

megaphone

THE FACTS & ISSUES

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"Month after month, year after year – NO ONE DOES MORE RAT TRAPPING THAN MEG!"*

* on the Coromandel.



RARE GROUND NESTING MOREPORK

Prior to the introduction of mammalian predators to New Zealand many of our native forest birds nested and raised their young on the ground. This life style sadly led to many extinctions once rats and other predators arrived. Among the birds able to adapt their roosting habits and survive are our beloved morepork who are only known to nest on the ground on predator free off shore islands these days – until now!

MEG's Port Charles Rat Attack project offers one of the safest predator controlled habitats with consistent control of rats, cats, stoats and possums over a large area benefiting in particular pateke (native brown teal), kiwi, and Nth Island Robins (Toutouwai). The safety of this habitat has allowed some morepork to revert to their natural instincts and nest successfully on the ground last summer.

Over summer a group of Community Max workers from Coromandel worked with MEG members to carry out the three monthly rodent monitoring. The monitor showed rats at an exceptionally low level of just 1.6% a level that has been maintained for some time now. One of the young men had not seen a morepork before and in the course of placing the ten tracking papers out on the line he was working he observed three morepork, one of which flew from the ground, he observed a nest with eggs.

This nest had one chick which fledged successfully. This is the second year we have seen this behaviour within the Rat Attack Block. The Rat Attack has 2600 rat traps that are checked and re-baited each month. Every two months we are assisted with this job by a group from the Global Volunteer Network – volunteers from all around the world come to help MEG with conservation projects in the Northern Coromandel.



Cute! Ground reared morepork at Port Charles

I think MEG's founders and the current team can take pride in building an effective focused organisation which is achieving what it set out to. MEG now has over 150 members and projects covering approximately 13,500 hectares.

Where controversy arises the strategy of focusing on common ground to build bridges is working. The fact is all in the community share the same desired outcomes so delivering effective solutions tailored to land owners values and opinions is still pivotal and remains at the core of MEG's philosophy.

MEG's policy is to minimise the use of toxins and decisions on predator control methods are guided by three core factors:

1. The wishes of the land owners on whose land we are assisting.
2. The welfare of native creatures many of whom are under constant threat of being devoured alive one bite at a time by rats and other predators.
3. The availability of volunteers willing to commit to servicing constant control regimens (more consistent volunteers = less toxins).

Partnerships with stake holders including tangata whenua, government agencies, landowners, volunteers, locals and sponsors remain the blocks from which MEG builds its substantial achievements. Equipped with a range of complementary skills, a commitment to hard work and good humour the MEG management committee is the cement that holds those blocks together and makes my job a pleasure.

Cheers - Jonty Rutherford, MEG Coordinator,
mob: 021 410040, jonty@meg.org.nz

MEG - 10 YEARS OF POSITIVE RESULTS

2010 marks the 10th year since a small group of north Coromandel people with an interest in the environment got together to form the Moehau Environment Group (MEG). Their vision was to enhance biodiversity by engaging the community and doing practical work to achieve a standard of habitat restoration that would allow the re-introduction and recovery of endangered species. Last year North Island Robins were relocated to Moehau having becoming regionally extinct early last century. 2010 sees exciting growth in animal pest control projects with coast to coast possum control to the south of Moehau becoming a reality (see map inside). That momentum continues with the start of the 1000ha Coromandel Area School Kiwi Project this year.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM POSSUM?



These are not deciduous trees!

The hot topic of debate regarding pest control these days revolves around the use of toxins and alternative methods of control. There is no doubt to the majority of New Zealanders that possum numbers need controlling or where possible to be eradicated. However lost in the debate is WHY we need to control possums and the impacts possums are having on our native fauna and flora.

In their native Australia, possums are kept in check through natural factors such as restricted food sources predation and disease. Unlike Australia New Zealand has no native land dwelling mammalian predators to help control the population. Also New Zealand trees have evolved in the absence of mammalian browsers and so have not developed chemical defences (eg 1080) that are present in many Australian plants to deter browsers. Consequently possum densities in New Zealand are much higher than that of Australia (1 per hectare) and can reach from 10-25 per hectare in broadleaf / podocarp forests and forest areas bordering pasture land.

From a personal perspective, in a 20 hectare broadleaf gully near Colville that borders pasture, over 300 possums were removed through shooting and trapping in a three month period. On the Port Charles coastline, trapping over a year in a 30 hectare forest block resulted in over 1,000 possums being killed with no decline in the number being trapped per day, as the surrounding lands did not have any possum control at the time.

Possums affect our native flora and fauna in a number of ways both directly and indirectly. Direct affects include browsing and predation, while indirect effects include competition for food and shelter. The effects of possum browsing are easy to see, and because of the selective nature of possum feeding, this results in the eventual death of the host tree. The selective browsing on particular species and individual trees eliminates some species and favours other less palatable to possums, resulting in a gradual change in forest composition. In Northland forests that were once dominated by rata, the rata has now disappeared and the only evidence of this is the dead stumps and trunks lying on the forest floor. In a long term study of possum feeding habits in Orongorongo valley forest near Wellington, where no possum control was carried out, tree fuschia, titoki, tutu, toro and fivefinger disappeared and were replaced in the canopy by tree ferns, pigeonwood and mahoe. Northern rata, kamahi and tawa were under attack and had disappeared in some areas.

The role possums play as predators is becoming increasingly apparent. Possums eat the eggs, chicks and adults of our native birds such as kokako, kiwi, Australasian harrier, fantail, kereru and muttonbird (*Puffins griseus*) among others, and this is known to have contributed to the decline of some native bird species. Possums have been recorded to have eaten more than 60 endangered native powelliphanta giant landsnails in one night.

Secondary effects of possum browsing may be less obvious. Canopies that are weakened by browsing may be more susceptible to wind and salt damage, pathogens, insects or climatic extremes. Also possums compete with native birds (eg. wood pigeon & tui) for seasonal food resources such as fruits, flowers and leaves and for shelter and nest sites, particularly with those birds that nest in holes such as kiwi and kaka.

Dramatic evidence of possum browsing can be seen throughout the Coromandel Peninsula, where inland forests display the totem like dead branches of rata, and in coastal areas such as Bum bay in Port Jackson and some of the coast between Port Charles and Waikawau bay the grey canopy of dead pohutukawa dominates (See accompanying photo). Already in the Coromandel many plant species have become locally extinct or endangered due to possum browsing e.g. milk tree and hard beech.

Due to the low rate of natural mortality in possums and the potential of breeding twice per year in favourable conditions, uncontrolled possum populations can grow at an almost exponential rate (depending on availability of food), meaning that population levels can quickly get to unsustainable levels within native forests, and cause a rapid decline in forest condition that may not have been evident even the previous year.

In the Coromandel many people claim that hunting and trapping would be sufficient to control possums over the whole of the peninsula. One can only surmise that these people have not gone bush in the rugged parts of the range. It can take an hour to cover a couple of hundred metres in some areas (not carrying heavy equipment) and so clearly it is not practical to trap or hunt in these areas. Leaving the only practical option which is the use of toxins or biological control methods.

Unfortunately for todays New Zealanders we are potentially facing a third 'extinction event' since the arrival of humans to these islands, with nearly a third (32%) of all land and freshwater birds having become extinct. We are left with a stark choice of having to control possums and other pests to try and save these species, or ship them off to mainland and island 'sanctuaries', or accept the extinctions knowing they could be avoided. Currently we have many critically endangered faunal and floral species with populations that number in the hundreds or less. As some redress it should be a priority to try to prevent any more extinction of our native species and to restore the biodiversity of our gondwanan forests. Humans are not the only species to have a right to exist and fulfil their natural lifecycles.

Yuri Forbes – MappSc



Total canopy collapse in precious coastal forest.

WAIKAWAU BAY WETLANDS AND ESTUARY PROJECTS.

After a fairly quiet Christmas period it's been full on since then. As you may remember there are two overlapping projects: - one to carry out baseline surveys of the 60-odd hectares of the wetlands and estuary ecosystems, and one to assess the impact of saltwater paspalum.

Both projects are well advanced and monitoring and investigations are bringing in some interesting results. We have just had help from a small group of Global Volunteers to monitor fernbird numbers and carry out our rodent monitoring as well.

After the initial Fernbird count of just 20+/- birds in 2006, in the Waikawau Bay estuary and wetlands, the latest full census carried out with the help of Bay of Plenty Polytechnic Environmental Management students, has tallied 110+/-, up from 86 last year. Thanks to a good breeding season and a regular rodent trapping programme by a small and dedicated group of volunteers!

Rat numbers are down to 10% but mice are still hovering around 40%. The good news is more tracking papers are showing evidence of increased insect activity and skinks; with one paper showing skink and mice prints side by side. Overall the mammal predator control is seeing huge increases in all native species.



Pateke at Waikawau Bay Wetlands

Even better news is the accidental discovery of Copper skinks in the back wetlands. These were thought to be absent from our area. Recently one of our overseas volunteers spotted a skink sitting on the top of a broken manuka branch in the back of the wetlands as we were heading back for breakfast after Fernbird monitoring. He managed to get a photo with his cell phone and we identified it as our native Copper Skink (*Cyclodina aenea*).

Great news for us as we had thought there were only Rainbow skinks (*Lampropholis delicata*) - an Australian invasive immigrant- in the wetlands and surrounding area. The general consensus is that the Rainbows compete for the same ecological niche and end up driving the Coppers out. Coppers are now scarce in our area and after two years searching this was the first we knew they were there. A live-capture pitfall was quickly installed and 'low and behold' the very next day an adult female and three young were found! (See photo). A very rare treat indeed!



Native Copper Skinks (*Cyclodina aenea*) - a rare treat!

Pateke (Brown Teal) surveys are underway as I write and already there seems to be more counted and more visible. There are now anywhere between 50 and 100 seen at the mid to low tide feeding in the outer estuary on crustaceans and baby cockles. Three surveys to date this month of March have given 89,121, and 108 respectively. Many other waterfowl are now present as well.

The saltwater paspalum is increasing in the estuary monthly, and you can almost see the stuff growing.

We have just completed our third lot of expansion measurements and that analysis will be in the next Megaphone issue. There are so many factors involved in this study, but the bottom line is the estuary is being radically changed by this invasive weed, and while huge gains are made for the protection of natural biodiversity, there will come a time when a "tipping point" will be reached, if nothing is done, and much of the health gains will be lost. Coupled with this has been the enormous increase in mangroves as well which tends to complicate our studies somewhat!

We now have a new volunteer working with us once a fortnight-Richard Clark (our newest secretary also). It's really great to have him on board and help us get all our 250-plus rat traps, and tracks up to scratch again. Maintenance is always an ongoing job.

We have also had a student from Coromandel-Annette- who joins us for one day a week to gain experience in environmental work. She is hoping to become DOC trainee ranger next year. So far she has helped with a wide variety of tasks from paspalum assessments to reptile research, to Pateke surveys.

And to top off an amazing few months, we attended the National Wetlands Symposium held in Rotorua in early March. With overseas speakers, scientists, farmers, regional council, and DOC staff, and few community group people like ourselves; 200 of us had a very informative and interesting couple of days. Wonderful networking opportunities and great connections. Still absorbing it all!!!



So watch this space as the next issue will include results from much of our research.
Wayne and Kathi.

COROMANDEL AREA SCHOOL KIWI PROJECT



Some of the Coromandel Area School Kiwi Care elective group with the 120 stoat trap boxes they are constructing

Coromandel Town is starting its own kiwi care group with a 1000 hectare predator controlled kiwi habitat on the ranges between the Whangapoua Road and Driving Creek. "The Coromandel Area School Kiwi Project" is underway and will give Coromandel Town locals, working with students from the Area School, the opportunity to save kiwi in their own back yard.

As Kiwi are territorial birds. Kiwi mums and dads send their offspring out in to the big wide world to find their own slice of paradise fairly young. With kiwi numbers now growing in the north of the peninsular, thanks to DOC and MEG, and at Kennedy Bay, thanks to the Harataunga Kiwi Project, the aim of the Coromandel Area School Kiwi Project is to install over 120 stoat traps to provide protection for young kiwi looking to make a home in the bush above Coromandel Town.

Driving Creek residents are already excitedly reporting kiwi calls close to their homes from time to time and all that is needed to make these visitors permanent residents in Top Town is stoat trapping and responsible dog ownership.

TOUTOUWAI UPDATE

The Toutouwai (North Island Robin) released into the Port Charles Rat Attack and Stony Bay April 2009 have dispersed over a large range.

Some of these birds have nested successfully with at least 10 sightings of fledglings confirmed.

We know that one of the MEG birds is having a second clutch all be it high on the mountain.

The continued success of this project relies on the rodent numbers remaining low. Rats are still tracking at an exceptionally low 1.6% in MEG's Rat Attack Zone at Port Charles.

The School's Kiwi Care elective group have been building stoat trap boxes and will be kiwi listening and laying the trap lines over the next few months.

Environment Waikato has paid for the stoat traps and members of the Coromandel Town community and the Area School will get the work done. We are fundraising for materials to build the trap boxes which are designed to keep people, kiwi and other birds safe from the traps.

A kiwi call count baseline survey will be done, with the help of kids from Coromandel Area School and the public, to get an indication of how many kiwi are already residing in the project area. That survey will be repeated annually so we can track the development of Coromandel Town's own kiwi population. Over the next few months the school kids and adult volunteers will GPS and map the trap lines, cut tracks and install the traps and once we are up and running service the traps each month. Close adult supervision and the use of a safe trap setting tool that keeps hands clear of danger will ensure safety.

The Moehau Environment Group (MEG) team are very pleased to be able to help get this kiwi care project started and will help manage the project over its first year but ultimately this is a project for Coromandel Town people and the running of the project will be handed to a keen core group of Coromandel town people who are on board.

Enthusiasm for the project from tangata whenua, the community board, landowners, the Coromandel Area School and the public has been awesome – thank you.



POSSUMS DONATE TO MEG SO CAN YOU



MEG's new possum fur plucker – possums will help pay for their own demise!

Donations and a \$650.00 grant from the Coromandel/Colville Community board have enabled MEG to purchase a possum fur plucker. When MEG are doing initial cyanide knockdown operations in areas of high possum density the fur will be turned into wages and resources to allow possum control over a greater area.

Your donations make resources like this possible. Our next goal is a quad bike and trailer to lift our efficiency in large scale back country possum control operations.

You can donate directly in to MEG's bank account listed in the back page and now online at the link below.

<https://secure.donate.co.nz/fundraiser.aspx/mego>

BOOK THE BACH & RAISE CASH FOR CONSERVATION!



The MEG HQ at Waikawau Bay is a large self contained, three bedroom, house that sleeps up to 12, with two bathrooms and a large living area with log burner and deck with BBQ. Expansive sea views towards Mercury and Cuvier Islands and an easy walk to Waikawau beach make it an idyllic getaway. Proceeds from rentals support MEG.

For rates, availability and bookings call Terry and Dawn on 07 866 6903 or see the view at to:

<http://www.holidayhouses.co.nz/properties/13409>

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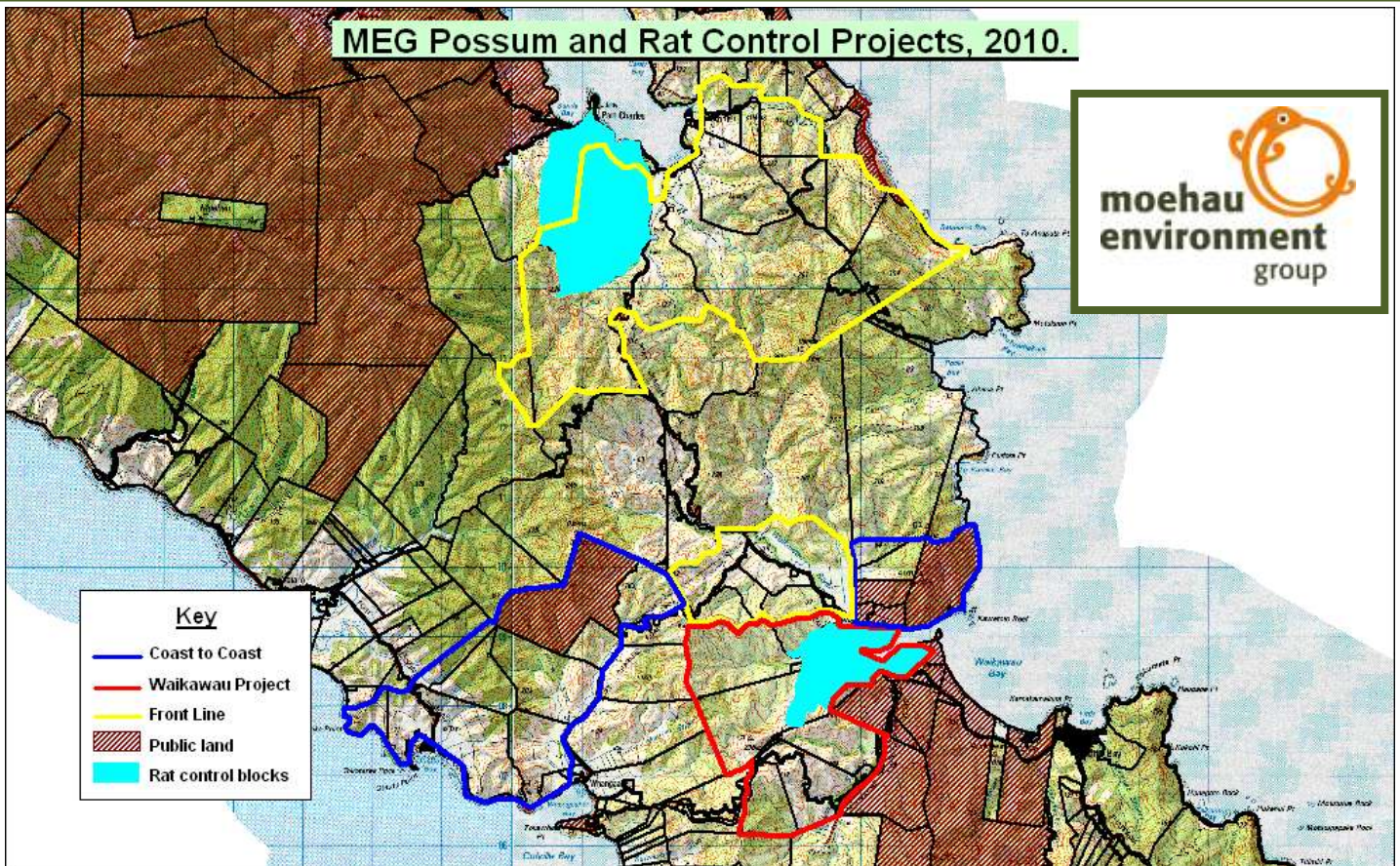
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Contact info@meg.org.nz Also available at the Green Snapper Cafe Colville.

MEG Possum and Rat Control Projects, 2010.



meg events

KIWI LISTENING IN COROMANDEL TOWN July & August will see kiwi listening at 3 sites in the range above Coromandel Town to get an idea of kiwi numbers in the Coromandel Area School Kiwi Project area before stoat trapping begins there this spring. Call 021 410 040 if you are interested in coming along.

MEG'S AGM will be held at 10:30am on Saturday the 16th of October at the MEG Ecobase, Waikawau Beach Road, Waikawau Bay.

THE MEG SUMMER PROGRAMME for Dec 2010 & Jan - Feb 2011 will be launched over Labour Weekend. Be entertained and informed over the summer by MEG's nature based events and adventures. This summer's programme sees the return of the Moehau Heli-Hike.

A BIG THANK YOU GOES TO...

- ☛ The Colville, Coromandel Community board for a \$650 grant towards a possum fur plucker.
- ☛ BNZ Save the Kiwi for ongoing support of MEG's Kiwi Project.
- ☛ Fortress Fasteners for hardware to build trap boxes and save kiwi.
- ☛ Lois & Warren Agnew from Gotcha Traps new corporate members & sponsors for supplying tracking papers.
- ☛ Steve Norris at Steelcraft Coromandel Town for engineering support.
- ☛ Print House, for sponsoring the Megaphone. Printed using Forest Stewardship Council certified paper. To find mindful print solutions see: www.phprint.co.nz or call Brett Phillips on 0800 225 125.
- ☛ 360 Discovery Cruises, The Coromandel ferry people, for sponsoring the MEG Summer Programme.

KORO THE KIWI SAYS "Hello - have you paid your MEG subs yet?"



"Koro the Kiwi" entertains kids on the 360 Discovery ferry to Coro!

You will be seeing more of Koro the Kiwi, MEG's new mascot. Koro will help to raise awareness and funds for kiwi care in the northern Coromandel.

MEG MEMBERSHIP.

Subscriptions remain at \$10 per person, \$20 per family and \$50 for company membership.

Please send subs to LM Williams Port Charles RD4 Coromandel or pay direct into BNZ account 020304 0342229 02. If you choose this option please email payment details to info@meg.co.nz

For new memberships please download the form at www.meg.org.nz/pdf/2707_Meg_Brochure_Member.pdf

Donations will, of course, be willingly accepted at any time in person, into MEG's bank account (see above) or at: <https://secure.donate.co.nz/fundraiser.aspx/megorgnz> !

Thank you.

POSSUM TRAP HALF PRICE MEGA DEAL

A new possum trap called the Trapinator has been developed by CMI Springs, the people who make the DOC 200 stoat traps you see around the district. Kelvin at Waiaro Sanctuary, one of the most experienced trappers in the district, had a test run with the Trapinator and was happy enough with the results to order 10 more of them. They are durable and really simple and easy to set even for people who are a bit nervous of traps. MEG are getting them wholesale and selling them at cost for just \$33 each which is about half the normal retail price. A sample is at CSSC at Colville if you want to check them out. Just text or phone 021 410 040 or email info@meg.org.nz if you would like to buy some Trapinators. **Mr Possum says "I won't be back"**.



...FSC...
Guide Only