



Worrying signs in possum roundup

Our first monitor (by an external contractor) for the year has shown some worrying results. We deliberately targeted suspected trouble spots, as we are becoming increasingly concerned about pockets of untreated habitat harbouring possums. Sure enough, some of the monitor results were as high as 16%. (By contrast, regularly baited areas were 0-1%.)

Our possum control scheme relies on 'self help' - Landcare are able to supply free bait, stations, advice, we

run the southern baitline barrier across the foot of the Peninsula and we do a lot of work on public areas of land. We simply cannot cover 22,000 hectares of private land, and the success of the scheme relies on landowners to organise this on their own properties.

In areas where possum numbers are allowed to grow, they will soon spread out to infect 'clean' areas of neighbouring land. As we all know, possums can decimate localised stands of trees, but



perhaps more importantly they change the overall structure of native bush and other ecosystems. Over 50% of the QEII covenants in Franklin are in the Awhitu area, so it is obvious that many landowners place great value on their environment. Please don't let your property harbour possums.... your neighbours won't thank you for it. Now is an ideal time to fill bait stations, with another fill in 4-6 weeks' time. If you have an aversion to using bait - we have just taken

delivery of some new Timms traps which are a good, non-toxic alternative - available to purchase or loan.

Some success is being reported with our mustelid traps (available for loan) - ferrets caught - fish flavoured cat food being the enticement which did the trick! *Inset: although not native, these Californian Quail chicks are delightful little birds which we think we could adopt as our own.... being ground nesting quail are especially at risk from predators.*

The patter of tiny feet ...

That familiar scuttling sound above wakes us from our slumber - They're Back!

Autumn is the time when Black Rat numbers are at their highest - the bounty of summer is over and they are looking for food and shelter. Also known as the Roof Rat, around the house they spoil food and spread disease. By chewing through electric wiring they cause fire hazards. Enough reasons for you to want to kill a few? Wait - there's more!

As the most common mammal 'weed' in rural areas, Black Rats have a huge impact on our native fauna and flora - eating insects, birds' eggs, chicks and fruit. The health and composition of our bush and forest can be dramatically changed by these nasty critters. Unlike the Norway (Brown or Water) Rat which is common around waterways in our cities, the Black Rat is a very agile climber and is mostly found living above ground in the trees (and ceiling space!) It is easily identified as it has a tail longer than the rest of its body. This measurement is much easier to perform when your rat is dead so here are a few tips....

Trapping - there are numerous types of trap available from hardware stores and rural suppliers. Peanut butter bait works well. Always place traps (or bait stations) along a perimeter wall where the rats like to travel. If placed out-



doors, traps should be covered to prevent inadvertent injury to pets or birds.

Poison - Numerous brands on the market which are effective. The important thing with poisons is to take care when using them. The safest thing is to use proper bait stations which are widely available. These will keep the bait safe from inquisitive dogs or children. By fastening the bait in the station, the rats gorge themselves on the poison, rather than take the bait away for storage. In a bush setting, laying the bait in a piece of spouting will keep it dry and make it last longer.

Possum bait stations are also widely visited by rats, so keeping these full will kill two pests with one stone!

Our kauri are dying



We were horrified to see many kauri stands like this on a recent trip to the Waitakeres. This deadly dieback disease has been positively identified in dying Awhitu kauri - yes, we have it here. Nearly all infected kauri die and there is no known treatment at this stage. Just because it has been out of the news recently, please don't let this danger be out of your thoughts. As it spreads via microscopic spores, if you are in an area with kauri, do keep to tracks and off kauri roots, clean your shoes and equipment of visible soil and plant material, and keep your dog on a leash.

Disinfectant spray is available for public use at the Landcare office.

Left: Many Kauri are dying in the Waitakeres.

Catchment Management Conference

A representative from Awhitu Peninsula Landcare attended this Conference, held a few weeks ago in Hamilton and run by NZ Landcare Trust.

NZ Landcare Trust is an independent, non-governmental, nationwide organisation that was first established in 1996. Over the years the Trust has flourished and now works on a range of field based projects, from large catchment-based projects that deal with complete landcare issues to working with smaller landcare groups with a specific bio-diversity focus. Throughout New Zealand, hundreds of farmers and landowners have been encouraged to review and adapt their 'land management practices'. They have planted trees, protected waterways, controlled pests and fostered native flora and fauna in an effort to maintain productive and sustainable environments.

It has been suggested that catchment plans be drawn up to help farmers in



certain areas of the Awhitu Peninsula. Many landowners will ask, "Why do we need one?" The answer is that all dairy farmers will have to fence off their streams and wet-

lands in the very near future and the rest of the beef farmers etc. will soon have to do the same. It is better to have control of your own destiny than to be told what to do. By forming catchment plans you take on partnerships with Fonterra, Department of Conservation, Auckland Council, Fish and Game, NZ Landcare Trust, Ministry for the Environment, Forest and Bird, Dairy NZ, Ngati Te Ata, Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Group and the general public.

The aim is to help landowners source funding for fencing, soil erosion (wind or water) animal and weed pests and labour to help plant trees etc. Fonterra has already indicated that it is ready to help.

Picture: Good catchment protection can pay dividends

Planting dates...

We kick off our planting season this year at Orua Bay on Queens Birthday. Pines have been cleared - to be replaced by Pohutukawas from Project Crimson - come along and plant trees your family will be proud of in years to come. All start times 10am:

- Mon June 3rd: Orua Bay Pohutukawa planting
- Thu June 21st: Manukau Heads Lighthouse
- Sat July 28th: Waimatuku/Hamiltons Gap Dune
- Sat Aug 18th: Awhitu Central Social Club Reserve
- Sun Sept 2nd: Pollok Wharf Reserve
- Sat Sept 15th: Awhitu Central Wetland

Our AGM

Will be held at 7.30pm on Thursday 3rd May at Pollok Hall. No speakers arranged, as we are hoping to have a 'shadehouse opening' event later in the year... watch this space.