vulnerable to sea level rise, these wetlands are key sites for climate change monitoring.

Helping hand

At times we need volunteers for short-term projects and other times for longer projects such as monitoring trap lines. If you are interested please do reach out to us. While we are at capacity at the moment, when opportunities come along we do appreciate having people we can call upon to help. And the roles can be quite varied.

What does limit us is funding. Multi-year funding for pest control is difficult to access. Money is necessary for purchasing the trap hardware (boxes and traps), bait, poison and cameras. For staffing to co-ordinate the lovely volunteers and respond to sightings, and to keep the lights on, the phone ringing and the truck full of petrol.

You can contribute by:

- **Give a little page** <https://givealittle.co.nz/org/otago-peninsula-biodiversity-trust>
- directly through our “Donations” tab on the website
<https://www.predatorfreepeninsula.nz/donate/>

We still have a few calendars featuring beautiful native birds found on the Peninsula. As we're half way through the year we're selling for half-price (\$10.00) and will deliver for free if you live on the Peninsula. Contact Chris chris@opbg.nz

Our possum elimination has had a high profile in the media of late:

- https://predatorfreenz.org/stories/when-possums-disappear-gardens-rebound-on-otago-peninsula/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHtu6S6HIW5opYvNm1dAErPMcWU6FIFOFbLh_hz5akVTwmnfbasTtqk9T_aem_tWQw-9Jilzw28T9D9nV3Eg
- <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/peninsula-proudly-proclaimed-possumless-place>
- <https://blog.doc.govt.nz/2026/03/26/how-one-man-did-his-bit-to-help-make-otago-peninsula-possum-free/>
- <https://www.critic.co.nz/news/article/12078/possums-we-dont-know-her>

Grand Total of Possums Caught = 24,792

Remember to Report a Peninsula Possum DEAD OR ALIVE!

Report a Possum Now:

possums@opbg.nz

Contact details:

Visit our website for a great overview of who we are and what we do. <https://www.predatorfreepeninsula.nz/>

Call into the Biodiversity Hub (next to Coronation Hall in Portobello) on a Tuesday – Friday to see Chris (although he is often out and about in the community)

Chris Arnison: Operations Manager and Community Coordinator

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