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No. 14: Spring 2021

Tēnā koutou katoa! In this issue we introduce the Halo Project to a wider audience, many of whom are receiving this newsletter for the first time. In this newsletter we reflect on our winter activities.

PREDATOR FREE

FOREST HABITAT RESTORATION

FROM SOURCE TO SEA

SEABIRD HABITAT RESTORATION

We partner with landowners, community groups and volunteers to restore native habitat and make it safe for wildlife. We aim to inspire and work with our communities to enhance, protect and connect with this landscape, through training, events, resources and providing employment and volunteer opportunities.

The Halo Project is driven by community input and involvement – thanks to all who participate, give their time, energy, expertise and passion! We really appreciate you.

PREDATOR FREE

To our newest readers - Haere mai, welcome!

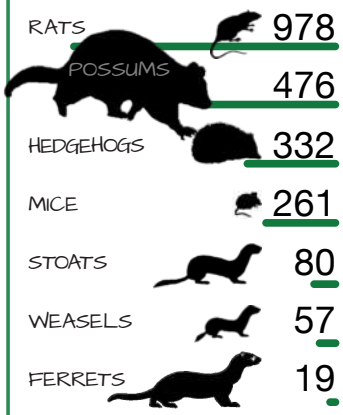
Aiming to create a safe halo of habitat for birdlife spreading beyond Orokonui Ecosanctuary, we're now a delivery partner for Predator Free Dunedin. We work closely with OSPRI Ltd to control possums across 12,500 hectares, from Aramoana to Flagstaff. We also target stoats, and in some areas rats - the worst predators of native birds, lizards and insects.

All traps across the Halo Project's 12,500 hectares of the Predator Free area

Halo Dashboard

2021

Catch data:



Total catch #: **2,186**
Total # traps: **2,702**

Source to Sea totals:

Length of fencing (m): **9,000**

# of native trees planted: **9,165**

PREDATOR FREE (continued)

Focus on Pine Hill possums

The owners of a rural property got in touch seeking help with their possum problem. The large and long property has lots of pine trees, native bush and inaccessible scrub, perfect for possums. It's also a link in the chain of bushy habitat from the Town Belt, through Pine Hill to Mount Cargill.

The couple maintain Timms traps around the perimeter of their house, with the help of their young neighbour Brody (age 6), but that was not enough. With the addition of 15 Trapinators and three AT220 automatic traps, it took only a couple of months of weekly trap checks before 100 possums were removed from the property. It's estimated that scrub and bush can support up to ten possums per hectare, therefore, we would expect to remove another 80-100 possums to get the density down to a low level.

The landowners are very supportive and appreciative of our work. Likewise, we're grateful to be working with such keen landowners, and glad to be getting this possum hotspot under control. A difference with this reduction of browsing pressure, will likely be noticeable in the bush and in urban backyards around the neighbourhood this summer. Possum control effort must be maintained to prevent possums from other hotspots simply moving in and taking their place.

Giles and Kate have been trapping possums on their property for nearly 30 years

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So far, so good – Heyward Point automatic trap trial

The new network of 117 AT220 Autotraps for possums and rats is up and running well across Heyward Point. This is a large-scale operational trial to test the trap's effectiveness under local conditions. We are closely monitoring their performance, servicing requirements, safety for non-target species (including kākā) and their catch.

So far, around 95% of the network is performing well and we've pleased with the function and reliability of these devices. We're working with the manufacturer on some issues with lure pumps.

NZ Autotraps have just released a phone app that allows accelerometer data to be retrieved from the traps, providing a coarse way of recording each possum catch. We're using trail cameras on some traps to validate the information we get through the app.

By counting carcasses, we know the trial network has caught at least 75 possums and 99 rats, and there's been no unwanted bycatch to date.

We've worked with almost 30 landowners who are all supportive of the trial and the goal of managing possums at low densities or, if possible, eliminating them entirely from the landscape.

Self resetting AT220 possum/rat trap

Predator Free Halo boundary (white dashes), with Heyward Point automatic AT220 possum/rat trap trial network.

Generally, landowners are very interested in the devices and the way they help us to work smarter. They see the significant advantages of the AT220 being the daylight lockout function to reduce the risk to non-target species, especially kākā, and the ability to self-reset.

We're planning to run the trial for as long as we can (at least for 6 months), and will continue to monitor the traps closely, as this informs our working model as we plan to extend this work across the remaining 10,000 ha in the Predator Free Halo.

PREDATOR FREE (continued)

What does a Predator Free Apprentice do?

Taking up the opportunity for on-the-job training and working outdoors, Kim Miller joins our team as a Predator Free Apprentice. There are 42 apprentices, part-funded by Predator Free NZ Trust, to meet the needs of community, commercial and council projects around Aotearoa, by training a new generation of predator control experts.

During lockdown, Kim has been looking at our predator catch data. He's assessing 'catch per unit effort' to see how catch numbers relate to a constant trapping pressure. This is important information for us. For example, if we are catching more predators over time, putting in the same amount of trapping effort, we'll know that predator numbers/densities are high (not yet being suppressed). But if results show a decrease in catch over time and under sustained (or increased) effort, they indicate a reduction in the predator population.

He's also been looking into the best way to monitor possums and how to eventually prove absence in areas where possums look to have been reduced to zero density.

He recently completed a predator trapping methods course at NMIT (Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology), and is gaining experience with other predator control projects. Including with City Sanctuary, where he is door-knocking and installing rat traps around student flats; Mammalian Corrections Unit, servicing the trap network running through Dunedin's Town Belt; and, Orokonui Ecosanctuary, servicing the bait station network within the fence.

"The things I like most about my role are how hands-on it is, the places I get to go, and the connections I'm making in the predator free sphere. I get to walk all over our beautiful places on a day-to-day basis, sun or snow, and that's right up my alley. Every trap placed and every pest removed feels like a pat on the back!"

Kim Miller setting a stoat trap on Swampy Summit

Predator Free community partnerships

Otago Tramping and Mountaineering Club check stoat traps

View from Mihiwaka – great habitat for native wildlife spreading out from Orokonui Ecosanctuary, and central to the Predator Free Halo

Looking to help out while fitness training, we were stoked to sign up members of the Otago Tramping and Mountaineering Club to check our network of stoat traps across Mihiwaka.

Traps require monthly checking, rebaiting and resetting, plus trap catch must be uploaded to the TrapNZ database. Fortnightly checks are needed over Summer.

Matthew's Track Group join 'backyard' trappers

A group of Sawyers Bay residents have been restoring native habitat by planting trees between Cedar Creek and Borlases Rd, with the help of volunteers and Sawyers Bay School. Keen to control predators in the area, the group contacted us for traps. After one training session, they are trapping and recording catches from their three Trapinator possum traps and two stoat traps.

SOURCE TO SEA

To our newest readers - Haere mai, welcome!

Last year the Halo Project secured funding to help landowners fence and plant waterways, wetlands and forest habitat in areas north of Ōtepoti Dunedin to Waihemo Shag River.

Our Source to Sea project uses this 'Jobs For Nature' funding to improve the quality of waterways and provide training and employment opportunities for locals, for three years.

Jennifer Lawn manages the project, with Jeanne Hutchison supervising six field team rangers. Upskilling team members is an integral part of the project and the team have undertaken training in Outdoor First Aid, Growsafe, Te Whare Tapa Wha, chainsaw, plant identification, seed collecting, and more.

Habitat restoration is underway at thirteen sites within our priority areas. It's fantastic to see all the native plants with cardboard guards popping up in special places around the area. Our focus is finishing the planting before dry weather sets in. Then, the team will shift to the all-important plant maintenance to ensure high plant survival.

Source to Sea team from left to right: Jordyn, Keenan, Andrew, Rangi and Yelah. Our work under Level 3 requires landowner permission and hygiene and distancing protocols in place

Inset: Source to Sea team in action with our newest ranger, Andrew, in front

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Tauraka a waka Merton Tidal Arm

Fencing and this season's planting is almost complete around Tauraka a waka Merton Tidal Arm. It's a large 'regionally significant wetland' in the upper reaches of the Waikouaiti-Karitāne estuary, with multiple landowners with small farms backing on to it.

This is an important site historically for mana whenua as a mahinga kai, having been a rich resource in tuna (eels), black flounder, giant kōkopu and waterfowl, and valued as a spawning ground for whitebait (galaxids).

Kāti Huirapa ki Puketeraki, landowners and local community groups, including Karitāne School and Waikouaiti River Estuary Care Group, have been planting around the estuary and Waikouaiti River margins for more than 10 years. Plantings have major benefits to downstream water quality and restoration of habitat for fish spawning, shellfish and birdlife.

There will be over 16,000 native trees, shrubs, rushes, sedges and grasses around the saltmarsh by the time we're finished this year, with more to add next year, including some threatened species to increase biodiversity and natural values.

The following photos were taken by Source to Sea's Jordyn Ashcroft.

Yelah planting at Tauraka a waka Merton Tidal Arm

This banded dotterel was one of a group of 20 feeding in the saltmarsh amongst ureure glasswort. Piopio or pohowera (banded dotterel) are endemic and threatened due to habitat loss and predation.

Jordyn says, "We were planting trees at a fantastic site full of birdlife, and between the chorus of birdsong I heard the faintest rifleman squeaks coming from a patch of kānuka". For more about Jordyn's photos see page 5.

SOURCE TO SEA (continued)

Jordyn Ashcroft - Our nature photographer

I've been interested in photography since I was a teenager armed with a budget phone camera. A year ago, I took the plunge and invested in my first telephoto lens to focus on wildlife photography, which is what I enjoy the most.

I am in love with our country's wildlife, particularly our native birds. But only since I started actively going out to photograph birds have I come to realise just how rare some of them are. This is what is driving me to pursue a career in conservation.

I share my photos on Flickr and Facebook. It's just a hobby for me, and I'm pleased to be able to share them with whoever wants to use them - especially for conservation purposes.

Tips for getting a good photo

For wildlife photography I use a *Canon 5D Mark IV* with a 150-600mm telephoto lens. As a back-up, I also have a *Canon 70D* and 24-300mm lens, which is smaller and much lighter so is good for taking on longer tramps.

Phone cameras are getting increasingly advanced and are capable of taking stunning photos, however, for wildlife photography I think a DSLR camera and a 400mm lens (minimum) will always be a necessity. There is a great range of gear available on the market to suit all budgets. I'm also not put off by second-hand gear – both my back up camera and lens were bought second-hand, and they work great.

Birds can be hard to capture on camera because they are small, fast-moving, inconspicuous, and are often found in the bush where light is very limited. Not to mention a lot of our native birds are not easy to come by, so you don't often get many chances! It can be a challenge, and requires a lot of patience, but that is what makes getting a great photo so rewarding.

Other than patience, my main tip for birds is that the closer you can get to your subject the better. Wearing dark or camo clothing, gloves, hoods or hats all help. Plus, help the birds come to you by using a squeaker or bird call - these work great for small birds like tomtits, riroriro (grey warbler), brown creeper and rifleman.

Brown Creeper: During a busy day planting, I decided to play Brown Creeper recordings from my phone to try and draw out a flock I could hear chattering away in a nearby kānuka. To our surprise, a pair instantly hopped down into a bare hawthorn beside us. These inconspicuous birds are notoriously difficult to photograph, so I'm always happy when I manage to get one.

Tomtit: This nosey male tomtit and his female companion were regular visitors as the team worked planting trees at a site in Evansdale.

Saturday public planting days

The field team have enjoyed moving from training to site preparation and on to planting–but it is hard work! They've been grateful for the help of volunteers at our planting days.

Unfortunately, lockdown came at a critical time when we had three public days planned. We're hoping we can make up for those lost days with a new series of Saturday planting days, which we can run under Alert Levels 1 & 2.

Next planting days:
Saturday 30 October and 6 November.

Follow us on www.facebook.com/halobeyondorokonui/ for more event info.

Friends & whānau volunteering at Whareakeake on a public planting day

Love planting trees? Volunteer with us!

We would love some volunteer help planting trees - we have so many to get in the ground!

This suits fit and keen people able to volunteer semi-regularly (one day per week or fortnight).

Weekdays (Tuesday to Friday) between 8.15am & 4.30pm.

We meet at the Source to Sea depot at 29 Station Rd, Sawyers Bay at 8.15 or on site (it could be anywhere between Dunedin and Matakaea Shag Point, and it's bound to be beautiful).

Please contact our Field Team Supervisor, Jeanne, on 022 095 0772.

Source to Sea community partnerships

The team at Milton Corrections Facility are growing 4,000 harakeke and tī kōuka (flax and cabbage trees) for us - Kia ora!

Native plants growing at Milton Corrections Facility, photo supplied

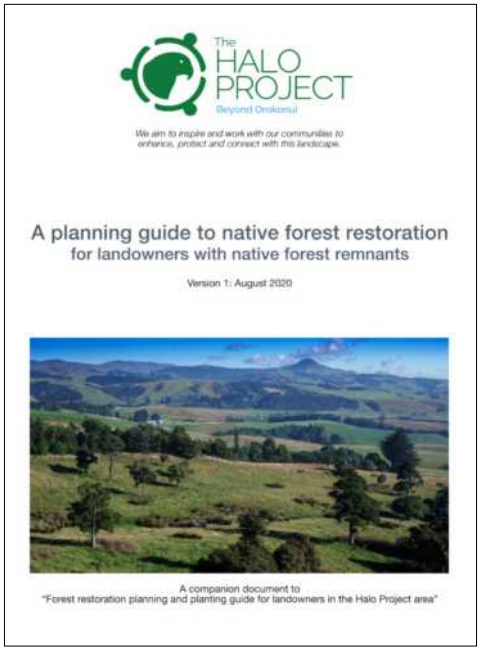
PUBLICATIONS

The Halo Project's forest restoration planning and planting guides are designed specifically for landowners and farmers in eastern Otago.

They are available in hardcopy for $15 (including P&P) for the pair.

Or they are free to download from www.haloproject.org.nz/resources.

Email info@haloproject.org.nz or phone 027 694 5064 to order yours.



CONTACT THE RIGHT PERSON

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Some of the Halo Project team: From left: Liz (Comms), Jeanne (Source to Sea Field Supervisor), Conor (Predator Free Project Coordinator), Jonah (Predator Free Project Manager), Sophie (Predator Free Project Coordinator), Rhys (The Halo Project Director) and Jennifer (Source to Sea Project Manager).

Correction: Autumn 2021 edition - DASHBOARD catches were reported for 'previous 12 months', instead of 'calendar year to date'.

THANK YOU

The Halo Project wishes to thank all our volunteers, supporters and funders for their ongoing support.

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