

# POSSUM PRESS

Possum Control Area Newsletter – July 2015

## What's new?

A total of 34 Possum Control Areas (PCAs) now operate over approximately 221,000 hectares in Southland, making good progress on reducing possum numbers across the province.

This year saw a further two PCAs set up and the initial possum control completed. These PCAs now have established bait stations, which will be baited annually to ensure possum numbers are kept low.

Mataura Island was one of the new areas established and over 3,000 possums were removed as part of the initial control. Post control monitoring of the work in this PCA showed several areas still holding possums and these had further control carried out in them.

An additional two new PCAs have just been confirmed and are scheduled to have their initial control carried out over winter. Landowners will take responsibility for maintaining the areas from next year.

### Have you moved?

If you have changed properties this year, please let our PCA team know so we can update our records.

**See page 2 for  
further details**

Environment Southland senior biosecurity officer Dave Burgess examines a wax tag for bite marks as part of a possum monitoring project.



**PossumControlAreas**

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Visit our website  
and click on



to see the latest  
PCA location map

**221,000 ha**  
in **34 PCAs**  
throughout  
Southland



**environment  
SOUTHLAND**

*Te Taiao Tonga*



# Monitoring

As the PCA programme grows, so too does the need to ensure landowners are maintaining the low possum populations, so monitoring is as important as the actual control work.

Monitoring is usually carried out using either lines of leg hold traps or wax tags laid out in randomly selected spots through a PCA area. Results will help indicate the level of possums and possibly highlight areas that require extra attention or where the frequency of control may be stretched out.

## When pests bite!

Possums around Southland are biting into wax tags to provide Environment Southland biosecurity staff with information on their numbers. The wax tag monitoring programme has recently been introduced in blocks that are already part of a PCA and the data collected helps show how possum numbers are responding to the programme.

Senior biosecurity officer Dave Burgess says the wax tags are nailed 30cm above the ground to a tree or post and marked with a luminescent strip and a visual blaze of flour rubbed on the tree. Lines of 20 tags, each tag 10 metres apart, are laid throughout the targeted monitoring area. The location and number of each tag is documented and they are left out for seven nights.

Once collected, the fun really starts, with biosecurity staff needing to analyse the bite marks left on the tags and use the Bite Mark Index (BMI) to determine relative possum abundance.

Dave says establishing whether bite marks are from possums or other pests has taken some training for staff, who hope to utilise the tool throughout the region as part of their ongoing monitoring programme. Further wax tag monitoring will be undertaken on several PCAs each year.

Recent monitoring on three PCAs provided excellent results, indicating possums are being maintained well below the target level. The target Bite Mark Index (BMI) is less than 30%.

Castlerock - BMI 11%

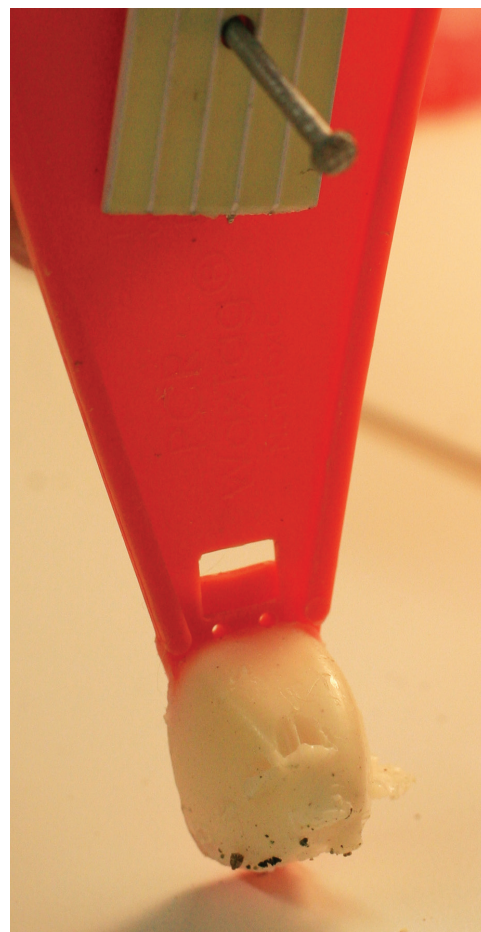
Ryal Bush - BMI 6%

Wendonside - BMI 4%

## TB AREAS

OSPRI manages the TBfree programme and undertakes TB vector control in areas considered a TB risk. Once the risk of TB is eradicated from an area possum control is no longer carried out. This means that if no formal possum control programme is in place possums will inevitably increase. Environment Southland staff work closely with TBfree New Zealand to review their programmes and ensure there is opportunity to transition areas from TB control to the PCA programme before possum densities can increase.

There are good reasons for continuing possum control and the PCA programme is an effective option for farmers to keep possum densities low, ensuring that economic and environmental impacts are minimal.



Possum bite marks are obvious in this wax tag.



# PCA Champion

## Sue Miller

When Otama farmer Sue Miller realised possums were demolishing her vege patch and roses, she decided it was time something was done.

Not one to sit back and wait, Sue took matters into her own hands, contacting the biosecurity team at Environment Southland to inquire about getting a PCA set up in her area.

Setting up a PCA can take quite some time for staff, who need to visit and discuss the concept with individual farmers in an area, but Sue took some of this on her own shoulders.

Biosecurity officer Alfredo Paz says having a local on board during the initial phase is invaluable in promoting the PCA and encouraging others to get on board.

Sue knew the farmers in her area well, many of whom were sheep farmers who had previously had little or no involvement with Environment Southland.

She was able to get out and talk to them about the idea of setting up a PCA and provide factsheets on the programme.

"If you want something you need to go get it and the local knowledge meant I know who owns what properties," Sue says.

"Just talking to people prompted awareness of the possums and the damage they were doing, many people hadn't noticed until they started looking."

Sue knew that having the whole area involved would bring the most benefits for all and individuals in the area have been noticing big improvements since the initial possum control was carried out.



Sue Miller

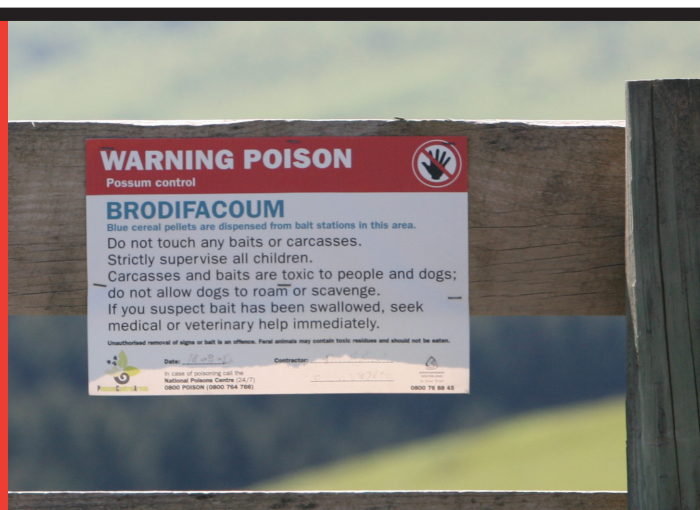
With the population reduced by 615 possums through the initial phase, Sue is once again eating vegetables from her garden and enjoying her rose bushes, which hadn't had the opportunity to flower for years.

Alfredo says the support of Sue in doing some of the groundwork with local landowners has been fantastic and anybody keen to find out about setting up a PCA in their area should contact Environment Southland.

## POISON SIGNS

Legislation, particularly around health and safety, requires that where possum toxins are used, a poison warning sign must be put up at normal points of entry to a property. Environment Southland supplies these signs to its contractors and landowners. Some signs must remain in place if bait is left in a bait station and it is unlawful for these to be removed.

If you have concerns about the placement of poison signage, please contact one of Environment Southland's PCA team.



# PCA Contractor Profile

## Chris Freer, a lifetime of managing possums

The sight of Chris Freer should be enough to send possums scampering, after all he's killed off more possums than he cares to remember. Chris is one of several contractors working for Environment Southland and local farmers as part of the PCA programme. With nearly half a century involved in possum trapping, he can tell you a thing or two about this pest and can now revisit areas he has previously controlled and see the benefits the programme is making, including regeneration of native habitat and an increase in birdlife.

Operating **Blue Mountain Pest Control**, Chris and his team enjoy the challenge of working for the PCA programme, carrying out the initial control work (which can mean removing thousands of possums) and then ongoing maintenance to ensure they don't make their way back.

Chris started trapping possums when he was just 17 and over the years has worked in a number of areas, carrying out possum surveys and trapping programmes, with his most recent work for the Animal Health Board and then Environment Southland.

He aims to utilise the possum fur and skins and ensures his control targets all possum habitat in a PCA to maximise his kill tally.

Chris predominantly relies on bait stations that he pre-feeds with special non-toxic pellet bait prior to using cyanide based poison. He also

follows up with other control options where required, such as leg hold traps and cage traps around sensitive areas such as houses.

Once Chris and his team have completed the initial possum control for Environment Southland he routinely contracts to many of the farmers to carry out the annual possum maintenance for them. Chris looks at whether the bait stations are still in the best location, if any need replaced and cleans them out before adding new bait and a blaze of flour to help attract possums to the station quickly.



The Blue Mountain Pest Control team, from left Chris Freer, Justin Scott, Wayne Scott, Darren Hewlett and Tony Crosbie.



## Environment Southland PCA Team



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