

Welcome to issue 27 of the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Inc., in which we look out to a future without the ARC and FDC organisations as we know them, and reflect on how heartbreaking it would be if our possum control programme in this fragile environment is not able to be continued into the future.

The battle must continue — we have come so far, but there's still a long way to go.

We explain the importance of 'releasing' young plants, and hope you can join us in November for

some practical experience in this exercise! And we celebrate the magnificent west coast — dune plantings, views and a planned Landcare Labour Monday walk which promises to be beneficial in many ways. We hope to see you there.

As always, we would like to publicly acknowledge and thank all those who support our efforts in improving Peninsula biodiversity with their goodwill, practical assistance, and by being Landcare members.

We need you all.

Bold goal sets sight on the possum

Actually, we really wish we didn't have to keep banging on about possums.

We know it gets boring — for us too! Our dream is that one day you won't be reading about this pest, but about threatened Peninsula plants being revived, and rare bird sightings being reported.

Now won't that be nice.

Unfortunately, dealing to the possum is the very basis for growth (literally) of our native flora and fauna and, much as Landcare would like to be able to reduce our efforts against this scourge, we cannot afford to at this time.

Why not? Because — slowly — we are winning, that's why. Take a look at our recent history, see if you agree.

In 2003, Landcare stated we were aiming for a 0% possum monitor result (RTC) on the Peninsula.

This was a bold goal indeed, given that an extremely high RTC of 20% had been reported.

Historically, local possum eradication had taken place without the benefit of an overall plan or



Eggs and young chicks from natives such as fantail (piwakawaka), pictured below, are a favourite food for possums through Oct-Nov.

You will know about building pest proof fences to form open sanctuaries

— Shakespear Park being the most recent. These are wonderful things, no doubt, but come with a breathtaking price tag — millions of dollars.

We are taking the Awhitu No.8 Wire approach for our 22,000 hectares — consistently targeting a line of bait stations across the bottom of the Peninsula (through Taurangaruru, including Karioitahi), with assistance from many helpful landowners.

We are concentrating on getting that boundary as possum proof as possible.

Our first line of defence!

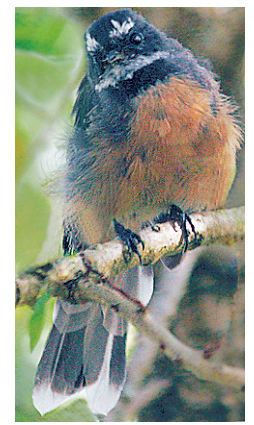
Landcare and Awhitu folk are now into the sixth year of a formal possum eradication programme.

Looking to the future, we are hopeful of continued com-

munity assistance from the new Council; perhaps even a wider pest focus to allow the inclusion of mustelid, and feral cats.

It would be heartbreaking to think that a dedicated control programme may not be affordable to continue, allowing Peninsula possum numbers to creep up again, with all the destruction that would cause.

With the support of the community and for the sake of our environment, we want to keep moving forward, striving towards that 0% bold goal.



West Coast wonders



The West Coast in winter can be a daunting place and enthusiastic plans for a July planting of the foredune at Waimatuku/Hamiltons Gap were tempered by thoughts of what Mother Nature is capable of inflicting.

She must have known that we were lending her a helping hand and decided to smile upon us. In weather that had us removing

layers of clothing and applying sun block, 4000 spinifex and Pingao plants were planted in record time by volunteers. Thanks to publicity on Radio Live by TVs Tony Murrell who is a Landcare member, volunteers came from far and wide to help restore the damaged dune.

Above: We are hoping that the plantings will prevent dune damage. Inset: The tyre marks...

Waiuku College come to the rescue on the West Coast

Once the plants were in the ground we noted that we were a few hundred plants short on one area and decided this needed fixing. With kind help from Franklin District Council and Taupo Native Plant Nursery in

Glenbrook we managed to source a further 1000 plants and then had to work out how to get them planted before the weather turned too dry.

Not to worry — Waiuku College to the rescue — step forward

Jane Patterson and the environment team of 11 students.

Again the weather in September was better than could be hoped for and soon the plants were in the ground and we could step back, relax and hope the

winds and tides wouldn't do too much damage to our good work.

Below: Jane Patterson's Waiuku College environment team and Tony Murrell celebrate a successful dune planting



follow up strategy.

Activity from some concerned landowners had focused on isolated pockets which were quickly re-infected by possums crossing boundaries. Something had to be done.

In 2004 a successful funding application to DOC enabled Awhitu Peninsula Landcare to institute a consistent and orderly approach to eradication over 4-year period.

At the end of this time, possum numbers had been reduced so significantly that the ARC were prepared to consider designating the Awhitu Peninsula a possum control area (PCA).

This would allow the cost of maintaining possum control to be split between regional and local ratepayers, with the rate based on unimproved land value.

It would give Awhitu landowners certainty and ensure the previous investment in pest control continued.

At an average household cost of \$16, it would be cheaper than someone buying their own possum bait.

In June 2008, Peninsula folk gave the PCA proposal a huge thumbs-up by returning an unprecedented 42.5% of voting papers, of which 74.7% were in favour of the scheme, which was instituted the

same year.

We can't tell you how delighted the Landcare team were at this very obvious show of support from the community.

As you would expect, our performance is strictly RTC monitored by ARC. In addition, on behalf of Landcare, Tricia Aspin

monitors pest presence, vegetation health and birdlife in specific fenced-off bush lots which have had possum control over many years (well prior to the first 2006

Landcare results). Thanks to DOC, ARC and the hundreds of volunteers and landowners who diligently trap, bait and shoot, recent results have been heartening.

Reduced possum numbers over the whole area has allowed Landcare this year to focus attention on a key strategy in the possum war — the southern Peninsula boundary.

The geography of the Peninsula enables us to develop a virtual 'mainland island', and we are intent on utilising this advantage for all it is worth.

Roadside blight reduced

Readers cannot fail to have noticed the dramatic disappearance of roadside rubbish over the last couple of months.

Landcare reported the growing piles of ditch litter to FDC and we had a terrific response — what a brilliant improvement.

Let's hope we can keep it that way as summer approaches and visitors increase.

We know many of you grab a plastic bag or three and do a 'rubbish run' in your local area every so often.

It can seem daunting, but every bit of rubbish removed is a win, so please keep at it if you can.

In the meantime, a bouquet

must go to the FDC for responding so meaningfully to the Awhitu cry for help.

Protect your land and our environment:

Now that winter is truly over, maybe a spring clean?

Awhitu Peninsula Landcare supports recycling initiatives for farmers; collections are available locally.

Plasback plastic recycling scheme for hay/ sileage wrap (and more): www.plasback.co.nz or 0508 338 240.

Agrecovery chemical removal programmes:

www.agrecovery.co.nz or 0800 247 326.