

Issue 6, August 2017

OUTSTANDING YEAR FOR WILDSIDE

Green Ribbon Community
Leadership Winner 2017

National Biosecurity Award
Community Winner 2017

Congratulations to the Wildside community, landowners, agency staff, conservation groups and BPCT for winning these two prestigious awards.

These awards were both presented at Parliament and recognise the Wildside for its significant predator control operations, sea bird, forest and fresh water protection as well as community and school education.

Formal congratulations was also lodged at Parliament by the Hon Ruth Dyson.



A Maori chief fish, weighed, measured and released in a long term study on the impact of marine reserves.

COMMUNITY INITIATED PROGRAM – POSSUMS

Possoms continued to be controlled across the Wildside with noticeable effects on plant health, especially palatable flowering vines and mistletoe. Soon contractors will be targeting a core area from Flea Bay to Fishermans Bay to reduce possum numbers to below 2% residual trap catch (RTC) or two possums in one hundred trap nights. Monitoring work has shown that the possum population has risen to 4% after being knocked down to 1.4% in 2014.

Possum control is also continuing in Hinewai and Misty Peaks Reserves with a total of 5,000ha of possum control. This work is possible due to the Banks Peninsula Pest Liaison Committee and targeted possum rates. The surrounding blocks on the Akaroa headland and Le Bons Bay will also have possum work carried out this year.

TRAPPERS WORKSHOP

A successful trappers workshop was held on a snowy day in May, presenters from Zero Invasive Predators and Cacophony Project wowed the packed room with groundbreaking and thought provoking research into how to eradicate pests from mainland New Zealand with modification in trapping techniques and development of sound lures, infrared cameras, and modified predator fences. A 400ha peninsula in the Marlborough Sounds has had predators removed and the area protected from reinvasion by lines of traps.

PREDATOR FREE BANKS PENINSULA SCOPING REPORT

The Rod Donald Banks Peninsula Trust commissioned a report to cost making Banks Peninsula free of possums, ferrets, stoats and rats. The report was undertaken by Max Curnow and Geoffrey Kerr of Lincoln University [available here](#). While predator control techniques that are currently available make the cost prohibitive at around \$90-\$130 million dollars, the report highlighted how social acceptance and buy-in of the community is vital for the success of predator control operations. As we see in projects around the country much can be achieved by clear strategic planning and inspiring volunteers and willing communities, such as has happened on the Wildside over 30 years.

DOC MARINE RESERVE MONITORING

We have two Marine Reserves on the Wildside, the Pohatu and Akaroa Marine Reserves, which are 16 and 2.5 years old, respectively. Local DOC rangers have been using two methods of monitoring, Baited Underwater Video (BUV) and blue cod potting, in the marine reserves.



Stony Bay valley



A banded kokopu of the Galaxiidae family, named after the patterns of stars on their backs. From Stony Bay.



Zero Invasive Predators ecologist Helen Nathen discussing Bottle Rock field site in the Marlborough Sounds.

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Wildside Project

The blue cod potting investigated the impact of the marine reserves on blue cod size, abundance and age structure. The Baited Underwater Video initiative uses a GoPro camera which captured a surprising variety of marine life including seven-gill sharks, blue cod, trumpeter, moki, marble fish, pig fish, eels and cray.

RIFLEMAN IN ABUNDANCE

Christchurch City Council rangers are using rifleman houses to boost the nesting success of New Zealand's smallest bird that are declining nationally. Research by Briskie et al. has found that the use of nest-boxes can increase nest success from 16% at natural sites to 80% a five-fold increase. The boxes have been installed around Misty Peaks Reserve above Akaroa to assist the rifleman population there with a spill-over effect into nearby reserves and covenants. The boxes were put together by the Akaroa Men's Shed.

STONY BAY STREAM COVENANT AND BANKS TRACK

The Banks Peninsula Track is rerouting its famous walkway after 27 years in operation. The new track will wind its way up through Stony Bay valley through a new and very special BPCT covenant on Mark and Sonia Armstrong's land and into Hinewai Reserve to the summit through some stunning old growth beech forest.

Fencing is underway and when completed will protect almost the entirety of the watercourse from summit to sea, with Hinewai already protecting the whole upper catchment. A large and impressive stand of kanuka will also be covenanted, being a warm north-facing site is sure to be full of Banks Peninsula tree weta, forest birds such as rifleman and lizards. The stream itself is already home to red and blue fin bullies, eel, lamprey and galaxids such as banded kokopu, koaro and inanga.

This new conservation effort fits nicely into the larger picture that is becoming a very special story. Linking Hinewai Reserve to the Armstrongs already large QEII covenant and penguin colony and connecting to network of protected reserves that covers more than 2,500ha across the habitat gradient from summit to sea.

2017 TITI COUNT

The titi chick count was significantly down this year on last at 24 chicks, however, the occupancy rate was at an all-time high with 50 occupied burrows. Rangers found no dead chicks and many burrows had been obviously used but were empty, this signals to us that the chicks had fledged slightly earlier this year than in the past leading to the lower count. Titi are still expanding across the colony and excavating new burrows, so the colony looks good.

WATCH OUT FOR NEW PENGUINS NESTS

Across the Wildside white-flipped little blue penguins are expanding back to where they nested more than 30 years ago before heavy predation started a dramatic decline. While this is fantastic news it does mean that penguins on beaches will be vulnerable to dogs and human disturbance. Please be vigilant as these special little penguins are still classified as at risk.

IN DEPTH - WHITEBAIT SEASON ON THE WILDSIDE

The annual whitebait season is open again, a legal and sometimes controversial fishery which is made up of five species of the galaxiid family, three species of which are declining and one threatened. Most of a fisherman's catch is made up of the inanga or *Galaxias maculatus* species, also declining.

Inanga have an interesting life cycle, the fish we recognise from spring harvests have spent six months at sea feeding on plankton before migrating back to freshwater habitats where they gather in shoals in slow-flowing backwaters and feed on tiny insects in the open water. After 1-2 years the now adult fish travel back downstream between February and April to small and very particular spawning sites, where they congregate. On the highest 'spring' tides the adult inanga seek out tall dense vegetation to spawn in at the base of riparian plants such as grasses or flaxes, keeping the eggs protected from drying out and from UV sunlight. University of Canterbury researcher Mike Hickford describes this as "almost 100 per cent humidity, conditions that are as close to being under water as you can get out of the water". The 1mm diameter eggs will hatch out on the next high 'spring' tide or flood and be swept out to sea.

While most people think that large West Coast rivers such as the Buller for whitebait they actually have very small spawning areas "by and large it is probably smaller streams that are more vital for the health of the population as their spawning habitat tends to be more intact" says Hickford. These are streams such as Goughs Bay where 17,000 inanga have been recorded in the stream.

At Goughs Bay plots of 5m x 2.5m were erected, eight plots were fenced and protected from grazing, and eight were left open to grazing. After 468 days, the vegetation in ungrazed plots was on average twice as high, the aboveground root mat was 14 mm deeper, and vegetation density increased by 40%, relative to grazed controls. The consequence of this was that egg densities in ungrazed plots were 10 times greater and egg survival was three times greater than in grazed controls. Also, many dead and undeveloped eggs were found in grazed plots, but not in ungrazed plots, at the end of the 28-day development cycle (Hickford & Schiel. 2011).

While the impact of fishing pressure on whitebait numbers is largely unknown DOC sees the protection of whitebait spawning habitat as playing a major role in enhancing the lasting viability of the fishery. Mike Hickford reports that even a hotwire fence two metres back from the stream bank, or from high spring tides in spawning areas, over three months of the year from January until April is enough to dramatically increase spawning and hatching success. "What's important is what is happening underneath the vegetation. The inanga spawn where grasses clump together and form a dense root mat. It's not uncommon for different generations of fish to choose the same clump of grass for egg laying."

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