

In sensitive areas, such as near houses or sheds, a safe option is the use of kill traps such as Possum Master and Timms. Baited with apples these can also be mounted up trees if required.



If you are not currently in a PCA and would like to know more about the benefits please visit our website [www.es.govt.nz](http://www.es.govt.nz) contact our Biosecurity officers either on 0800 76 88 45 or [service@es.govt.nz](mailto:service@es.govt.nz).

We thank all farmers already in a PCA for your support and especially welcome feedback on the PCA concept and control work to date. This can help with the direction of a PCA programme.

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# POSSUM PRESS

Possum Control Area Newsletter - February 2012 - Issue #2



**Possum numbers are quietly increasing in many parts of Southland and are a concern as they can severely impact on the environment by damaging flora and fauna. They pose an economic impact by reducing agricultural production by competing with livestock for food and they are also a known carrier of Bovine Tb disease.**

Environment Southland's PCA programme has been set up to assist landowners to maintain low possum populations throughout an area.

Fourteen PCAs covering about 75,000 ha have been successfully established with several more currently in the set up phase. This is thanks to the high level of acceptance and support from landowners and good initial possum control implemented. We're looking at setting up more PCAs adjoining these areas over the next few months.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Higher densities of possums are regularly found on farm shelter belts than in bush or forestry areas.
- Possums are born about three weeks after mating and crawl up to the marsupial pouch where they remain for at least 4 months before emerging to cling to the mothers back.
- The average weight of a possum is 2.5 kg, but Southland possums frequently weigh between 4 and 5 kg.
- Possums are unusually susceptible to TB and the disease progresses quickly to an infectious stage. Possums with advanced TB can have visibly swollen lymph nodes at the groin or armpits.
- There are currently approx 814,000 results on Google for 'possum recipes.'
- Possums are drawn to willow, pines and poplar trees in spring to eat the new buds.



It is important for landowners in these PCAs to ensure annual control is carried out to maintain what has been achieved. Environment Southland will continue to assist all landowners when each round of control is due in their PCA to discuss how they intend to carry out the maintenance control, ie do the control themselves or engage a contractor. ES will also supply agreed materials at a greatly reduced cost.



Currently the price of possum skins and fur is at a high. ES is utilising possum trappers in some PCAs to help knock down possum populations to low levels which can then be maintained by bait stations. Once possums are at a low level it becomes uneconomic for trappers, which is why methods such as bait stations are more effective and efficient. This ensures possums do not breed back up to levels again where economic and environmental damage and nuisance is occurring.

The set up and ongoing use of possum bait stations is one of the main control methods promoted for PCAs. Brodifacoum or Pindone cereal pellet bait are the most common baits used in these stations as they do not require a Controlled Substance Licence. Although effective toxins, they do have a couple of issues that need to be managed carefully. The first is that stock must not have access to the bait as it can remain in the liver for several months and could be detected at slaughter. For this reason many bait stations are positioned up trees or behind fences beyond the reach of non target species, particularly stock. If you have any concerns that stock have had or may have access to bait stations please contact our biosecurity staff.

Another requirement, as with all toxins, is that a poison warning sign must be put up at all normal access points to the property for health and safety reasons. These signs must remain in place for several months.



We are trialling a new possum kill trap (Goodnature), which is powered by a CO2 canister. It administers a powerful blast to the back of the possum's head when it tries to nibble on the lure block within the trap. The manufacturers claim that 10 -12 kills can be achieved from each canister. These traps can be viewed at [www.goodnature.co.nz](http://www.goodnature.co.nz).



An infra red trial camera is being used to help provide information on possum activity, particularly around bait stations and traps. It has helped our staff and landowners understand what possum densities are in certain areas of a PCA or individual property.

The camera was set up on a kale crop at Castlerock last winter where it recorded multiple possums feeding at one bait station, but not before they had munched their way through at least a day's worth of dairy support grazing, as can be clearly seen in the foreground of this photo.