

Newsletter of the South West New Zealand Endangered Species Trust

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Stoats on Coal Island

Volunteers on the February trip to Coal Island found more than expected – 6 stoats on the island. Of these, 3 were on Pratt's track (across the middle of the island) and the other 2 on Johan's track (around the north of the island) and 1 on the Otago Retreat track. Trustee Don Goodhue and volunteer Raewynne Daly were checking the traps on Pratt's track.

"We had got off to a good start with the first six traps clear as we had expected they would be. As we approached the next trap I could see that the trap had been sprung and there was something in it. When we opened the top of the trap station to find a stoat I was not quite sure what to think. A number of questions sprang to mind – where did that come from?, what has gone wrong?, are there any more? The last question was soon answered 7 traps later – another stoat and by the time we had found our third stoat I was also wondering what the other teams would be finding. We met the other teams at Moonlight Point a couple of hours later to hear that they had found a further three stoats. Not a good start to the trip."

The Trust met the week following the trip to discuss the situation. Also at the meeting to provide technical advice was Lindsay Wilson, DOC Biodiversity Manager to the DOC Te Anau office. Lindsay and DOC Trustee Andy Cox were able to put the issue into perspective; in particular it was becoming apparent that the situation on Coal Island was not an isolated incident. Stoats had been found on other sanctuary island over the summer including Pomona Island on Lake Manapouri and an un-named island on Lake Hauroko that had been stoat-free for over 20 years. Information being collected by DOC was indicating that a mast year had brought about an explosion in pest numbers – stoats, rats and mice. Advice from DOC was that stoat incursions onto Coal Island should not be unexpected particularly during these mast years. The critical issue is that we are able to manage these incursions and ensure that if stoats do make it

to the island we "nail" them. This could mean that we review the frequency traps are checked, check traps for operation more frequently and try different lures.

In the first instance it was decided that a team would re-visit the island on the as soon as possible to check traps and re-bait them with salted rabbit meat. Further action would depend on the outcome of that trip. Thanks to support from Alpine Choppers, Trust Administrator Joyce Kolk and volunteer Kathy Harris flew to the island on the 7th of March and spent 2 days doing this work. They found 2 further stoats on Johan's track. A further trip has been scheduled for mid-April.

While it has been disappointing to find stoats on the island it has perhaps been a bit of a "wake-up-call". In the short-term it we need to focus on managing the situation and rebuilding confidence in the operation of the trapping program. In the longer term we need to address those issues such as funding that would let us manage the trapping program in a manner that is more flexible and adaptable to events such as a mast year.

In this edition....

- **Stoats on Coal Island**
What we didn't want to find
- **Southland Tramping Club**
Volunteer trip



Left: Tracey Patterson checks a trap on the Otago Retreat trap.

Photo: Tracey Patterson

Right: Volunteers relax at the Oil Store.

Photo: Tracey Patterson



Southland Tramping Club Volunteers in Preservation Inlet

By Tracey Patterson

In February, 5 Southland Tramping Club members had the opportunity to travel to Preservation Inlet with Don Goodhue to check the Stoat traps on Coal Island & the mainland. The helicopter dropped our group on the west end of Coal Island. Here Don showed us how to reset the traps, before we split ourselves into 3 teams of 2. Graeme Appleby and myself did the Otago Retreat Track. We were the only ones fortunate enough to find Kiwi probing in 2 different spots. Firstly near trap 39 and then 4. Seven kiwis had been released before Christmas around trap 4, so this was very pleasing to think some had traveled that far.

We sadly found a stoat in No 4 trap. But great because he was dead. It took us 4 hours to get to the East side of the island. Raewynne Daly and Don had already completed the Pratt Track, they had got 3 stoats. Mike Soper and Chris Morison had taken the longer Johan's Track, so we walked up to meet them on their track. Finding gold mining sites on the way. They too had found 2 stoats.

Once back at Moonlight Point we relaxed until the chopper came back. Probably took a minute to get us over to the mainland, our base the "Oilstore". When Don first spoke at one of our Tramping Club meetings last year, one of the huge attractions for most of us was staying in the "Kisbee Lodge." Two weeks before we were due to leave we got word that the lodge was not available to us. I so wanted to pull out at that point. Our alternate accommodation was staying in the " Oil Store" , we just knew it was an old shed and that was it and not even a toilet!!! But knew I wouldn't get another chance to get in there. Well the Oil Store was great, we all managed to get a bed, we could get away from the sandflies and there was a very "cool" toilet. (For the first 3 days we didn't see a sandfly as it was very warm with a very strong wind.)

Our second day was a huge day,(10 hrs) up and along the ridge following a marked route checking traps all the way. It was a very warm day also. The undergrowth was so dry. We had a side trip into the Alpha Goldmine. How did they get all of that equipment in there? Just amazing. We called in at 19 Gala Street and visited Preservation Lodge. The hunters in residence were very much at home. The place is amazing. We had a look around then as we were leaving they brought out 3 cooked crayfish for us. It took another hour to get to our campsite. Day 3 (8 hrs) was checking the traps along the shoreline heading back to the Oilstore. The walking was so diverse, loved it. A little beach walking, boulder hopping, walking around ledges, thru a tunnel and a very steep climb. For those of you who have the DOC hut poster we were able to tick off another hut, Te Oneroa Hut.

The next 3 days were very relaxing, exploring the area. It was only about 40 minutes around to the Puysegur Lighthouse. Five of the guys had a day walk over to Sealers Beach. Don is a ball of knowledge and a fabulous tour guide, able to answer every question. We ran out of water at our hut very early on and had to collect water from a creek daily, even that was very low. Chris was out with a handline most mornings and evenings hoping for that big fish. He did catch a few fish but according to Don they were not worth catching but Chris cooked each one and ate them. The guys from the Lodge were out fishing in front of us one day and pulled up on the sand and dropped in 3 live crayfish and 3 very fresh trumpeter. Don cleaned the trumpeter and spread salt and brown sugar on them, made a fire and smoked them, and we ate them about an hour later. Fantastic!!!

The food was fab, the company was fab and the place incredible. If you get a chance to get in there, take it.



Left: Volunteers negotiating the Otago Retreat coast.

Photo: Tracey Patterson

Web site updated

Thanks to help from Yibai He in Wellington, the website has been brought up to date. For back-issues of newsletters and information on volunteer trips visit the website.

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