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2012 Bird Count

Quails on Quail Island

Nick Allen has been monitoring birds on Quail Island since March, 2001. On 17th and 18th March, 2012, Nick was on the island again to carry out the annual bird count. He walked three transects and made a detailed count of birds seen and heard at different times of the day. Nick comments that the Californian quail seem to be in higher numbers than ever before.

The island was named by Captain William Mein Smith, the first European recorded to have visited the island, after the many native quail, koreke, he found there. "Its extinction around 1875 is thought to have been brought about by it being widely taken as food, the widespread burning of native grasslands and the introduction of mammalian predators" (*Otamahua/Quail Island – a Link with the Past*, p.15). What a pity that the native quail no longer exist to enjoy the habitat on the island today.

As well as the transect walks, Nick does five minute bird counts in four habitat types and calculates the percentage of the total count found in each site.

Nick reported that no pheasants or New Zealand pigeons were seen or heard but feathers of both species were seen, probably freshly moulted. Both species were likely to be inconspicuous due to moult.

He said that bellbird numbers seem to have increased, but there were lower than expected numbers of goldfinch, silvereve and fantail which were badly affected by snows in the previous winter. Goldfinch numbers may have declined due to increased thistle control. No introduced coastal birds were seen.

Two Caspian terns were seen together near King Billy Island and were an uncommon sight in the harbour.

The Trust is fortunate to have the data that Nick provides and he is to be thanked for his time and expertise.

The table below shows the variety and frequency of birds found on the transect walks.

	Abundant >50	Common 15—50	Occasional <15	
Native land birds	Silver eye	Welcome Swallow Grey Warbler	Australasian Harrier Kingfisher	Fantail Bellbird
Introduced land birds	Californian Quail Goldfinch	Rock Pigeon Chaffinch Greenfinch Starling	Skylark Dunnock Blackbird Song Thrush	Australian Magpie House Sparrow Redpoll Yellowhammer
Native coastal birds	Pied Oystercatcher	Little Shag Variable Oystercatcher Black-backed Gull	Pied Shag Spotted Shag White-faced Heron Pied Stilt	White-fronted Tern Caspian Tern Red-billed Gull



Native Quail, Koreke, *Coturnix novaeseelandiae*



Californian Quail, *Callipepla californica*

The Team 2012

Allan Williams Patron

Ian McLennan Chairman
Secretary and Treasurer to be appointed.

Ian MacDonald Forest and Bird Representative.

John Lewis Ngati Wheke Representative

Peter Anderson Trustee.

Mike Bowie Trustee.

Ross Cullen Trustee.

Colin Meurk Trustee.

Tom Veitch Trustee.

Grant Campbell DoC.

Colin Burrows Advisor.

James Ross Adviser.

Tina Troup Advisor.

Marieke Lettink Advisor.

Laura Molles Advisor.

Nick Allen Bird counts

Bev MacDonald Newsletter editor.

Skry Adamson Web site manager.

Barbara Price Administrator

Ken Bain Auditor.

Peter Hayward Trust employee.

Tony Giles Trust employee.

Silver Tussock, *Poa cita*.

Colin Burrows.



Silver tussock was about the most abundant plant on Otamahua/Quail Island in 1850. Its 50cm tufts would have been a fine sight, en masse. During the farming era on the island (1852-1986) it was gradually supplanted by plantations of pines, cypresses and oaks and by the development of dense pasture grassland. Silver tussock is hardly ever eaten by stock, but cannot compete with other dense, tall grass swards. By 1997 its presence on the island was reduced to scattered individuals or patches, mostly on dry hill-slopes and near rock outcrops.

To prevent further losses of this grass we have been transplanting the tussocks from areas being planted in trees to permanently open sites. There is often a problem of growth of broadleaved weeds like Californian thistles, or annual brome grasses among the tussock patches. More recently we have set out to develop an extensive tussock area on the Summit Ridge. Large tussocks are divided into small pieces with a few leaves attached to the base with a few roots. These are placed in 2.5l pots filled with potting soil and grown from May-June until late spring when they are big enough to plant out. Ultimately, instead of weeds growing among them we hope to place native turf species in the intertussock spaces.

The common name is not very apt-sometimes, from a distance, in sunlight, the living and dead leaves look silvery but the tussocks are green, striped with light brown dead leaves. The generic name *Poa* is from a Greek word that simply means "grass". The specific name *cita* means "fast-growing". The genus *Poa* has a diverse range of species in this country and *P. cita* is one of the largest, commonest and hardiest. Worldwide there are thousands of *Poa* species. All have leaves with their tips shaped like the prow of a canoe but very few are tussock grasses. The genus name is also used as a base for the family to which all grasses belong, *Poaceae*.

Photos taken by Ian MacDonald

Demand High for Safe Accommodation on Quail Island.

Mike Bowie, Ecology Department, Lincoln University.

During a recent visit to the island I decided to check on how the tree weta were doing in their motels. To my surprise I found six tree weta and some of these were immature - so it appears that the weta are breeding even in the presence of mice. Fortunately our trusty regular volunteers Andrew and Bernice have been trapping mice around the weta area to enhance their survival. Weta can cohabit with other invertebrates including black darkling beetles (*Artystona rugiceps*), the endemic Banks Peninsula cockroach (*Celatoblatta peninsularis*), millipedes, possibly the Banks Peninsula endemic *Icosidesmus schenkeli* and springtails (*Collembola*). For the first time on the island I found some Canterbury gecko in the weta motels. One gecko was sharing a motel with an adult tree weta. It is very likely that the geckos are seeking safe refuges such as narrow cracks in rocks and weta motels to avoid predation by mice.

Photos taken by Mike Bowie

Darkling beetles in motel.



Banks Peninsula cockroaches, millipedes and springtails sharing a motel.



Canterbury gecko sharing motel with an adult tree weta.



Stone Walls Exposed.



The Department of Conservation has removed the long grass and trimmed overgrown macrocarpa trees to expose the beautiful dry stone walls that line the hospital terraces.

“ A group of prisoners was brought over to Quail and Ripapa Islands by launch, each morning at 8.30am and returned to Lyttelton at 3.00pm. The stone from the rhyolite quarry, overlooking Walker’s Beach, was worked by the prisoners to construct the stone walls behind the site of the leper colony and along the foreshore at Whakamaru Beach.

The task of constructing the individual blocks for the walls must have been physically hard, time-consuming work. After the rocks had been dislodged by explosive charges, they were hammered to the approximate size, before the lengthy task of cornering and facing the blocks with cold chisel began. The stones were transported by horse and dray to the site of wall construction, where finishing touches were added to fit the blocks into the wall in jigsaw fashion.

The stone walls are an excellent example of the skill that once existed in the craft of stone masonry in the Canterbury Province. Prisoners also carried out much of the track and terrace construction work that features in the island’s landscape today.”

The “Hard Labour Gang” built many of the man-made features that still exist and which are now considered of historical value. (From *Otamahua/Quail Island-A Link with the Past p.44.*)

In 1907 there were plans for a prison on the island but the establishment of the leper colony was one of the main reasons the prison never eventuated.

Photos taken by Ian MacDonald

Trust News.

On Tuesday, 29 May, Ian McLennan, Barbara Price, Colin Meurk, Ian and Bev MacDonald representing the Trust, met with the Mayor, Bob Parker at the Hilltop Hotel, to sign a Memorandum of Understanding. This document outlines an agreement between the two organisations and is important as it gives the Trust City Council funding for the next three years.

The Trust is losing the services of two Trustees. Andrew Luddington is resigning as a Trustee. Andrew was responsible for the management of the Trust boat. Ross Cullen is going to Norway. Ross was responsible for researching and implementing the bird watering sites on the island and designing and supervising the recent visitor survey as well as being secretary. Both will be missed.

The Trust is being joined by James Ross who is the Senior Lecturer in Wildlife Management and Biometrics at Lincoln University. Much of his research work has been in the development of new pest-control technologies so his expertise will be of great assistance to Mike Bowie in the continuing pest control on the island.

Andrew Luddington assisting with the siting of the summit information panels.



Ross Cullen planting on the island.



Mayor Bob Parker and Ian McLennan signing the M o U.



Visitors to the Island.



Students from the Institute for Study Abroad at Butler University in Indianapolis, USA, came to the island on 18th March, toured the plantings and cleaned up rubbish on Walkers Beach. Kylie Fitzgerald from IFSA organised the visit as a break from their studies at Canterbury University.

News from Volunteers.

Ian Jury and his wife Carol have moved to Mudgee in New South Wales, where Carol has accepted a midwifery position in the hospital. Ian was a familiar face not only on Quail Island, but on other restoration projects such as Barnett Park and Southshore Spit. We will miss Ian's enormous knowledge of native plants and animals. We wish Ian and Carol well.

Andrew "Trapper" Luddington has been a volunteer for the past 4 1/2 years, working on the island every Monday and Tuesday with Tony, Peter and Bernice. Andrew has decided that he needs to devote more time to his farming business. He has dedicated an enormous number of hours to the project, and we will miss his input and good humour.

Work Days for June and July 2012. August Planting Days.

Workdays will continue on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month in June and July.
Planting will take place every Saturday and Sunday in August.

As usual, to join a group, **you must book in with - Ian McLennan** e-mail id.mclennan@xtra.co.nz
phone 3845 338

Mosses on Quail Island-Bryony Macmillan

Canterbury Botanical Society arranged a visit to Quail Island on 20 November, 2011, to record bryophytes (mosses and liverworts). We were very grateful that Dr Allan Fife, Landcare Research, Lincoln, joined the group and to Colin Burrows who led us to the most suitable sites.

Allan Fife writes:

My sense of the Quail Island bryoflora is that it is depauperate and strongly influenced by drought and/or extremely free-draining soils. The upper elevation rock outcrops lack the more mesic and shaded sites that occur at higher elevations on the nearby Port Hills. The vegetated areas appear not to have yet accumulated the organic debris that will, in time, allow additional species to establish. Undoubtedly assiduous searching of the island would permit the addition of some species to this list. However, the additions would be relatively few and not change the overall impression of a depauperate flora composed of opportunistic species.

It is likely that a visit earlier in the spring might have found some "ephemeral" species (such as the hepatic *Targionia*, and mosses in the Pottiaceae and Funariaceae) that may have already disappeared this season. I would also expect some more epilithic species (e.g. *Racomitrium*, *Schistidium*, and *Grimmia* spp.) on rock outcrops; more turf-forming species (e.g. species of *Brachythecium* such as *B. albicans*) in more mesic sites; and probably more soil-inhabiting species of such genera as *Bryum*, *Ditrichum*, and *Fissidens* generally to be present on the island. Perhaps these would be more obvious in winter or early spring.

The most obvious species on the island were the mosses *Eurhynchium praelongum*, *Hypnum cupressiforme*, *Thuidium furfursum*, and *Triquetrella papillata* and the hepatic *Chiloscyphus semiteres*. *Camptochaete pulvinata* and *Weissia* cf. *controversa* var. *gymnostoma* were very abundant on the S-facing soil banks beside the track above the wharf.

I collected very little and have sent my material of the *Weissia* (which I named as *W. controversa* var. *gymnostoma*) from the track margin above the wharf to Jessica Beever, for her opinion. I regret that I did not collect the purported *Fissidens* cf. *taylori* for checking.

Allan Fife 22 Nov. 2011.

List compiled from field determinations by Allan Fife with a few additions:

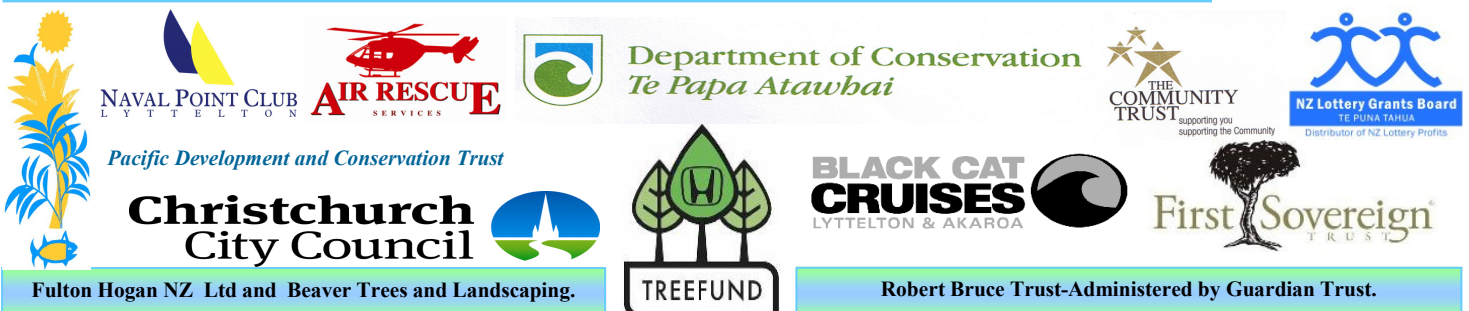
Mosses

Acrocladium chlamydothecium
Brachythecium rutabulum
Bryum billardierei
Bryum campylothecium
Camptochaete pulvinata
Campylopus clavatus
Campylopus introflexus
Ceratodon purpureus
Ditrichum cylindricarpum
Eurhynchium praelongum
Fissidens cf. *taylori*

Acknowledgements.

Lyttelton Port of Christchurch Continues to Support the Trust.

Lyttelton Port of Christchurch (LPC) is committed to supporting the local community. A long-term sponsor of Otamahua/Quail Island Ecological Restoration Trust, LPC provides transport to take the plants to the island and a grant which contributes to the cost of maintaining the Quail boat which is essential for transporting the workers to the island. LPC is proud to support the Trust in its work of ecorestoration on the island.



Robert Bruce Trust-Administered by Guardian Trust.

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