

Otatara
Landcare Group

PIGEON POST

*Newsletter of the
Otatara Landcare Group*

Issue 75 Winter 2026

In This Issue

The 'Living Legends'	2
School's 'fungal foray'	4
Nursery news	7
The kakariki chick rescue	8
Getting ready for Spring	10
A Bushy Point story	12
When the rats almost won	15
Caring for your cat	16
Bat sighting in Otatara	18

The full colour version of this publication is available on www.otataralandcare.org.nz under 'publications'.



Seen or heard this shy native bird at Bushy Point?

Fern birds are among the many native birds found at Bushy Point. Fern birds are small, long-tailed songbirds that are predominantly streaked brown above and pale below.

They can be seen - or heard - in the rushes and low bushes and scrub around the margins of the Bushy Point area, on the estuary side. Their call is described as a characteristic 'u-tick' given as a duet by members of a pair.

THE 'LIVING LEGENDS' STORY



By Chris Rance and Barry Smith

If you've been around the Bushy Point Walkway you might have seen a 'Living Legends' sign along the way. The Living Legends project at Bushy Point was part of a nationwide project in association with the Rugby World Cup in 2011.

Brainchild of Stephen Tindall, of Warehouse fame, he funded a native planting project in every region of New Zealand. Not only did they finance the purchase of 10,000 native plants per region but also three years of plant maintenance (spray releasing) after planting.

Each region had a project nominated by DOC and in Southland that project was Bushy Point. The Otatara Landcare Group was a willing participant, having already planted for the previous 10 years, though at a lesser extent, and it saw the

Bushy Point project grow exponentially over those three years.

The second component of Living Legends was the support of the project by a living All Black rugby player in each region. Our Southland Living Legend was Kevin Laidlaw, who became an All Black half-back, playing all 17 of his games, including three tests and scoring 21 points in the 1960 tour of South Africa.

Kevin was from Nightcaps, the only All Black from the area, so imagine the thrill of having a top-ranked national rugby player from that tiny community.

The first Living Legends planting at Bushy Point was in 2011 and it was a very big deal for us – 5000 native plants to be grown locally and

The first 'Living Legends' planting in September 2001. Back Row, from left: Barry Smith, Trevor Huggins, Stephen Elford, Kevin Laidlaw (Our Living Legend), Ray Jackson, Linda Jackson, Ruud Kleinpaste, Juanita Tressida, Stan Somerville, Brian Rance, Russell Evans. Middle Row, from left: Graeme Miller, Pat Hoffman, Gordon Hosking, Robyn Smith, Jan Oster, Mark Oster, Maggie Elford, Chris Rance, Randall Milne, Edith Jones (and Ellie the dog), May Evans. Front Row, from left: Colin Bishop, Cathy McFie, Colin Pemberton.





planted all in one morning! Linda and Ray Jackson took on the growing at the Southland Community Nursery and a separate 'Nursery area' was created.

The first Living Legends planting of the 5000 plants was in September 2011. It was a big event! Planned from Wellington, it was hosted by TV personality Ruud Kleinpaste and local dignitaries like mayor Tim Shadbolt and Kaumatua Michael Skerrett along with the DOC hierarchy and about 250 people.

It brings back fond memories that the central 'booking system' planned from Wellington had 120 people booked for Auckland and only half turned up whereas in Southland virtually no-one booked and 250 odd people turned up – that's Southland for you!

A highland piper (Barry Smith's daughter Fiona) piped the crowd onto the site and the plants were planted in double quick time! We were a bit worried by the size of the task and not knowing how many would turn up, so OLG volunteers pre-dug planting holes with a post hole digger!

A BBQ was held thanks to the local Lions Club and speeches were held in a marquee. The large area which had looked like a desert just hours before was transformed into an area with 5000 native plants and combi-guards.

This first year's event was followed by two further years with 3000 and 2000 plants and following on from Living Legends, the OLG has since then planted around 1000 plants a year.

The grand total planted at the 25 year mark, 2025, was 37,586 plants. The OLG volunteers and helpers continue to plant and maintain plants at Bushy Point albeit at a reduced rate and the whole project has seen rough grazing pad-



docks transformed into a successful native forest area with walkways, tracks, interpretation signs, picnic areas, a pond, viewpoints and seating.

Sadly, our greatest supporter Kevin Laidlaw, All Black No. 611, died on the 30th of July 2024. Kevin was the last Living Legend of the 17 to still be involved in the project until his health deteriorated. The families have continued to be involved in the project from time to time. Ceremonial Totara Trees have been planted to commemorate the passing of both Maymie and Kevin.

FUNGI FORAY ADVENTURE



Otatara School's adventure with Lloyd

Matai class along with several other junior classes at Otatara School recently headed off to Queen's Park for a 'Fungi Foray' with naturalist and educator Lloyd Esler, to discover fungi growing there and to learn more about the fascinating world of fungi in all their varied forms, shapes and colours.

The children returned with new interest in and excitement about the fungi kingdom which includes organisms such as yeasts, moulds, mushrooms, rusts, and mildews. Matai room was quickly turned into a fungi forest, with various species collected and displayed, including a huge bracket fungus, soon, appropriately, to be displayed on a wall bracket!

Class teacher Megan Duyvesteyn said the children had learned so much about fungi, and were continuing to learn about bracket fungi in particular.

Blake's report on the Fungi Foray

Some classes at Otatara School went to Queens Park on the bus for a Fungi Foray. First we had lunch under an Autumn tree and met Mr Esler. Mr Esler said if you catch a leaf you will be warm all winter! Mr Esler then showed us some fungi and we started the Fungi Foray. Mr Esler spotted a fungus called Smoker's Lung. He said it got its name because it looks like someone's lung who had smoked. It was slimy and black and put me off smoking!

Then Mr Esler spotted a Fly Agaric and Mr Esler said if you put this fungi in a glass of water it will attract flies and they will die. The fungi was red with white spots. Then we carried on the Fungi Foray, we walked for a very long time. We found a very big tree stump and heaps of people went on the stump and after this Miss D found a very big bracket fungus. If a bracket fungus is on a

tree it means the tree is dying.

After that we went to the war memorial and we listened to a song and looked for our last names on the memorial. After we did that we went back to the bus and we went back to school. My legs were very tired.

The class report on the giant puffball fungus

Miss D heard about giant puff ball fungus growing on Southland farms so she asked around to see if anyone had one we could look at.

Debbie from Fonterra messaged Miss D because she had a giant puff ball fungi she could deliver to us in Matai. It was very exciting be-

Below, Lloyd Esler and Matai class on their Fungi Foray into Queens Park.



Fungi Foray discoveries *Continued*



cause we had been reading about the Giant Puff Ball fungi. Did you know they are edible? Debbie brought in the Giant Puff Ball and we all had a hold of it.

Some of the children commented it felt like “a cloud, it looked like a steam bun, it was heavy, it looked and felt like a pillow”. Mrs Mac was in our class so she went and got some scales and we weighed it. It was 700 grams - a lot heavier than we had thought.

Miss D brought a knife to school so we cut it in half and looked at the insides.

We won't eat the Giant Puff Ball!

*Right, weighing the giant puff ball.
Below, Matai class in front of the impressive display the children and 'Miss D' created on their Fungi Foray.*



WHERE WOULD YOU SIT?



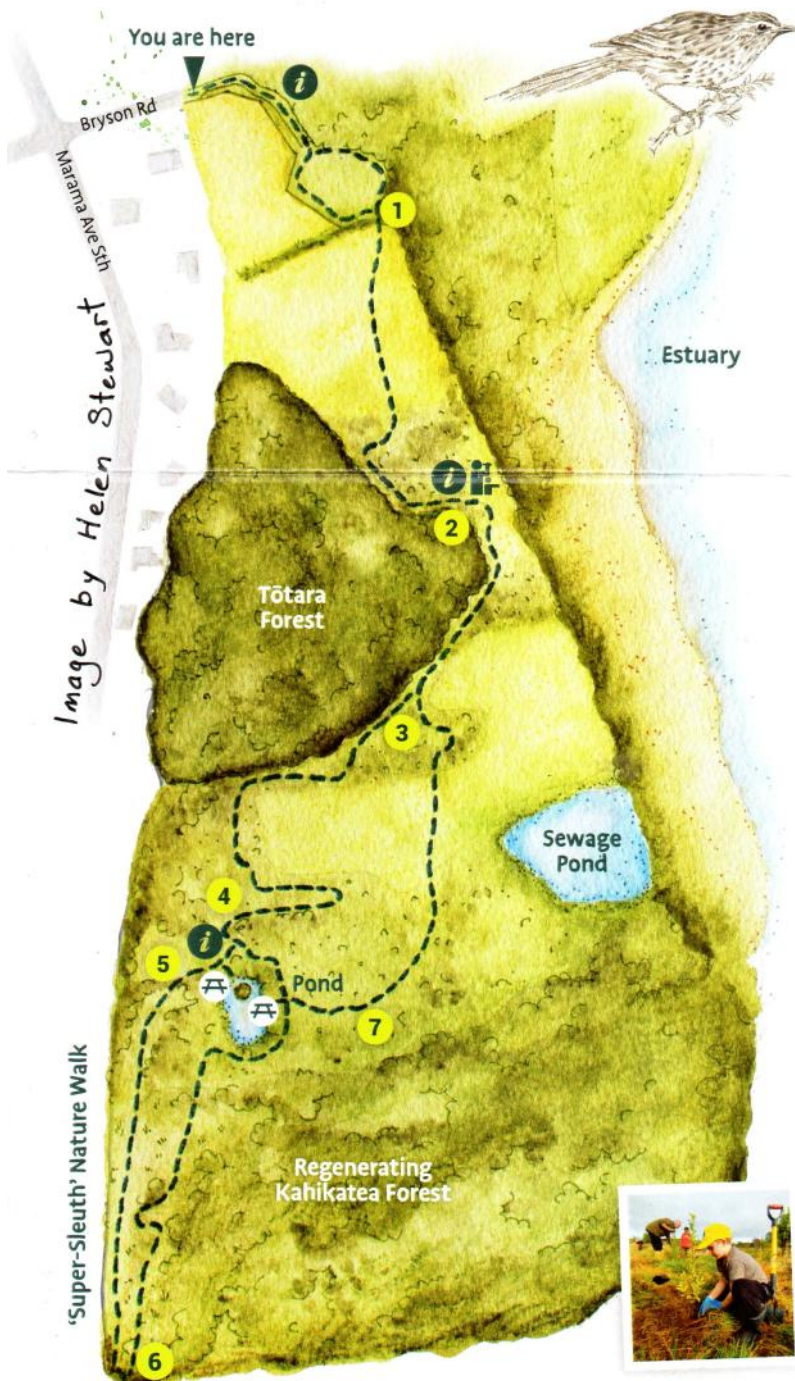
By Linda

Enjoy the View

I like walking. I like sitting. Combine the two & I'm a happy explorer. Bushy Pt is a place to be proud of, once mostly grassy paddocks, now a community asset with thousands of native plants, abundant birdlife & easy walking tracks.

I live close by & enjoyed a picnic with friends & volunteers on tables near the pond, using seats generously donated by locals.

Now I'm thinking of other seats in other places, hoping our community could help make them happen too. Where is your favourite place or lookout in Bushy Pt?
April '26 L



HERE FOR YOU



News from the Southland Community Nursery

Amazingly, the Community Nursery continues to grow its volunteer base every year. Each Friday around 10-20 volunteers arrive ready to do whatever is most pressing in the Nursery. April/May was the main time for cleaning seeds.

We are also still collecting seeds – manuka, Pittosporum, cabbage tree, and its quite a time-consuming procedure to clean and process all the seeds ready for sowing in June. If you want a refresher on what to do, come along on a Friday and find out – or go to:

www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/restoring-your-patch/get-growing/seeds/

We have also been developing new plant labels for the Nursery to better inform people about the plants – the factsheets can be downloaded at:

www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/restoring-your-patch/know-your-patch/forests/forest-planting-list/

If you have just moved to Otatara or moved to a new property and want advice or native plants, please email us at:

rances@southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz
or call or text Chris on 021660361.

We have also had a bumper apple crop on our property this year and we had a community apple pressing event for making juice in May. To check all the goings on at the Nursery see:

www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/news-and-events/

You might be surprised!

Chris and Brian Rance





A kakariki chick that flew

One day Bush Haven answered a call from a DOC ranger that a wee red-crowned kakariki chick had been found on a track on Stewart island.

They searched but could not find a nest or any signs of parents. I rang the ranger and instructed him on how to give home-made electrolytes as the bird was showing signs of dehydration, and then the chick was put on a Stewart Island Flights to Invercargill and brought to me to raise.

A hands-off approach was taken. I was determined this little one was going to be returned to where he was found and needed to be human averse as much as possible.

A substitute nest mate was given in the form of a small stuffed toy (actually a kakapo but the best I could find) that was kept with him at all times and used at feeding times with the spoon beside the beak of the toy. He thrived and eventually was transferred into an aviary to learn to

fly and feed himself. Native trees and leaf matter from native bush in Otatara was put in the aviary and native berries, insects and seed heads were sourced daily as he was weaned off a captive diet.

I had named him nicknamed Stewie while he was with me and nine weeks after he was sent to Invercargill, he returned to Stewart island with

Below left, Stewie upon his arrival at Bush Haven. Below, ready for release after just nine weeks!





Stewart Island Flights in the care of the ranger who had found him.

He was released near where he was found in the hope his flock would find him. Stewie is back where he belongs.

From two hourly feeds to self-sufficient in just over two months. A fabulous result! Fly free Stewie. It was a privilege to raise you.

*Cheryl Johnston-Thomas
Bush Haven*

Contact details for Bush Haven Native Bird Rehabilitation Trust

For kereru, bellbirds, wax eyes, tui, fantails, kaka, kakariki, kingfishers, moreporks and owls, phone 022 509 6712

For harriers, falcons and sea birds, phone the Department of Conservation on 0800 362 468.

A rehab collaboration teaching a kereru 'how to kereru'

Here's another good news story about a recovered chick on its way to release...

Nik Hurring from Project Kereru in Dunedin writes: This little kid, Keith, is a rehab collaboration between myself and Bush Haven in Invercargill.

He came into care at the end of March after his nest was accidentally destroyed (the tree it was in was cut down). The team at Bush Haven were in the situation where this little kid was

the only kereru in their care at the time. On one hand - a good thing - but for this wee one, not so much. Being in an aviary on his own and being so young put him at risk of imprinting on humans. Having no natural fear of people puts him at even more risk when released.

I had four in temporary residence and at least one (the little kid who fell from his nest at the Botanical Gardens) will be over-wintering until it's old enough to be released when there is more food around.

By temporarily transferring the little guy up from Invercargill it means he not only has company of his own kind, but he will learn how to eat trees, fly and have very little human interactions (only when I go in to feed once a day) as he grows over the next few weeks before he goes back down to freedom.

When we all work together we can have greater outcomes for our wildlife, and for me, this is what it's all about.

Right now, this little kid just needs to learn 'how to kereru'.

Left, Keith the kereru getting 'flight fit' for his release back in Otatara, where he was picked up after his nest was destroyed when a tree was felled.



READY FOR SPRING



100 trays of native seeds sown thanks to volunteers

Seed sowing is such a hopeful and positive activity to do.

Recently at the Community Nursery we sowed over 100 trays of different seeds, all in the promise of spring germination and producing the next lot of plants for people to put in the ground on their properties.

There were 50 large trays of the most common natives for restoration – kohuhu, tarata, mingimingi, cabbage tree, hebe, ribbonwood, broadleaf and wetland plants toe toe, red tussock, *Carex secta*, salt-marsh ribbonwood, to name but a few.

Then there are the ‘big trees’ – with future years in mind we sow kahikatea, pokaka, totara, rimu, maitai and miro seeds. They take longer to germinate and grow and then need to be planted into a sheltered nurturing environment.

And then there are the rarities – those threatened plants that will go into special places.

All the seed collecting, cleaning and preparation has taken from December to May and you need to be constantly on the lookout for seeds.

If you miss the collecting then you have missed another year of having that opportunity. But it is also important to know what you are collecting – otherwise you might end up growing something like *Coprosma robusta* (a weedy northern native) instead of *Coprosma lucida*, a local native.

Nursery seed sowing on a Friday went extremely well – like a well oiled machine with Linda and Chris at the helm and 20 willing helpers.

Continued on next page



Below, volunteers getting ready to sow more than 100 trays of seeds at the Southland Community Nursery centre in Grant Road.





All the sown trays of seedlings were then put under protective covers to make sure the neighbour's cats don't think they are litter trays (there's nothing worse!) and the mice and birds can't eat the seeds.

The seed trays sit out all winter getting rained on and their winter chilling (natural cold stratification), and can be relied upon to germinate in September when the whole nursery process starts again for a new season.

Come along on a Friday morning if you want to learn more.

Chris and Brian Rance

www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz



Look out for Old Man's Beard

Old Man's Beard is a clematis (called 'travellers joy' in the UK) and it has white flowers and is a smothering exotic plant. It is high on the Environment Southland eradication list for Southland. We are often asked to properties whose owners think their properties have Old Man's Beard (OMB).

Invariably the plant turns out to be the vine *Muehlenbeckia*. This time the owner definitely had a better idea than we did. It was definitely a Clematis which OMB is, but we were unsure if it was just an exotic clematis of which there are lots or Old Man's Beard. It only had leaves, no sign of flowers or seedheads. We took photos and a sample and took them to Environment Southland.

Walter and Rachel identified it as Old Man's Beard and offered to control it for the landowner, so a win-win all round. Apparently, the distinguishing feature of OMB is the five leaflets, other clematis usually have three leaflets. When it's flowering its easy to identify – (see photo) and it flowers much later in the season than the native clematis.

We are happy to come round and help identify any plants in your bush or If you have seen or suspect the presence of Old Man's Beard report the sighting to Environment Southland immediately and they will help eradicate it from your property.

Brian and Chris Rance

Below, seeds sown and ready for germination for a new planting season.



A HIDDEN TREASURE...



By Phil McCarthy

Part of me doesn't want to write about Bushy Point, because it feels like a hidden treasure.

But then I think, how incredible is it that we have this burgeoning native taonga on our doorstep, and I hope more and more people are discovering its magic.

Tens of thousands of native plants have been planted at the 14ha site by Ōtātara Landcare Group volunteers and others since the year 2000.

We've been wandering around there since we moved to Ōtātara in 2008, and it's incredible to see the changes in less than two decades. Areas that were grassland have transformed from newly planted, to established, and now maturing native bush.

One of the real treats is having a breather on the bench at Barry's Pond, which is a wonderful little oasis. The wetland features flax/harakeke, sedges and scattered shrubs, including thickets of coprosma to attract fernbird/mātā - and is attracting waterfowl, white-faced heron, black and little shag/kōau and kingfisher/kōtare.

The bench has a memorial plaque with a lovely inscription 'For Russell - who loved the

Birds' I didn't know Russell, but I love to think of him enjoying the same serenity this joyous little spot gives me.

The white trig structure on the hill marks one of Invercargill's high points, 20m above sea-level (near the other bench that overlooks the estuary with a great view across to the city).

The rolling hills are the remains of sand dunes, most of which were levelled around 1910, with sand removed as fill to create the embankment that once carried a tramway across the estuary from Stead Street to Ōtātara.

The estuary is fringed by salt marsh. Jointed wire rush/oio dominates the tidal zone then gives way to coastal scrub, including cabbage tree/ tī, mānuka and flax/harakeke. Listen for a short metallic 'tchick' which gives away the presence of rare fernbird/mātā.

There's something about the way the tracks have been laid out that seems to ensure you barely see anyone else. You know there's other

Looking out over the estuary from the bench near the trig point at Bushy Point, a lovely view.





people there but somehow your paths rarely cross. Of course, you're never really alone, with playful pīwakawaka flitting in and out of the bushes around you - and kāhu soaring in the skies overhead.

Tōtara forest on sand dunes is a nationally significant ecosystem and we are lucky in Ōtātara to have some of the best remaining examples in New Zealand.

Kids love mucking around in the forest with all sorts of huts and bush swings built over the years. James (who is now 14) mentions finding a bunch of buried hammers there once (the mind boggles).

Bushy Point was a great place to haul in blackberries, a guaranteed way of getting the kids along for the ride. The blackberry plants are mostly gone now, which is for the best (and there's some great supplies elsewhere in Ōtātara/Sandy Point, but you'll have to find them yourselves).

And of course, no trip to Bushy Point is complete without a nod to the 'poo pond', that vital bit of infrastructure helping things flow out our way. The ducks certainly seem to like it. The



Tiger, the McCarthy family pet, admiring the serenity of Barry's Pond at Bushy Point.

winding network of tracks are slowly being surrounded by nature's revival and I'm beyond excited to see what Bushy Point will look like in another 20 years' time.

Find out more about Bushy Point here: <https://www.otataralandcare.org.nz/bushy-point-restoration/>



Healing creation at St Luke's

Members of the St Luke's Anglican church congregation in Black Road have been steadily working away in their bush for several years, removing invasive trees and plants and planting natives. Working bees are held regularly, on a third Saturday afternoon of the month, with afternoon tea provided as a reward!

From left, Dot Muir, Geoff Dembo and Penelope Gillette.



This is the time to ramp up your pest control

Rodents spoil food, spread disease and cause damage by fouling and gnawing. That's around the home and yard. In the bush and gardens, rats raid bird's nests and eat eggs and fledglings. They also eat a lot of seed that would otherwise be eaten by birds or germinate.

Rodents become more visible and annoying from late Autumn when they are out looking for food sources and warm homes to escape the cooler temperatures. Otatara Pestbusters are noticing increased rodent activity and demand for traps and poison.

Rodents are prolific breeders, which means your home and outbuildings, bush and garden could be overrun with rats and mice in the absence of any control.

Although not particularly hot, summer has been an ideal breeding season for rats and mice – all the more reason for undertaking some pest control now to keep a lid on them.

For successful rodent control, it is best practice to use a suitable bait station or trap.

A well designed bait station keeps the bait as dry and fresh as possible and attractive to the rodent.

Rats and mice prefer fresh, high quality foods and will reject spoiled or low palatability foods when given a choice, so bait selection for traps and bait stations is important.



Bait stations secure bait in place and prevent rodents from removing it elsewhere. They also prevent your pets from accessing the bait. Pet proof trap boxes complete with a trap are also available at super-cheap prices at the moment.

Otatara Pestbusters has bait stations and bait, and traps as well, for sale to Otatara residents at cheaper than wholesale rates (Baits only 60 cents each, bait stations \$5 and trap boxes with traps \$15.00 at the moment).

If you are not already actively undertaking rat control, join the 200 plus Otatara households that are already doing it to protect your home and our native birds. This collective effort has tremendous benefits to wildlife and can avoid costly damage to wiring and plumbing in particular.

Tips for successful eradication:

Don't handle bait with bare hands as rodents are suspicious of human scent and may avoid baits that have been touched;

Ensure rodents don't have access to alternative food such as stock or chook food, food scraps or garbage;

Maintain fresh baits in traps and bait stations – discard mouldy bait;

Be particularly vigilant during Autumn when the first cold and wet weather arrives as this tends to drive rodents indoors to find food and shelter.



Getting the rats under control with trapping



A while after we came to Otatara I saw a rat. It was big and I laid in wait to deal with it on its return journey. That was a futile waste of half a day. The rat had more clues than me.

That was the beginning of me sourcing different traps and devices that were guaranteed to work, many of which didn't achieve a lot. The year the rats got into our neighbour's barrel of dog biscuits we caught 17 of them in traps.

After trying many types of trap, we found some that worked and we backed this up with poison. The poison certainly worked but the bad smells that came from the occasional dead rat were less than welcome.

We had concerns about the amount of poison we were using and the effects it may have had on our dog, the owls, and other local fauna. We cut

back on the outside poison use, but the rat population persisted.

Dallas Bradley from Otatara Pestbusters helped us to source better traps. To keep any bad smells away from the house we got five traps and set them around our one acre section.

They are excellent traps and we caught many rats initially and then only mice. Since starting this trapping regime, we have caught 25 rats and 35 mice. Frightening isn't it!

If you want to make a real difference and protect our local environment, catch up with Dallas Bradley. He can get you sorted with the best and cheapest traps and poison, so we can get the job done. Happy trapping,

'Alligator'

A well-deserved national win for Cassie

Congratulations to Cassandra Horton, Invercargill City Council senior open spaces planner, who has been named Parks Leader of the Year, a national award.

The award was presented by Recreation Aotearoa, and recognises an individual who demonstrates exceptional leadership in the management, sustainability, and development of public parks.

Invercargill City Council Manager Parks and Recreation Caroline Rain said the win was a reflection of Cassandra's dedication to making Invercargill's public spaces some of the best in the country.

"When we're out visiting the open spaces in our city, we don't often think about all the work that goes into planning and creating them for the community," she said. "Our parks are shaped by deliberate effort and care. Cassie's



Cassie with her trophies.

efforts continue to play a key part in ensuring they are thoughtfully designed, inclusive spaces for everyone to enjoy now and in the future."

"We're really proud to have her on our team and to see her work recognised at the national level."

Representatives from the Otatara Landcare Group worked with Cassie in the preparation of the Sandy Point Domain Reserve Management Plan, and were impressed with how she juggled all the wishes, aspirations and needs of

the many stakeholders, groups and organisations who use the Sandy Point area and facilities as well as the changing trends in society around open spaces.

"It is so important to make sure that these plans are from and for the people who use our open spaces," said Cassie.

BETTER CAT CARE



And protecting our precious wildlife

We own a QEII covenanted property in Otatara. We actively trap for rats, stoats, and possums.

I have noticed an increasing number of wandering domestic cats around our property in Otatara. One friendly female cat frequented our property several times over the Christmas and New Year holidays and wanted to stay.

After neighbourly enquiries I found out that the cat's family had gone on holiday, leaving their cat to be fed by a friend. Luckily in this case I was able to contact the cat's feeder, who came to collect the cat.

Cats are effective hunters of our native fauna (tui, kereru, piwakawaka, skinks, etc). The cat owner's friend proudly stated that the cat was a 'great hunter'.

Our own cat, Chester, has been brought up as an indoor cat and goes for walks on his leash daily and has access to a secure 'catio' (our upstairs deck).

We work from home, so our cat has lots of company. The straying cat owner's friend thought this was a sad life for our cat. I am happy for anyone to come and visit our cat, who is happy as a clam with his life as his behaviour and the photo indicates!

I brought this situation up with the committee of the Otatara Landcare Group. We discussed this issue at length, and felt the way forward was to raise awareness of the issue and encourage responsible cat ownership and to show there are ways of having a happy indoor cat.

The issue of cats provokes strong emotions, but what is true is that New Zealand has a serious problem with feral cats, with a population of potentially more than a million, killing tens of thousands of birds a year in New Zealand, along with skinks and geckos. However, this need not be the case.

An article in the Southland Times (21 April 2026) quoted DOC as saying Rakiura/Stewart Island had a successful breeding season of the

critically endangered pukunui/southern New Zealand dotterel. It was the biggest population recovery in 35 years.

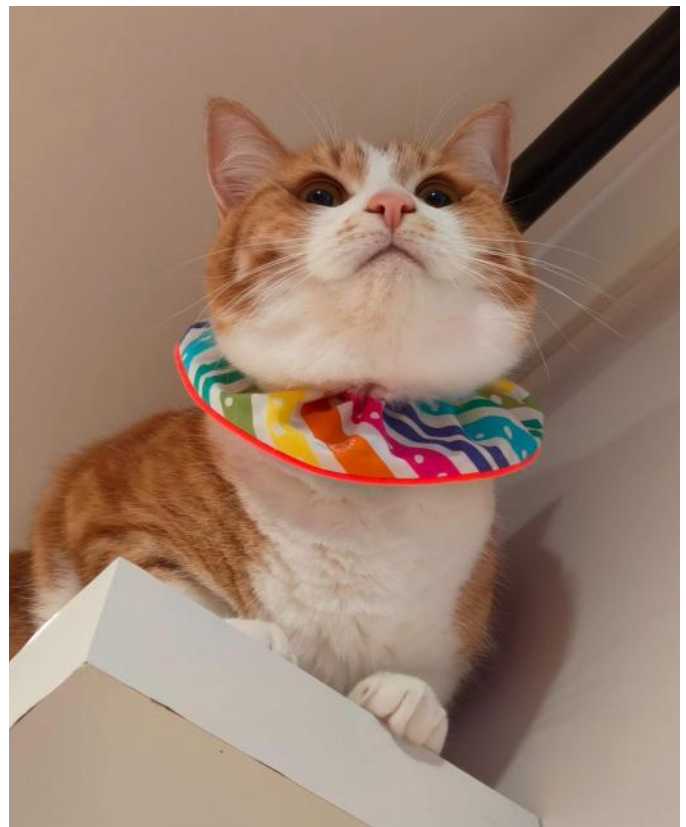
DOC Rakiura Operations Manager Jennifer Ross says the result is a major boost for conservation efforts and credited this to "significantly reduced feral cat numbers in key breeding areas". This is not confined to New Zealand – feral cats are a huge problem in Australia.

Australia's federal parliament released a report that confirmed that cats are the primary drivers of mammal extinctions in the country.

Speaking to my Australian conservation friends, the common belief is that if a cat 'steps off the deck' they are considered 'feral' and are swiftly dealt with. What we encourage for Otatara residents is responsible cat ownership. There

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An example of a brightly coloured cat collar that warns birds there is a predator on the prowl.





Chester the cat in his happy - and safe - place.

are feral cats on the loose in Otatarā too, often the progeny of cats cruelly dumped when unwanted. Domestic cats are also much-loved companions and bring joy and comfort to their owners. How then can domestic cats and our unique natural world coexist in Otatarā?

Here are some suggestions for what is called ‘responsible cat ownership’.

Microchip and de-sex your cats –de-sexing and microchipping can make a real difference animal welfare. By de-sexing your cat, you’re ensuring you don’t get any unwanted litters. Other benefits include reducing your cat’s likelihood to roam, meaning it will be safer and have an increased lifespan, and also reduce scent marking by males.

While it’s not mandatory everywhere in Aotearoa New Zealand to microchip your cat, this is also a good idea and acts as an added layer of protection should your cat go missing.

Fit your cat with a brightly coloured collar and bells – the more bells the better. It gives the birds early warning of a cat on the hunt. Bright, ‘scrunchie’ collars fitted with bells have been shown to reduce hunting, as the birds can see the

colours and hear the bells. Spotlight has some excellent fabrics for cat collars, and little bells can be purchased from pet supply stores, which also sell little collars. Patterns for ‘scrunchier’ and brighter fabric collars can be found online.

Many people keep their cats indoor at night– GPS tracking has shown how far a cat can range at night, much to the surprise and alarm of their owners, who had no idea

their loved cat had been out and about to such an extent, a risky activity.

Some people keep their cats indoors during the daytime, or in specially built appropriate enclosures or ‘catios’. This does prevent the heart-break when a cat out in the neighbourhood is struck by a vehicle, hurt in a fight with another cat, attacked by a dog or just vanishes.

SPCA New Zealand recommends keeping a new adult cat indoors for a minimum of three to four weeks (and kittens for six to eight weeks). This confinement period is crucial; it allows the cat to decompress, bond with you, and establish the house as their new safe territory before facing the outdoors.

And maybe consider not replacing your cat when it passes away.

Some helpful information is contained in this website, from which the information on de-sexing and microchipping was taken:

<https://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/know-yourtarget-predators/cat/>

CONFIRMED BAT SIGHTING



Security camera picks up passing pekapeka

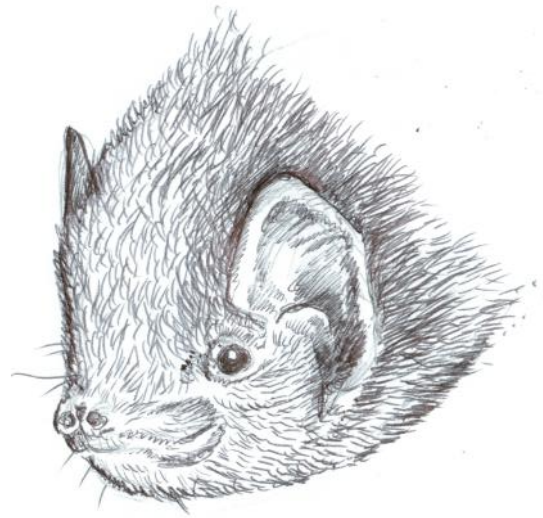
Over the last dozen years there have been occasional reported sightings of bats in Otatara. Now there is proof – a bat passing by was recently recorded in security camera footage at an Otatara property.

There are two bat species in Southland. Short-tailed bats live only in ‘old growth’ forest – native bush that has never been felled such as in Fiordland – so any bats in Otatara will be long-tailed ones (otherwise known as pekapeka).

Pekapeka are really small – their body is thumb-sized and they weigh only about 10g – but they have long wings stretching out to some 15cm either side. They fly at night, reaching speeds of up to 60km/hr, and feed on flying insects like small moths, midges, mosquitoes and beetles which they hunt using ultrasound echolocation (similar to sonar).

Spring and summer are breeding time. Pekapeka will have favourite roosting trees in a ‘home range’ of about 150 hectares and fly up to 40km round trip each night to feed. Known and likely breeding areas in Southland are Tuatapere/Rowallan, Pourakino, Waikaia and Blackmount/Jericho, so they are very unlikely to be seen around here at that time.

Less is known about what pekapeka do in the autumn and winter, but it’s thought that young bats travel around and so that’s the time of year when they may turn up here. They will be passing through, catching food as they go, so spotting

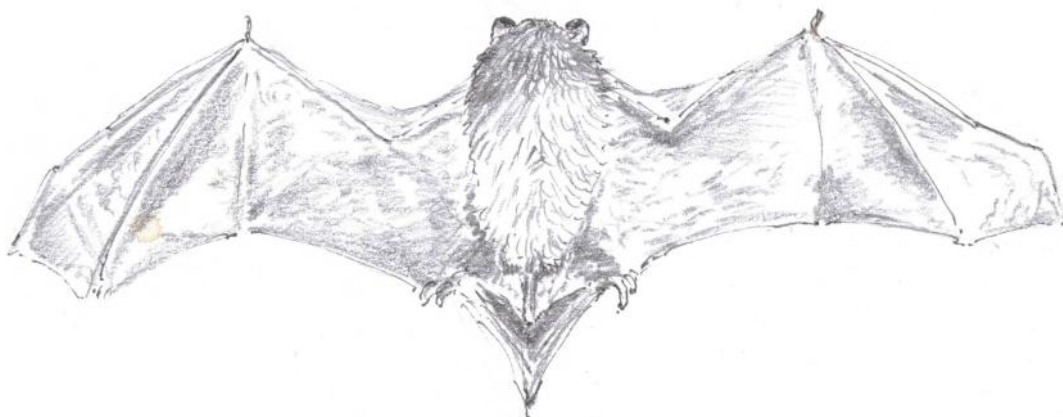


one will be a matter of being in the right place at the right time – late dusk or early dawn on a night mild enough for insects to be flying around, probably along bush edges and treelines and near watercourses.

There are hand-held detectors which pick up the ultrasonic sounds that pekapeka make, but it’s a matter of luck whether you will find any with them unless you’re in one of the pekapeka hotspots such as Catlins River or Rakiura.

If you ever review your security camera footage, keep an eye out for a fast-moving bat. Please report any sightings to Otatara Landcare Group.

Geoff Dembo



*Illustrations by
Lloyd Esler*

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