



Millars Beach Restoration Project

Feb 2025 Update for Supporters

Kia ora friends and supporters!

Thank you to our Supporters

We are hugely grateful for the support and funding from the following organisations:

1. Environment Southland - This grant focussed on expanding the baiting network from Area 1 to Area 2 and 3. This funding covered labour associated with cutting new tracks, purchase of new bait devices, the bait itself, and contractor labour to administer it.

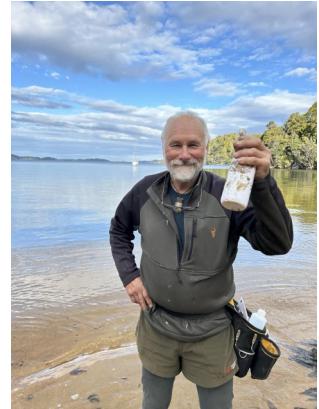
2. Rio Tinto/Murihiku Runaka - This grant has enabled us to purchase new automatic traps of the latest design with some further retrofitting and coms access for a year. This includes the ability to see data and on-board camera activity in real time, through radio signal connectivity. There are several other projects on the Island (and the Bluff Hill / Motupohue project) either already using, or also buying into this technology and we are sharing resources.

3. The Pacific Development and Conservation Trust - This grant also enables us to purchase more automatic traps and consumables (lure etc)

4. The Forest & Bird “Give a Trap” platform has accepted our project. This links approved projects to the Give-a-little platform, and makes it easy for random people to donate. We've had our first donation of lure for the automatic traps recently.

September Monitoring 2024

As part of trying to measure the impact of our efforts, we have set up 50x points (5x lines of 10 points, each 100m apart) spread right across the whole property. Once a year, in September, these points are fitted with Ink Pads and Chew Cards, which are then brought in after 3 nights and analysed for rat, possum and other insect activity. The attached photo shows clearly the difference in September 2024, of the previous year's efforts. Lines A and B are in the area that was trapped and baited - Lines C, D and E were in areas not being trapped or baited. The contrast was quite stark and very encouraging. We have not been doing regular bird counts yet, but a plan is underway here. Anecdotally, we believe there are more bellbirds and keruru around than we've ever seen before.



Andy with the Salmon lure he dropped in the bush late 2023 and found a year later in the same spot!

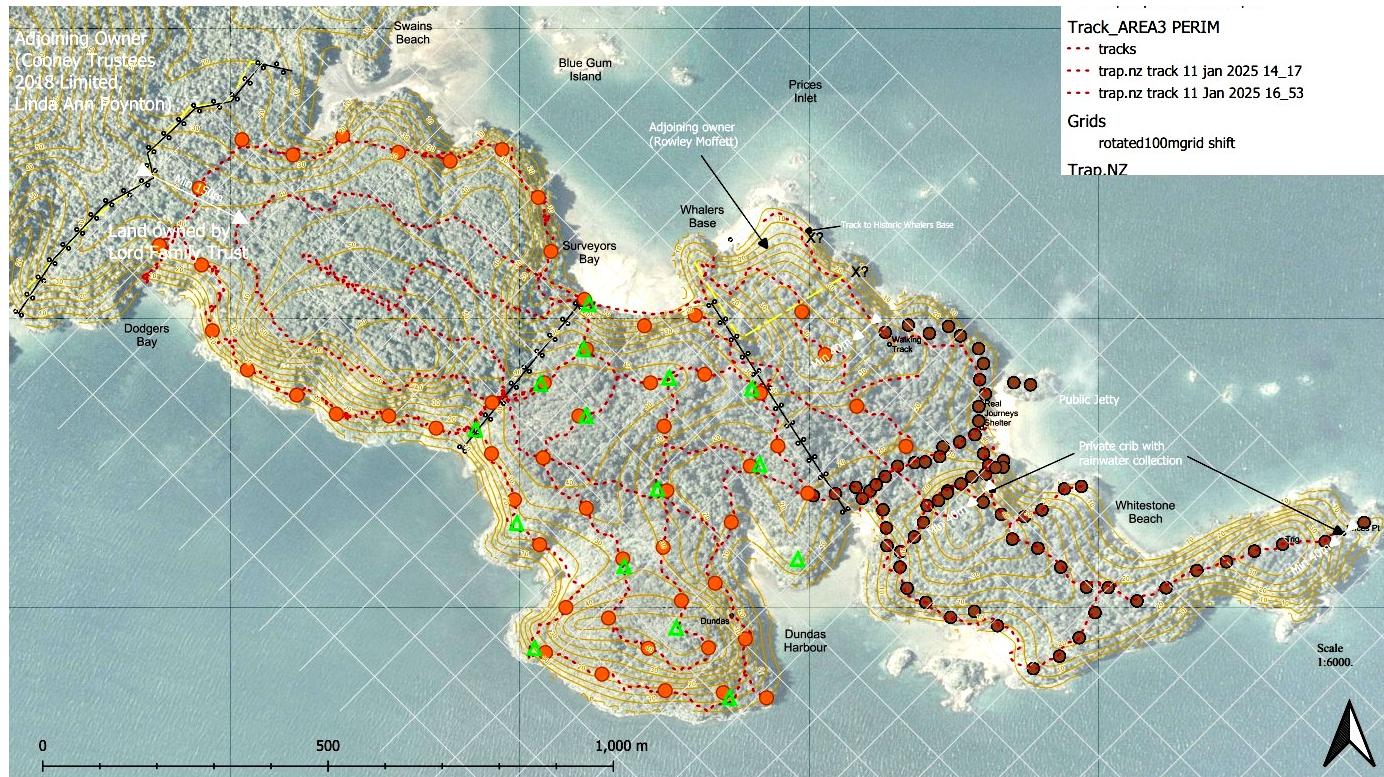


Pregnant cat caught 2024. It's large tummy prompted Jenni and Marcia to investigate what it had been eating and they made this discovery!



New Track Cutting

Tracks are essential for being able to distribute traps and bait devices around the property, so a huge number of hours have been spent over this summer developing routes and making them easily walked. This work has been carried out by a combination of Andy and Jenni, Andy Marshall, a number of volunteers , and our contractor, James Ware, of HMB.



A serendipitous outcome of these new tracks is a whole new appreciation of the Millars Beach property! We have discovered beautiful coastal vistas and outlooks, stunning stands of rimu, a wonderful variety of types of bush. We have stumbled over kiwi. We have not calculated the distance of all the new tracks but it will be quite a few kms! (see pics on next page for some new views)

New Trap Installations

The new generation of automatic self re-setting traps (NZ Autotraps) are "AT520's". We still need more, but the available funding allowed the purchase of 15 and all are being deployed in Area 2. (Previously not trapped at all). Installation is almost done - just another couple of days' work. Part of this work included installing radio aerials on a couple of prominent high points. The two key guys from "FTP Solutions", the company providing this product, came to Millars for 2 days to set up and train us in setting up these new devices. We still have the second part of the training to do - how to access, download and view the data in real time. (This will be done by zoom meeting quite soon). However, as soon as they were set up, they were busy knocking off big fat possums and rats immediately! The new devices are different in that they have:

- A much more powerful battery
- A radio antenna
- A solar panel
- A camera which records the animal interacting with the trap



Baiting in Area 2 and 3

The Environment Southland support is specifically for baiting. We have almost finished installing 100x new "Philproof" bait tunnels, which will be used for a "pulse baiting" operation. Ie Prefeed will be put out, then toxin, for a short period (eg 3 weeks) then all removed. At a later stage, we may do another 'pulse' bait operation - all the devices will be left installed so all that hard work will have been done. These bait stations can only be accessed by possums and rats. James, our contractor, will be doing this work.



Routine Trapping and Baiting in Area 1

Area 1 has a large number (approx. 60) single-kill devices (about 5x different types) plus about 18 self resetting AT220s, along with about 80 bait tunnels. These have all been checked once a month since being established in Nov-December 2023, by a combination of James, and Andy/Jenni. These are all on our TrapNZ platform, with all checks and catches noted to enable data analysis from time to time. We noticed an increase in rats over this summer, which coincided with observations from other people in the Bay - a bit of a mast year, possibly encouraged by the extraordinary rata bloom we had. (The most brilliant for many, many years, and stayed out for more than 6 weeks). The most recent round we did was around the 25 of Feb 2025.

Volunteer Support

As well as wider family members, this summer, a number of cruising yachts have again called in at Millars Beach (specially in February) and as usual we have made some lovely friends. They all quickly hear about the Project, and several crews have rolled their sleeves up to work some long days on track cutting and trap distribution. These volunteers have included Rex and Diana, Dave and Helen, from England (yacht "Grace"), Cyril and Janine from Whangarei (yacht "Attitude") and John and Sue, from Invercargill, (launch "Topaz")

Emergent Challenges

- Wasps have been a nuisance this summer. They swarm on carcasses and even on bait in live cat traps. Andy got several stings. They seem to be fading off though by the end of Feb. We now have bee gloves and headgear and a range of powder and sprays (see left hand pic below. Wasps ate the entire other half of this dead rat!)
- Deer numbers seem to be high, and none have been shot this summer. Their impact on the under-growth is quite alarming. We are considering how we can promote hunting in a safe way to try and impact on the numbers. Jenni is the Person I/C of issuing hunting permits, and her phone no is on all the posters on the property etc.
- Jenni has carried out a spraying mission right round the property, focussed on thistles and ragwort which pop up in all the grassy areas.
- We caught 3 (pregnant) cats in the spring, and only one more over summer.



Networking

As a result of several opportunities (some face to face, some by zoom), we have connected with folk from several other projects, including Shane (the employed pest manager at The Neck), Sircet (the urban Stewart Is project), and Bluff Hill / Motupohue (a very well established project - David Swan there has been extremely helpful). Overall we feel we are very much part of a community of people rolling their sleeves up and just getting on with trying to have a positive impact.

Website

We are in contact with Te Ara Polytech to get some free help making our website a bit more snazzy. The main purpose of that is so anyone who stumbles across it will be so impressed they will feel inspired to donate!

www.millarsbeach.org

Next Steps

Our goal is to work towards heavy predator suppression in a way that is sustainable in terms of both cost and time in order to allow birdlife to thrive. To achieve this we will need considerably more AT520's for coverage that will keep on top of rats and possums, but a lot of the infrastructure (specially tracks and bait stations) is now in place.

Want to be involved?

We need help with hunting, purchasing more traps, volunteer time, or advice on possible funding streams—we would love to hear from you!

