

STEWART ISLAND NEWS

CELEBRATING RAKIURA

June 2020

\$4.00



Kidney Fern Arm, Paterson Inlet. *Photo by Bill Watts*



Our deepest condolences and love to Jenny Gell. Ewan will be missed by the island community.

lockdown large gathering of people with the Cross Country race at the Ringa Ringa golf course. The Rakiura Challenge, slated for October, has filled up. Tourists, gone from meandering along the roads for months, are back. Keep up the good hygiene habits: wash your hands often, stay home if you're sick, and if there's hand sanitizer available at public places, use it.

SIN thanks the 10 cents-a-salmon committee for a very helpful grant for this year. We are most grateful!

Traps are being snapped up in SIRCET's new Adopt a Trap program. People and businesses are adopting traps to be arm-chair ratters, to support SIRCET, and for the fun of naming the traps. (Trappy McTrapface, Maria Von Trap and Rat Damon are taken.)

A few SIN FYIs:

- We were unable to print an April edition during lockdown, therefore we produced a free on-line edition available at www.stewartislandnews.com.
- Because of uncertain visitor numbers and to avoid the wastage of un-sold paper issues, we will be printing fewer copies in the future. If locals want to be guaranteed a SIN we advise you buy a subscription. Details on back page.
- For news between issues, check our Facebook page.
- FYI there will be no July issue.

The island, along with the country, is moving back toward "normal." Quiz is back on; the "thongs" of more than three people at a time are permitted in the shop; and the school recently held a first post-

Mamaku Woodshop, makers of the SIN boat *Koru*, have generously sponsored five! Hayden Johnson won a FB quiz about Stroppey and won a trap in his name. The adopted traps make a fun and unique gift... not everybody gets to have a rat trap on Rakiura named for them. For more information see page 15 or go to www.sircet.org.nz



Bree Asher crosses the finish line at the HMB School Cross Country race. *Photo by Mackenzie Clearwater*

Lots inside: a great story from former residents George and Kristy who have spent lockdown living at a lighthouse. Sounds charming and romantic but there's a catch ... involves copious amounts of poo. We've got a new Snapchat ratting column featuring a wee rat rap. A new crossword from Ben Hopkins, what's and who's new at DOC, more lovely writing from Bill Watt and Raylene, and much more. Happy Level 1, everyone! —Jess



Halfmoon Bay Police Beat

Kia Ora

I would like to thank the community as a whole for the efforts they have made towards the situations of self-isolation and social distancing while we have combatted the COVID-19 epidemic that has seriously affected the rest of the world.

As the numbers continue to improve for New Zealand of cases reducing and the days of no cases being reported it's the pain that a few will have felt some meaning and value that will hopefully allow us as a community to go forward and put this behind us. In saying that, it still means that we have to maintain our hygiene practices and any health issues identified be dealt with appropriately to avoid any possible uptake of COVID-19 here on Rakiura Stewart Island.

As we continue to go forward and get into some form of normality of island life as it was prior to COVID-19 I ask that you take the opportunity to check your vehicles for Warrants of Fitness and registrations, getting them back into current for those that have lapsed during the isolation period.

Also as we carry on through the winter months even giving your vehicle a once over for the simple sake of safety through prevention first.

On a different note there have been a number of enquiries about people wanting to obtain firearms licences. At this time if you are seriously considering please let me know and I will be happy to talk to you about it. If I am able to get sufficient numbers I will arrange for a Firearms Safety course to be run here on Rakiura Stewart Island in an effort to lessen the cost for people to travel to Invercargill to attend the same course.

Also to reinforce safety on the road seatbelts are to be worn while driving a motor vehicle on New Zealand's roads.

Kia pai to ra.

Constable Stuart Newton
Halfmoon Bay
Rakiura Stewart Island
021 191 5210



Heartfelt thanks to everyone for supporting me through the last year.

The phone calls, hugs, baking, fish, visits, whisky drinking, prepared meals, you were all so amazing and I wouldn't have been able to make it without you. The beautiful flowers and lovely cards received over the last few weeks have been a great comfort.

Belinda, Phil, Marty and Shawna enabled Ewan to stay home for his last month which was his dearest wish. I will never be able to thank these four enough.

What an amazing place we live in.

We privately farewelled Ewan as was his wish.

—Jenny

**Terning away from the World:
A lockdown adventure at a lighthouse**
by George Nicholas

First it was warnings from friends and family. 'Maybe you guys should think about coming home'. Then it was the news, with travellers all around the world sharing stories of their short notice flights home. The big one for us was the government warning from Travelsafe. 'We encourage all NZers to consider getting home immediately, as airline travel may be disrupted for the foreseeable future and you may not be able to get home if you do not do so now'.

Kristy and I had planned our big OE trip for a year, we had sold most of our stuff (except the important things, like the cast iron frypan and the good stick blender), quit our jobs and left the country for Europe in October 2019. The plan was to travel Europe for at least a year, with maybe a job in there somewhere if we could get one. We had been through Portugal, Spain, Germany and had just gotten to Ireland when the virus really started to shut things down. We had just applied for a job looking after terns somewhere on the East coast of Ireland and were waiting to hear back.

So there was a debate to be had. Should we stay or should we go?

Pros for leaving:

1. Everything was shut or shutting down, we had been in Ireland for a week already and hadn't been able to get to a pub!
2. If we didn't leave now, we might not get home for a while, maybe even a year.
3. We didn't know anyone here and if things went bad we could be in a bit of trouble.

Cons:

1. Could we even get home? Airports were shutting down every day, countries were shutting borders, we couldn't find any info on transiting through places like LAX or Singapore.
2. This was our big OE! After this it would be time to get jobs, houses, dogs. This might be our last chance at traveling for the lifetime of a dog at least.
3. If we got home, would we be able to isolate? We both know people that are medium to high risk and we'd be travelling through a lot of airports to get home. All it would take would be one lax moment, a hug or a handshake

and we would be putting them at risk. Our parents both have dogs, what about the dogs? If we pet the dog, then mum pats the dog, is that a vector? Should we be washing the dog after every pat? How do you sterilize a dog!?

After a lot of tea, biscuits and talking, we decided to stay.

We had a good workaway to stay at (workaways.com, would recommend it for any traveller on a budget) so we had no bills, and it was on a rescue farm with dogs, pigs and horses so we had plenty to keep us busy. We were also still hopeful that the tern job might go ahead. It was based on a tiny island 10km east of Dublin so no issues with quarantining.

So we waited. I called the manager once a week to see how things were going, until I started feeling guilty for bothering him. In the meantime, we fed pigs, mucked out horses and illicitly worked out in the closed parks of rural Dublin.

On the 23rd April, we got the call. It was all on! We were hired for a 4-month stint on Rockabill Island, working on Birdwatch Ireland's Roseate Tern project! We had 10 days to get ready, order as much field gear as we could find on Amazon and pray to Bezos that it would get here before we left. Also somehow order, pay for and pick up enough food to last 4 months. In the middle of the lockdown. With no car.

Thanks to a combination of incredibly helpful people, a few favours and the Amazonian trade winds blowing the right way, by the 2nd of May we were on our way. Armed with official documentation allowing us to travel and with the help of a new friend we'd met at the workaway, we came in from rural Dublin into the city proper and out to Malahide Port, where we would be leaving civilization for the next 4 months, heading out to a football field sized rock in the middle of the sea.

We all met up at the marina; Kristy, me, our new friend Emma who would be joining us for the season, our manager Stephen, and our surly boat operator (who probably has a heart of gold), Eoin. After a bit of hilarious and not at all tense banter about which food we could leave behind if we had to (Eoin: most of it; Us: none of it), and some more tense moments packing the boat with more and more

birdwatch gear, we were off into the Irish sea.

After an hour in the boat, we saw the lighthouse appearing over the horizon. The boat was too loud for talking, so we spent the time pondering exactly what we'd got ourselves in for -- no showers, electricity for an hour a day and only the constant company of a few thousand terns for four months.

We'd been warned that the place itself was a bit basic as well. No drinkable water, no power, no insulation and a bit of mould round the place. Of course that's just standard living for a couple of good keen conservationists, we're happy when the roof isn't made of tarp!

First impressions when we got off the boat were good. A solid stone pier to unload the boat on, then a series of concrete steps up to the old lighthouse house and the lighthouse behind. You could imagine the same trip being made a hundred times over the last 150 years. The apprehension on the way out, the hard slog of unloading months' worth of food up the same concrete steps. The relief that the house is still standing, and pretty decent inside.

The lighthouse itself was built in 1860, with a large granite house sited next to it a few years later. By the looks of it, it hasn't had a lot of maintenance since then, apart from a good thick coat of paint every few years (none of the doors shut due to the inches of paint!).

The house was built to accommodate two families, so essentially two houses, divided straight down the middle by an internal brick wall. We have the run of both sides, so heaps of room to spread out.

After unloading, unpacking and settling in, our first job was to get the island ready for the birds. There's a few terns already hanging around looking hopeful, as well as black guillemots, razorbills and puffins.

The island is covered in a thick growth of tree mallow. This is a non-native perennial, with thick soft leaves and purple flowers. The leaves can be made into a poultice for burns and probably make for some pretty good loo paper so apparently lots of lighthouse islands have a bit of this planted around. Not so useful for the

terns however, it limits their nesting sites to a tiny portion of the island so first job for us was to clear it and put in nest boxes.

That job done, we settle in for some proper birdwatching. The majority of the terns here, both Common and Roseate, have been ringed at some point during the 30 years this project has been running. Our job for the first month after we'd set up is to sit in the hides we've constructed around the place and try and decipher tiny hieroglyphic numbers and letters on small metal bands on the legs of birds who very much do not want to stand still.

After installing nearly 800 boxes round the place, the birds have made their choices, claimed either a box or a patch of land (usually in the most awkward place they can find) and started laying. Our job now is to check our assigned areas twice a day every day for eggs, and bit later on, for chicks.

The downside of this job is that the terns are very much against the idea of us getting anywhere near their nests. In practical terms, now that the entire island is filled with birds, this means no going outside without full protective gear. Waterproof jacket, pants, hood and a few layers of hats is de rigeur for the season. The second we get out of range of the eaves it's chaos. Birds swoop from every direction, some aiming for a good peck on the head, the smart ones for exposed bits of skin (hands are favourite if they can get 'em.) The pecks we can handle. The poo is another story. Every bird that's got anything saved up from the hours of placid nest sitting will now try and deposit their, umm, deposits directly on us. These birds have had years of practice and it shows. Once again, anything exposed is fair game. Hands, clipboards and the small exposed gaps of face are clearly worth the most points, with extra points awarded to things that are hard to clean, like spotting scopes and binos.

It's a pretty good swap though. In return for acting as targets for these birds to practice their aim, we get to be part of their lives for a few months. Our entire day is spent watching these little seabirds. They land here, coming from as far as West



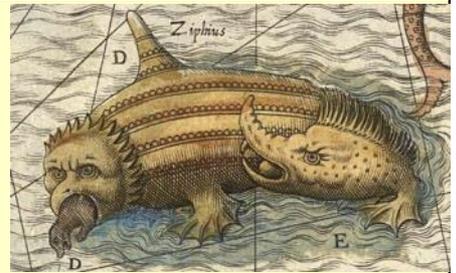
Africa, set up a little home, catch up with their partner, who they may not have seen for the previous nine months, mate, lay eggs, hatch said eggs and raise a chick, hopefully to fledging point, then come August, they'll be off again. And we get to watch it all play out. We get to enjoy their mating dances, share in a bit of happiness when we find a new egg in a box, and shake our fists/beaks at the sky when the weather blows an egg over a cliff.

So that's us for a few months. Enjoying the tern life, feeling lucky that we've got a job, and a safe place to ride out whatever happens to the world next. In a few more months, we'll get to share one more thing with the terns, and that will be flying a few thousand miles back home to our own little island.





The **Myths & Legends club** had a busy May. We covered more stories from the Epic of Gilgamesh and delved into how linguists and archaeologists managed to crack cuneiform which is so fascinating it deserves its own article. We also learned the meaning of omens, legacies, and looked at Gilgamesh’s relationship with his axe to discuss the use of dreams and symbolism in stories.



May Monster Mondays were great. Complementing the latest school library display of owls, we met several owl monsters: Stikini, Strix, Ziphius, and the Owlman of Mawnan. Like the Beast of Bodmin, the Owlman seems like just more fake news straight outa Cornwall. The Ziphius is a sort of quaint sea monster also known as the owl whale. But you don’t want to mix with Strix ... a scary creature from Mediaeval witch stories. Raylene’s written about garlic in this month’s gardening column and I’ll add that garlic in a baby’s crib keeps the nasty strix at bay. Blended into the monster stuff we learned architectural terms: gargoyles and grotesques are architectural sculptures found on buildings (the strix is a famous grotesque on Notre Dame cathedral). The difference between a gargoyle and grotesque is that a grotesque is just a sculpture, but the gargoyle also serves as a rainwater spout.

The stikini, from Native American lore, is seriously sinister. He walks among humans as a man during the day, then goes into a tree at night, transforms into an owl monster and vomits up its soul and internal organs and hangs them in a tree, then kills people at night. The library display teaches the kids the science of owl pellets – how they eat their prey whole and vomit back the bones and fur. The kids are invited to surmise how this could have fed into the stikini story.

We also learned about basilisks which led us to meet Pliny the Elder, an ancient Roman writer who endeavored to write one of the first encyclopedias. Now that’s an ambitious writing/research project!

The basilisk is a hybrid monster: part rooster, part serpent. A deadly chicken dragon who can kill with a look. It supposedly comes from a serpent egg, incubated by a rooster, hatched on a pile of dung (its cousin the cockatrice is a hen egg incubated by a serpent). Which leads us back to our living document, the Mythological Creatures Glossary. What’s the word for a dung pile where a basilisk egg hatches? Suggestions include baren, donc, and poovum. According to Pliny the Elder’s information on basilisks, the creature can be slayed with weasel wees. Other legends declare a mirror, the herb rue, or a crowing rooster will do the job.



It’s all been so fascinating and now things are getting even better. June brings us Egyptian Mythology presented by Julie and Sam Asher. The Rosetta Stone, Hieroglyphs, mummies, pyramids... wonderful stuff.

Thanks to Bevan, Gary and Ulva for the loan of mythology books for this project.

If any of this piques your interest and you’d like to learn more, get in touch! —Jess

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Stewart Island Real Estate

For all local listings - houses, cribs, sections and blocks of land.

See our website TODDCO.NZ
or contact our local representative **Jeanette Mackay on 027 681 8589**
for all Island real estate enquiries.

To the most amazing community in the land,

Thanks for all your offers of help, understanding and patience while we overcame this very unique situation. We are now back on top of things and are keen to support and supply you in to the future.

We are happy to keep making up orders and delivering to you or arranging a collection time. We will charge \$10.00 for delivery on orders under \$100.00.

We also really want to retain as many of you as possible, so if we can do anything to make your experience with us easier or more enjoyable please do not hesitate to let us know, this might be an item you would like us to stock, hours of trade etc... no ideas will be cast by the wayside.

Another branch we would love to extend is the option of bulk buying goods at discounted prices these would require a bit of advanced notice (2 weeks). The range includes baking needs and dried bulk foods, but we can do a deal on most bulk items please just enquire.

As always we are happy to serve you and hope it will continue long in to the future

Kia kaha Rakiura, thanks for being you!

Sam, Charlotte and the team.

Stewart Island Four Square



"We are not isolated we're insulated..."
Ewan & Jenny
Dogs Darcy & Whero

*Photo from Copeisolation photo project by
Laire Purik.*

Kelvin-Helmholtz clouds (aka billow clouds) captured by Sarah Tranmer. A video of this rare cloud phenomenon developing during sunrise over Halfmoon Bay is on our Facebook page.





The Looking Glass

Light on the inlet outlines a faint ripple ~
 A passing shower spears the surface
 As if a million insects dance.
 The world holds its breath.
 Monetary momentum lost. Pursuit of profit stalled.
 Nations seek leaders.
 Only a slight murmur moves the waters.
 Nature has regained ascendancy
 for the briefest moment in time.

A peaceful harbour reflects embracing peaks.
 In the heavens scudding charcoal clouds
 Then glimpses of palest blue.
 Seabirds plummet for fish.
 Pied oyster catchers noisily peruse the shallows.
 Wood pigeons call from dense treetops.
 It is their season restored, kingdom regained;
 unsullied by constant clamour of
 mortals failing to inhale long, slow.

Instead humans have been stopped in their tracks.
 Awaiting vaccines, relief from fear.
 But this wilderness rotates on...
 tides, seasons, birdsongs.
 No outside direction, cossetting or persuasion.
 Simply turning, unbroken.
 As before, over millenia.
 And should always be if only
 allowed the space to breathe.

Sun breaks through, glistening silver on still seas.
 Black swans create a majestic wake.
 Deer and bird impressions
 march along pristine sands.
 The watery looking glass shimmers dots and dashes
 messaging the human race:
 "Drink in this sight, regain this sanctuary.
 Let lungs inhale health, happiness,
 not virus or indeed greed. Learn."

Barbara Vos

Sawdust Bay, Paterson's Inlet 23/4/20

Follow the Stewart Island News on Facebook

400 Words by *Beverley Osborn*

Several weeks ago a friend e-mailed me a poem she thought would appeal to me. It did – both for its sentiments and the information that it was written in 1869 at the time of the Irish potato famine. I noted the author's name so I could quote the poem in this month's 400 Words, and found it was actually written this year by Kitty O'Meara from USA, not Kathleen O'Mara from Ireland. Not only was the 1869 origin discredited, but so was a story that it had been republished in 1919, in response to the Great Flu Epidemic. There has also been a challenge – since discredited – from an Italian writer who thought it was an adapted translation of her work.

So here's the poem, which seems to have gone nearly as viral as Covid 19 itself.

And the people stayed home,
 And read books, and listened and rested,
 and exercised, and made art, and played games
 and learned new ways of being, and were still,
 And listened more deeply.
 Some meditated, some prayed, some danced,
 Some met their shadows.
 And the people began to think differently,
 And the people healed.
 And in the absence of people living in ignorant,
 dangerous, mindless and heartless ways,
 the earth began to heal.
 And when the danger had passed and the people joined
 together again,
 they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and
 dreamed new images,
 and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully,
 as they had been healed.

Birdsong has been heard again in city streets, we've been wowed by pictures of Mount Everest framed in a clear sky, of formerly smog-bound city streets where people can breathe freely again. We've responded so well to the messages about being kind, caring for each other. How can we carry that forward?

Sir Winston Churchill once said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

The international focus is moving now towards dealing with economic fall-out and I wonder whether we will miss the opportunity of re-thinking the desirability of having a "growing" economy. Of course people need to make a living, but how about a "sufficient" economy rather than one geared towards constant expansion – which encourages personal greed for more than we actually need? How about politics that embrace positivity rather than nit-picking criticism?

Let's meet the challenge!

What's up, DOC?

Introducing Biodiversity Ranger Kate Morrison



Here's a picture of Kate from a recent trip running up past Mueller Hut in Aoraki National Park.

A bit about myself: I'm an Australian and have been in New Zealand for six years. My ideal weekend is spent running up mountains with my friends. I spend a lot of time trail running - the gnarlier the terrain, the happier I am! Looking forward to seeing the epic backcountry here on Rakiura and learning more about the amazing fauna and flora. Though I'm especially looking forward to checking out the Tin Range and the Ruggedys. My current hobby is learning more about horticulture and gardening.

Planning underway for 20/21 breeding season

Detailed operational plans are being developed for predator control through the vulnerable nesting and chick rearing stages of the southern NZ dotterel/tūturiwhatu annual cycle. Public consultation will begin in June alongside consenting work. We are pleased to have two of our three dedicated field rangers returning to the project and are actively recruiting a replacement for the third ranger position after one of our most experienced field rangers took up an attractive opportunity elsewhere. You'll be hearing from us soon regarding next year's predator control work. It will be very much based on the current model focussing on ground-based trapping and toxin baiting for feral cats, however, this year we also aim to include control of a black-backed gull colony near the important breeding habitat at Hill 511.



Mason Bay/Te One Roa dune restoration

We're scanning the long-range weather forecasts for suitable weather windows to complete this year's 80 hectares of heli-boom spraying over sections of high-density marram grass between Martin's Creek and Duck Creek. 39 hectares has already been completed and further work will help us reduce seed set from upwind marram plants. This is a big step forward to breaking the holding pattern that the programme has been in for some time. Several repeat heli-boom spray treatments will enable us to knock down the majority of the infestation and we'll move to cover this area with ground-based spot spraying to maintain the gains made now.

Predator Free Rakiura website and video

DOC Rakiura staff have been working with the Predator Free Rakiura group to help build the new website and aspirational video. Check it out at

www.predatorfreerakiura.org.nz

Conservation conversations

We all hope that life in New Zealand will return to a COVID free future. If possible, we are aiming to launch an on-going series of public meetings where we focus on one of our biodiversity projects at each session. There will be an open invite to all, and we hope to provide an opportunity for local islanders to connect with the biodiversity programme. At this stage we're waiting for a more risk-free environment before kick starting this idea. In the meantime, please remember that you can contact us at any time to discuss the work that we do. We welcome all feedback and ideas.

All roped up

Recreation & Historic Ranger Christina Paterson practiced some of her rope skills this month in preparation for her upcoming ropes course.

Rope practice!
Photo by Andrew King
DOC



Fashionably late flock count



A southern NZ dotterel/tūturiwhatu during the annual flock counts on the Freshwater River mouth mudflats. *Photo by Jake Osborne*

April is normally a big month in the Rakiura biodiversity calendar because it's when our annual flock count of the critically endangered southern New Zealand dotterel/tūturiwhatu is scheduled. This year we had to change our plans. The flock count took place at the end of May and while this isn't ideal in terms of consistency with previous years, it has given us insight into how the population has fared since the last count of just 170 birds in April 2019. The 2020 flock counts estimate a population size of 173 birds.



Capturing low and high tide during the annual flock counts. *Photos by Andrew Eastwood DOC*



Dotterel with leg identification bands feasting on crab legs. *Photo by Jake Osborne*

This data helps us determine whether predator control and other interventions are working.

Back to Ulva Island/Te Wharawhara biosecurity

Rangers were excited to get back into field work after nearly two months of working from home on training, planning, reporting and other administrative tasks. Our top priority was reinitiating biosecurity surveillance on pest-free Ulva Island/Te Wharawhara. It had been a tense two months with no detection work taking place on the island and we were concerned that rodents may have arrived during that time. Rangers checked and rebaited traps around the coastal fringe of the island as well as the inland network of traps around the busier north-west side of the island which includes houses and other buildings where rats might prefer to establish.

Rangers also laid out ink tracking cards across the island. So far there have been no rat detections through our trapping work, and we're eagerly awaiting the retrieval of the tracking cards later in the week! We have also engaged Sandy King and Gadget from DOC's Conservation Dogs Programme to run four days of checks through June. So far so good!

Snapchat by Jess Kany

The importance of context

Have you ever given someone a gift and it wasn't received the way you imagined it would be?

My sister's boyfriend once famously gave her a vacuum cleaner for Christmas (to which she infamously replied: *Thanks for the gift that keeps on sucking.*)

We all know pet cats waiting in vain for thank-you notes for half-eaten stick bugs left on their owners' pillows.

Sometimes gifts aren't appreciated because, well, because they're half-eaten stick bugs. But sometimes the context is missing.

Missing my far-away family, I decided late one night that a heart-felt gesture was in order. I adopted three rat traps on my rat line and named them after my mom and sisters and sent them a screenshot of the trap map, their names on a string of dots.

We can't be together right now, I wrote to them on our Whatsapp group, but rat traps named after you on my rat line are all together now.

Sister #1 replied: *How touching. I'm sure there must be a Hallmark card that expresses the gratitude one feels after being so honored. I'm so gRATe-ful.*

Stung, I asked her if she'd had a bowl of sarcasm for brekkie.

She added insult to insult: *I am honored. Thank you. I am going to name one of our cats' litter boxes after you. We have 4, but yours will be the nicest.*

Then, with zero acknowledgement of my gracious gift, Sister #2 chimed in: *4 litter boxes? Really?*

I remarked to Sister #1 that I was renaming her trap *ingRATitude*.

Finally, hours later, my mom joined the conversation. In verse. (Ya think lockdown's getting to some folks?...):

*A formal connection
To rodent detention
(With ratty errata
Recorded as data)
Seems not so much kindly distinction
Than a depreciation
Of family status.*

So, not the reception I was hoping for,

but a Whatsapp thread to make me laugh. Also the phrase "rodent detention" makes me wonder if the finer aspects of rat trapping need to be explained...? Nah.

Here's the thing: with some gifts: context is important. Like my overseas family members, some off-Islanders might not fathom the value of the rat trapping program on Stewart Island/Rakiura. How crucial it is to keeping rat numbers down so that our beautiful and vulnerable native birds can survive and thrive. The traps serve as a line of defense to Ulva Island, catching rats before they swim Paterson Inlet and cause havoc on our pest-free tourist attraction. Community members who volunteer their time to check these traps each week are passionate about this cause. The trap represents hope for our precious environment. Adopting and naming a rat trap for someone is a bestowing an honor and a unique, thoughtful, meaningful gift.

Just, maybe, remember to share all that context with your loved ones when it comes to gift-giving time.

Details for Adopt A Trap on page 15 or go to www.sircet.org.nz

Winter Fire Safety from Fire and Emergency NZ

Stay warm but make sure you keep yourself and your household safe.

Fire moves incredibly fast – a house fire can kill within five minutes. Keep your smoke alarms in working order (press the button to check) and make a household escape plan (www.escapemyhouse.nz) so you can get out safely during a fire.



Don't take chances. Remember the 'heater metre' rule: keep flammable materials at least one metre away from any heat sources. And it's one heater or larger appliance per plug – no more.

Make sure you check your electric blanket is in good working order before you use it and turn it off before you go to sleep.

If you have a fireplace, take precautions to ensure a fire doesn't spark or spread and make sure your chimneys and flues have been cleaned first.

Always use a fireguard or spark-guard fire and never throw rubbish into the fireplace – particularly batteries and aerosol cans.

When you're done with the fire, empty the ashes into a metal bin and pour water over them before you dispose of them, as they take up to 5 days to cool down.

Check www.fireandemergency.nz for more advice on how to keep safe when keeping warm this winter.



Glowing Sky Merino

Between The Shop & The Pub, Rakiura
glowingsky.co.nz



Vaila Voe

by Bill Watt

It is hard to believe now, but there was once a house a Vaila Voe. Judith Smith (daughter of CD Smith) recalled it being derelict in the early – mid 1940's but as children they would go there on wet days – they had a pack of cards hidden. The Rakiura Museum has a photograph of the cottage. (Figure 1). The photograph is credited to Eileen Willa, and was



– gifted to the Museum in 1983. It shows the cottage in fairly decrepit condition (note the missing weatherboards and wobbly-looking piles). Notes with the photograph indicate it was 'Jack Mercer's cottage' and that Jack Mercer was otherwise known as "Jack the Ripper" (No-one seems to know why). Mrs Willa's note records that Mercer had a lease of a run of 1000 acres at Port William, from 1895 until his death in 1913. It is no known what he did with this 'run' but apparently, he went there often – which suggests that he may have grazed animals there. The mills required bullocks and horses which had to be grazed somewhere.

Figure 1 Courtesy of Rakiura Museum

Another (undated) photo of Vaila Voe held by the Rakiura Museum (Figure 2 below) is interesting. It is possible to place this photo quite accurately using the rocks and landforms as transits. It shows definite evidence of milling – a cleared area leads up from the foreshore. The cottage was sited near to the rock walling along the foreshore which is still apparent on site. It seems probable that the logs from this site were milled at Thule (they would not have been dragged uphill to get them to the Ryans Creek mill.) I have wondered if the track from Thule to Vaila Voe is an old mill track – it seems too well formed and graded (where it has not been re-built) to have been cut just as a walking track. Alternately, logs could easily have been floated across to Thule from Vaila Voe.

The cottage was pulled down in the late 1940's. Vaila Voe must have been a 'cold little hole' to live, with little winter sun. It probably looks more 'unspoiled' now than it did 100 years ago.



Figure 2 Courtesy of Rakiura Museum

Nearly at the shortest day, which gardening lore fixes as the time to plant garlic and shallots, but a couple of locals offer different advice. In the space of a short walk with Mac I met Dave Dunkley at the Post Centre and then John Foley at the top of the hill. ‘Any advice on growing garlic?’ I asked respectfully, knowing them both to be keen on the Venerable Globe, one of its historic names. Another is Stinking Rose!

Separately but concordantly they advised planting as early as possible, before the soil lost autumn’s warmth, and to lay down newspaper on either side of the rows of newly planted bulbs. John favours a good handful of blood and bone dug in beforehand and then a topping of seaweed, Dave prefers a mulch of pine needles. Paper and mulch protect the bulbs from nasty critters and suppress weeds. As luck would have it, I stopped at the corner to talk to my young neighbours, Chris, Serena and Megan, and shared Dave’s words of wisdom with them. ‘Would you like some pine needles?’ asked Chris. ‘We’ve got a pine plantation up the back.’ Cast your bread upon the waters and it shall come back to ye a hundredfold! The dear boy has already delivered a sack of the good stuff to my door.

The Allium family, which includes about 700 species, ranges from garlic through onions to chives and comes down to us from the mists of antiquity. The Neanderthals enjoyed garlic, the Egyptians worshipped it, the Israelites, bored with manna from Heaven, bewailed the loss of it and the Roman legions, marching all around the then known world in their hob-nailed sandals, spread it far and wide.

Garlic is believed to have originated in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Western China. Its botanical name, *Allium sativum*, indicates that a ready supply of it was not left to chance, rather it was cultivated (sativum = sown). The botanical name for shallots, *Allium ascalonicum*, refers to its supposed origin near the city of Ascalon in ancient Syria.

Long before modern antibiotics, garlic was known for its antiseptic qualities - and then some! The ancient Hebrews believed that garlic eased hunger, gave colour to the complexion, improved blood circulation,



Dave’s divine garlic, Elephant garlic, (actually a wild leek) and beautiful shallots from Ship to Shore



Folded newspaper laid on either side of a row of garlic cloves, planted 2cm deep



Pine needles as mulch, pinned down by that wonderful gardening aid, the chicken wire seed-and-seedling-protector and bird-keeper-outer

killed parasites, kept the body warm and encouraged love. Wow! What not to like?

Shallots have a milder flavour than onions and in the right conditions (well drained, compost- enriched soil) a single bulb can produce a good number of offsets. Plant 10 cm apart and 25 cm between rows, the base of the bulb firmly but not too deeply embedded in the soil. Garlic cloves should be planted 2 cm deep, 10 cm apart. As autumn advances keep an eye on both garlic and shallots and lift them when the stems start to dry off. Shake off any dirt and leave somewhere sunny and out of the weather to dry completely.

Elephant Garlic, *Allium ampeloprasum* var. *ampeloprasum*, is not a garlic but a type of wild leek. The derivation of its botanical name, while sending me on a wild leek chase through various dictionaries, bears this out: Greek ampelo -vine/ vineyard and prasum - leek. Was it grown in vineyards to ward off insects, I wonder. No matter, it reliably produces very large, solid bulbs which look like garlic but are much milder in taste, more like its true cousin, the leek. These keep – and eat - well. The attractive, globular flowers float above the veggie garden in late summer, attracting the bees and delighting the dried flower aficionadi. A purist intent on productive rather than pretty would probably whip the flower buds off.

They say a weed is only a plant in the wrong place. Well, one Allium sure has helped itself to places on our roadsides and in our gardens. Wild garlic or onion weed, *Allium triquetrum* (three cornered) gets into every corner, every crack in the concrete! Hugh Wilson (Stewart Island Plants) assures us that the bulbs are edible but fortunate are they whose gardens are free of it. Its bruised leaves give off a powerful garlic odour, handy, I guess, if you encounter a vampire on a dark night.

Happy gardening! Raylene

SIRCET Update by Becky Belladministrator@sircet.org.nz

Lots going on for SIRCET this month!



**Stewart Island / Rakiura
Community & Environment Trust**
for people for environment

Adopt-A-Trap

Over the lockdown Willy has been beavering away working on our fantastic new fundraising tool called "Adopt-a-Trap". The idea is an interactive web-based app that allows the adopter to see when their trap catches rats. By adopting a rat trap you are helping us fund the costs involved in maintaining the 210ha rat tracking network in the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Recovery Project, from the comfort of your own home! Thanks so much to Willy, who really made this project happen.

A trap costs \$40 to adopt, what a great gift idea! <https://www.sircet.org.nz/donate/adopt-a-trap/>

World Albatross Day 19th June 2020

The inaugural World Albatross Day is on 19th June, and as we are right in albatross country down here, we have decided to celebrate. The theme for this year's awareness day is "Eradicating Island pests". Although we don't have albatross breeding on Rakiura, Buller's mollymawk breed on Solander Islands in the Foveaux Strait (about 5000 pairs). Over half the world's 22 species of albatross breed in New Zealand waters.

We are planning a walk out to Acker's Point for the community on the 19th June to see if we can spot any albatross from the shore. If you're out fishing that day post some photos of any albatross you come across to our Facebook page.

Thanks to many local businesses donating experiences and accommodation, we have also organised a Trade Me auction to promote domestic wildlife tourism, raise awareness for World Albatross Day, and raise funds for SIRCET. We will post links to the Trade Me auction in all the usual places when it goes live.

**Weka**

In the Halfmoon Bay Habitat Recovery Project area we have noticed a disturbing absence of weka recently. It's possible that this is a seasonal effect, or they are just less conspicuous than normal for some valid reason, but we are starting to get concerned. Please let us know if you are still seeing weka around your place, or have you noticed an anecdotal decline recently as well?

Forest Bird Monitoring

Our Stewart Island resident ornithologist Matt Jones has been doing 5-minute bird call counts for SIRCET for 10 YEARS!! Matt has recently finished the 2020 round, and although it was a little later than normal because of lockdown (we try get them done in April), forest bird numbers at Ackers within our project area are slightly up from last year, which is great! Bird numbers are down at Ryan's Creek at our comparison site where we don't do pest control, however this could also be affected by the later May counts as it's pretty shady and cold there at this time of year. (Let's face it, humans tend to bunker up in the winter too!)

Thank you SO much Matt for all your dedicated work counting our feathered friends. We really appreciate you!



Caption: Matt Jones celebrating 10 years of forest bird counts for SIRCET.

Call for volunteers

At SIRCET we are heavily reliant on our volunteers. Volunteering for us comes in all sorts of manners – it doesn't mean you have to clear rat traps if you don't want to! (Although that is handy too). In the past we have had a lot of long-term visiting volunteers from overseas that spend around 1 month helping Willy with a range of tasks. For the foreseeable future we won't have this valuable resource, so we are hoping more local people might be willing to come on board and help with trap building/maintenance, nursery work including plant propagation, clearing rat traps, and any other task that might come up! Let us know if you would like to help but you're not sure how, we should be able to come up with something to suit anybody!

Another way of volunteering for SIRCET is by being a Trustee. One of our long-term trustees is stepping down, and we need more local people to join up and guide SIRCET into the future. It sure is exciting times in the community and environment space on Rakiura! Give it some thought, fire in any questions you have and we look forward to hearing from you.

Volunteer week is coming up from 21-27 June. We are planning a "WE APPRECIATE YOU!" event for our fantastic volunteers to say thank you, so stay tuned for details.

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The chocolate (or vino) award goes to Laire Purik and Karl Johnson. Thank you Laire for all of the effort you put into the Copeisolation photography project. And thank you Karl for all of your good-natured helpfulness at the RRC which is recognized and appreciated by the community!

The *Copeisolation Stewart Island* book is coming soon.

Pre-sales of the book will be available.

Watch this space and follow Lairka Photography on Facebook for updates, or get in touch with Laire or Shona.

Thank you very much to everyone who has been involved.



Happy froggies. Photo by Jo Riksem

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Cross Country cup winners were Elise Simeon, Ngakau Edwards, and Ryan McRitchie-King. Photo by Jess Kany

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