

PossumPRESS

Possum Control Areas Newsletter

August 2017

The PCA programme has reached a major milestone, with more than 300,000 hectares now part of the programme in Southland.

It's an exciting time, with an impressive 45 PCAs established across 302,003 hectares. This success comes down to landowners following up once a PCA has been established or using contractors to continue possum control work. Employing professionals sees improved results in control, and more efficient use of time. Many are also moving towards multi-species pest control, such as stoats, ferrets and feral cats. The PCA team can help develop control plans for these species and source effective traps for use.

The team continues to transition areas no longer under the OSPRI TBfree programme to new PCAs, providing advice and assistance to landowners to ensure low possum numbers are maintained.

Possum gossip

During winter, possums are looking to target valuable crops and grass. From August to September, they're hunting budding spring growth, particularly shoots on poplars and willows; so keep waterways on your property in mind for control. You'll also find them eating new catkin seeds on pine trees in windbreaks. They love them so much they eat enough to turn their poo yellow! These areas are ideal to target using bait stations, traps or night shooting. Contact the PCA team if you need advice or assistance for control on your property.



▲ Crop damaged by possum browsing.

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Possum Control Areas

**302,003 ha in
45 PCAs
throughout Southland**

Visit our website to see the latest PCA map on our BEACON mapping service



Possum control and biodiversity; how are they related?

Controlling possums is essential for protecting New Zealand's native biodiversity, which is the variety of living things in an area, from insects to birds to plants and fungi. Did you know farming environments can directly benefit from biodiversity too?

"An environment rich in different species is a healthy one," says Environment Southland biodiversity programme team leader Ali Meade.

"In a farming environment, it can provide helpful ecosystem services. Possums love wetland plants, which filter excess nutrients from run-off. Windbreaks or bush blocks provide habitat and shelter for native species and stock, but also opportunity for possums."

Senior biosecurity officer Dave Burgess says traditionally on-farm control has focused on preventing Bovine TB, but landowners were also noticing the ecological benefits.



▲ Tui.

"Biodiversity isn't as in-your-face as the financial implications of TB for landowners, but anecdotally we are

hearing of more birdlife on properties because of control."

Summer monitoring results

Understanding possum populations helps the PCA team and farmers understand where control is most effective. Summer is an ideal time for monitoring, so biosecurity summer student Rachel Batley was tasked with collecting wax tags from 80 monitoring lines on properties across various PCAs in Southland.

Each line contained 10 wax tags spaced 20 metres apart which were left out for a week before being retrieved. Possums bite the wax block leaving a telltale bite mark, which provides an indication of numbers and locations.

Senior biosecurity officer Dave Burgess says monitoring results for the period were favourable, although 20 lines had higher numbers than expected.

"Where higher numbers were recorded we will work with landowners and discuss alternative or additional control methods. Ultimately, possum control is the landowner's responsibility, but we can provide traps, bait and advice to set them in the right direction."



▲ Summer student Rachel Batley collects a wax tag.

Toxin use reminders

Ensuring safe toxin use is essential.

- ▶ By law a poison warning sign must be in place at normal points of public entry where bait stations are present.
- ▶ Poisons must be included as a farm hazard and in your health and safety plan.
- ▶ If moving stock to a new grazing area or felling trees, check for the coloured triangle marker which indicates a bait station, or give the PCA team a call.
- ▶ Remember that stock cannot have access to bait stations.

Possum control checks

With the success of establishing PCAs comes a shift in focus for the team at Environment Southland.

Senior biosecurity officer Dave Burgess says the initial goal is to get property owners started with advice and control methods to manage their possum populations, and then it's up to them to make sure numbers aren't increasing.

The team will now start to follow up on that with possum control checks, particularly for farmers doing their own control.

Q How many possums does it take to replace a lightbulb?

A None because they can see in the dark!

This will involve increasing field monitoring to ensure bait stations are set up correctly and not accessible to non-target species, as well as assisting farmers to keep up with maintenance of their bait stations.

"If you know anyone having issues with bait stations like missing lids, be sure to tell them to get in contact with us so we can fix them up or supply new ones," says Dave.

Properties undertaking alternative control methods like trapping or night shooting will also be visited, to ensure possum numbers are maintained to expected levels and not affecting neighboring properties.

"There's been a big decrease in possum numbers in the last few years and most farmers are of the attitude it's good practice to have an effective pest control plan."



▲ A bait station located in a tree to avoid stock interference.

PCA contractor profile – Toby Haliday

"Now don't tell anyone I said this but I reckon farmers are friendlier down here," says Toby Haliday.

He's the big boss at Best Pest Control Southland, the guy in the field, the guy answering the phone and the guy contracted by Environment Southland and farmers to help with pest control and setting up PCAs.

"I'm a bit of a one man band at the moment," he says. "I moved down from Napier for the scenery and the hunting, but one thing I like most is how community oriented everybody is."

The same goes for the farmers he's working with as a pest contractor, who wholeheartedly support the PCA programme.

"You can tell farmers realise the importance of pest control and that it takes everyone being involved to succeed."

The rapport between landowners and the PCA team was also a testament to the success of the program and their hard work. "It's quite personal the relationship they've built with farmers, and as a contractor it's great. Environment Southland coordinates everything and make sure it's ready to go."

Toby says into the future he's looking to expand his business, as well as increasing the types of pest control he can offer.



▲ Toby Haliday



The fight for Forest Hill

Forest Hill Scenic Reserve is one of the last surviving remnants of the forest which once covered the Southland Plains. Situated on a seven kilometre limestone outcrop, the reserve is home to a host of native species now rarely seen in the area.

It's also a new PCA, and a great example of multi-agency pest control.

Initiated in May 2016, Dave says the PCA maintained what the discontinued TBfree programme had achieved and supplemented pest control carried out by the Forest Hill Trust Foundation and Department of Conservation.

"They focus on pests in the reserve and we focus on working with landowners on surrounding properties on their possum control."

With Forest Hill being long, thin and surrounded by farmland, trust chair Glenys Dickson says pests invade all angles, highlighting the importance of a multi-agency approach for both farmers and the health of the forest.

"Most farmers have empathy for the biodiversity benefits of control because it's where they live and it protects their land too. The aim is to get pest numbers low enough to reintroduce native species and restore the reserve's unique ecology."

Ralph Hamilton is a farmer with a bordering property and vice chairman on the trust. He says the PCA supports both the reserve and surrounding farmers.

"It's a good concept because it has flow-on effects for them and the forest."

The PCA is coming up for its first round of possum control maintenance, meaning biosecurity officer Andrew Goodger will be coordinating with landowners to rebait stations and recommend contractors.

"Biodiversity is the biggest reason we do this, and it's great landowners are aware of the reserve and how being involved in the PCA would complement that work," Andrew says.

For Ralph, it's about the future.

"I do it for my kids and grandkids. It's about being community minded and doing our little bit."

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