

Friends of Lord Howe Island

Newsletter No.48

Winter 2019



Friends members, from the time of the first investigation into rodent eradication on Lord Howe Island in 2001, have been interested in the progress, which has been documented in the Friend's newsletters. Today 8 June 2019 is a very historic day for Lord Howe Island - the helicopters flew and distributed bait pellets across most of the southern mountain areas. A good window of weather has allowed several days of light winds for the flying operations, and minimal rain forecast means the baits will remain intact for the required time for rodents to find and consume before they break down. As an adjunct to the aerial baiting, ground teams have been busy positioning 21,000 bait stations around the settlement and in houses. Already the rustling in the forest at night, and footsteps in the rooves have ceased.

In this issue:

- 1 - Historical day for Lord Howe Island
- 2 - 3 Restoring Paradise - a revue of feral eradications on Lord Howe Island.
- 4 - Infographic on the Rodent Eradication Project
- 5 - Seabirds remarkable recovery on Lundy Island
- 6 - Oceanview
- 7 - Weed dating in Melbourne
- 8 - Recent bird sightings.



One of the two helicopters spreading baits on Intermediate Hill



Above - boxes of bait pellets arrived by the Island Trader ship on 12th April.

Left: Two helicopters, with very experienced New Zealand pilots will spread baits across the forest and cliff areas of the Island over just a two or three day period. This will be repeated some two weeks later. Ground baiting in the settlement will continue for about two months.

Restoring Paradise *Predator free Lord Howe Island*

While the rest of the world ponders over the recent news that a million species globally are facing extinction from human activities (see end story *), Lord Howe Island is getting ready to celebrate the success of 40 years protecting its unique species by removing the last introduced feral mammal pests.

Wherever humans have settled islands, they have brought their domestic animals along, and Lord Howe Island is no exception. Early sailors put pigs and goats onto the island for food; the settlers brought farm animals and domestic animals- horses, cats, dogs. The worst feral mammal to arrive was the Black rat, *Rattus rattus*, that got onto the island in 1918 with an incident involving the cargo ship Makambo. Rats quickly multiplied and wreaked havoc with the wildlife – within ten years of arriving the rats had eaten five landbirds into extinction, later two plant species and a number of invertebrates have disappeared.



In the 1970's, environmental surveys identified the damage being done to the island's flora and fauna species through introduced mammals – pigs, cats, dogs, goats and rodents. Of particular imminent danger was the possible extinction of the endemic flightless bird, the Woodhen. Once thriving all over the island, this bird was at that time confined to just 20 individuals surviving on the lofty summits of the 875-metre-high mountains in the cool, damp mist forest. National Parks ornithologist Dr Ben Miller and Island ranger Paul Beaumont confirmed that the wild pigs introduced in the 1800's for food, were digging up the nest and eating eggs and chicks of the Woodhen; wild and domestic cats were eating Woodhens and some dogs killing them. So, in 1980 the conservation story began for Lord Howe Island – the rescue of

the Woodhen. The island men shot 180 wild pigs in the mountains, rangers trapped about eighty feral cats, and dogs were tightly controlled. In 1982 a ban on domestic acts was introduced, with a grandfather clause that allowed anyone with a pet cat to keep it until it died its natural life, if it was desexed.

As part of the rescue program, funding of \$250,000 was raised by the newly formed National Parks Foundation and a captive breeding program was carried out on the island. Three pairs of Woodhens were whisked off the summit of Mount Gower by helicopter, to a breeding facility built for the purpose. New Zealander Glen Fraser looked after the Woodhen pairs, and helped them raise 93 Woodhens that were released around the island. With the environment now predator-free the Woodhens quickly began breeding with the others left in the wild, and after five years the population of Woodhens was about 300. At the time this was the most successful captive bird breeding program in the world.

As a result of removing these feral pests the birdlife has had a dramatic increase. Black noddy and Little shearwater seabirds that had been pushed off the island earlier by cats have come back to breed by 1990; Sooty tern seabirds are breeding in hundreds on the beaches where they hadn't been seen for over 100 years, Providence petrel seabirds have been increasing their range each year to re-colonise former breeding areas across the island

In 1999 a team of New Zealand hunters were employed to remove wild goats that had also been put on the island by early sailors. Over a three-month period, the team, with locals, removed 384 goats. The recovery in plant life has been remarkable since these browsing goats have been removed.



In 2002 the LHI Board turned to investigating the feasibility of removing rodents from the island. At the time techniques had been developed to carry this out on islands around the world, led by concerns in New Zealand that the only way to

save their endemic land birds was to remove feral pests from offshore islands and place the birds there. Over the next seven years a draft plan was prepared to carry out a rodent eradication on Lord Howe Island, using the experience and science from what had been achieved around the world since 1980 when the process was pioneered. Funding for the Lord Howe Island project was received from State and Federal governments in 2012, and over the past 7 years the plan has been fine tuned.

And 2019 is the culmination of this work, not just the 17 years planning for Lord Howe Island, but the science and experience from 40 years eradications around the world. Many of the islands completed so far have been much larger than Lord Howe Island – for example sub Antarctic Campbell Island (8 times the size of LHI), Macquarie Island (10 times the size of LHI) and South Georgia.



Baits will be distributed by helicopter (left) over mountains and cliffs; and via bait stations (right) in the settlement area.

At this very time, winter 2019, the world's experts in carrying out these projects are assembled at Lord Howe Island, and with locals, and other Australian workers are beginning the final stage of the long conservation project - carrying out the rodent removal operation.

For the project supporters, both locals, mainland conservationists and regular holidaymakers to the island this is a very exciting time. In the settlement area small black bait stations have been laid out on a ten-metre grid across the

ground by a team of 50. These will have bait pellets placed in from 22 May, and topped up once a week for two months. The rugged mountain and cliff areas away from the settlement will have bait pellets carefully delivered by helicopter in June or July. This operation will only take a day or two, twice at fortnightly intervals.



The Lord Howe Island White-eye and phasmid - just two of the species to benefit from the rodent eradication project.

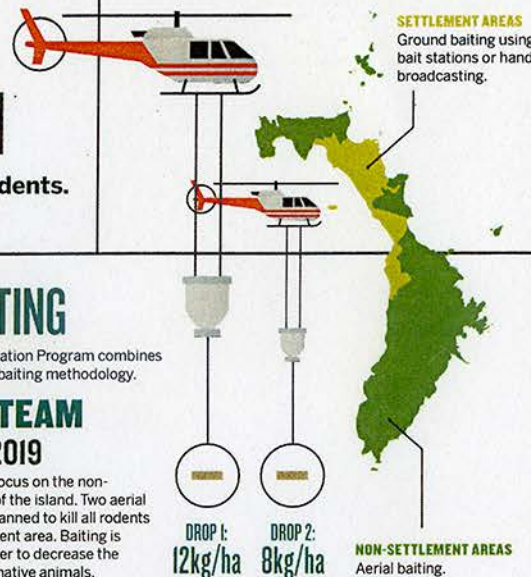
Over 600 islands around the world have had feral animals removed for conservation purposes, but most are in remote oceans and not accessible to the general public.

This is a unique opportunity for anyone to witness one of the great conservation projects of the world. The benefits into the future with a rodent free island are almost unimageable, but it is expected all birds will increase, plant life will flourish, along with lizards, beetles, snails and other invertebrates eaten by rodents for 100 years. During the 2019 winter period you can visit and learn about this conservation triumph, there are conservation activities to join in, and special lectures by the professionals who have carried out similar projects on islands around the world.

"We are witnessing the loss of biodiversity at rates never before seen in human history. Nearly a million species face extinction if we do not fundamentally change our relationship with the natural world, according to the world's largest assessment of biodiversity. In a process involving 500 biodiversity experts from over 50 countries, 134 governments negotiated the final form of the Global Assessment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Human activity severely threatens biodiversity and ecosystem functions worldwide. About 1 million species are facing extinction. If nothing changes many of these could be gone within just decades."

LORD HOWE ISLAND RODENT ERADICATION PROGRAM

The largest populated island to undertake a full scale eradication of rodents.
What does it take for an operation of this magnitude to be successful?



LESS THAN
1.2KG
28000 BAIT STATIONS
Used across the settlement area.

2100ha
OF SURFACE AREA TO BE BAIED

1 PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION 2001

Mice and rats are responsible for the extinction of at least 5 endemic bird species and 13 invertebrate species since 1918. Inaction will threaten the unique biodiversity values on which World Heritage listing is based.



150 000 MICE **210 000** RATS

House mice (*Mus musculus*) arrived on Lord Howe Island before 1860. Black rats (*Rattus rattus*) were introduced in 1918 when the ship *SS Makambo* ran aground.

Lord Howe Island phasmid:
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

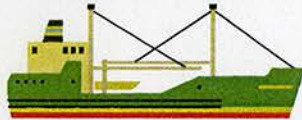


70+ THREATENED SPECIES IMPACTED BY RODENTS

Including the world's rarest insect, the Lord Howe Island phasmid. Thought to be extinct since 1920, it was rediscovered on a rodent-free island in the Lord Howe Island Group in 2001.

2 PLANNING, LOGISTICS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SEP 2017-APR 2019

Located 775km off the coast of Sydney, Lord Howe Island's remote location means the project requires extensive planning and logistics management, in conjunction with broad and ongoing community engagement to ensure the greatest possible chance of success.



1 SUPPLY SHIP

Most of the equipment and materials needed for the project will be shipped by the *Island Trader*.

8 CORE PROJECT CREW
Responsible for project planning and logistic management.



3 BAITING

The Rodent Eradication Program combines aerial and ground baiting methodology.

AERIAL TEAM JUN/JUL 2019

Aerial baiting will focus on the non-settlement areas of the island. Two aerial applications are planned to kill all rodents in the non-settlement area. Baiting is scheduled for winter to decrease the risk to non-target native animals.

2 AS350 HELICOPTERS USING BAIT SPREADING BuckETS

Each helicopter is equipped with a flight line Global Positioning System (GPS), recording accurate flight lines to ensure bait is applied with 100% coverage. Use of deflector buckets will minimise bait in the marine environment.

2 AERIAL BAIT APPLICATIONS 3-5 days each, 14-21 days apart. Scheduled for June/July 2019.

2 HELICOPTER PILOTS Highly skilled with experience flying in challenging conditions.

8 AERIAL SUPPORT CREW One helicopter engineer, one GIS officer, one loading supervisor, and five bait loaders.



DROP 1:
12kg/ha

DROP 2:
8kg/ha

GROUND TEAM MAY-OCT 2019

Bait stations will be placed throughout the settlement area, with hand broadcasting in areas between bait stations and aerial areas.

50 GROUND BAITING CREW To place bait stations, monitor bait stations and to hand broadcast bait.



4 MONITORING & CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT APR 2019-AUG 2021

6 CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT CREW Up to 85% of woodhens and 50-60% of currawongs will be housed during baiting by the Taronga Zoo team, who provide specialist care for the birds during the monitoring phase.



6 SPECIALLY TRAINED DOG TEAMS Two permanent biosecurity dogs and their handlers will monitor rodent activity. Specially trained rodent detection dogs and their handlers will also be used after the baiting.

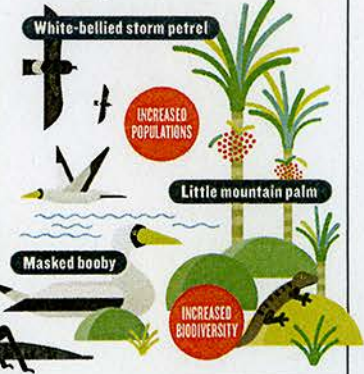


Intensive rodent monitoring will occur for two years, followed by ongoing biosecurity monitoring. If no rodents are detected two years after the initial eradication the project will be deemed a success.



5 OUTCOMES AUG 2021

- ✓ Increased biodiversity.
- ✓ Enhanced world heritage values.
- ✓ Removal of rodenticide from Lord Howe Island permanently.
- ✓ Removal of domestic rodent impacts and related health concerns.
- ✓ Increased numbers and breeding success for birds such as the Kermadec petrel, masked booby and white-bellied storm petrel.
- ✓ Increased seeds and seedlings for numerous plant species including the critically endangered little mountain palm.
- ✓ Recovery of endemic ground lizards and invertebrates such as land snails.
- ✓ Reintroduction of the world's rarest insect, the Lord Howe Island phasmid.
- ✓ Long term benefits to tourism and the island's economy through improved visitor experience.



TIMELINE

PROGRAM BUDGET:
\$10.5 MILLION



LORD HOWE ISLAND
RODENT ERADICATION PROJECT



PROGRAM PARTNERS



Seabirds treble on Lundy after island is declared rat free

RSPB study shows rats culling favoured nesting of puffins and shearwaters

For years, they were the scourge of seabirds seeking to nest on Lundy. But since rats were expunged from the island off the coast of Devon 15 years ago, the seabird population has trebled to 21,000 birds.

Puffins have increased from 13 birds in 2001 to 375, while the population of Manx shearwaters has risen from 297 pairs to 5,504, according to a study led by the RSPB.

Black and brown rats, which arrived on Lundy as stowaways on ships, preyed upon the eggs and chicks of ground-nesting seabirds, particularly the burrow-nesting puffins and shearwaters. Between 2002 and 2004, the non-native rats were eradicated – a project opposed by some animal rights groups, who argued that conservationists were favouring tourist-friendly birds over the rats.

Since Lundy was declared rat-free in 2006, its seabird populations have bounced back, as they have on other small islands when invasive predators introduced by humans have been removed.

There were more than 3,500 pairs of puffins in 1939 but fewer than 10 pairs in 2000, with fewer sand eels in the surrounding seas as well as the rats contributing to their decline. While 75% of the global population of Manx shearwaters breed on British islands, Lundy's population by the turn of the century was far lower than its potential, and much less than on nearby islands such as Skokholm, where 350,000 pairs nest.

Dean Jones, the warden on Lundy, which is managed by the Landmark Trust, said: "It is exciting to see this level of recovery in Manx shearwaters, one of our most important seabirds. In spring the island comes alive at night with the sound of these amazing birds. The increases in puffins, guillemots and razorbills is also very encouraging for the future of seabirds on Lundy and we are maintaining our vigilance to ensure rats cannot return to the island."

Helen Booker, senior conservation officer for RSPB in south-west England said: "This study clearly shows how quickly and positively seabirds respond to the removal of non-native predators. Of course, we had anticipated major population increases when the project was launched, but the scale of this recovery has far exceeded our expectations."



A recent study found that nearly 10% of the world's bird, mammal, amphibian and reptile species currently on the brink of extinction could be saved by culling invasive mammals such as cats and rats on 169 islands.

On British islands, rat eradication programmes have been successfully completed on the Shiant Islands in the Hebrides and on St Agnes and Gugh in the Isles of Scilly, with seabird populations subsequently bouncing back.

But rat eradication programs have been controversial with some animal rights activists, who have argued that the black rat, although not native to Britain, is one of the country's most endangered mammals.

We should also see spectacular seabird recovery after removal of rodents from Lord Howe Island, particularly the smaller seabirds.

The June group tour will be staying at Oceanview - one of the first guest-houses on Lord Howe Island. Here is a little history of Oveanview.



When the Burns Philp Company established a steamer trade between Sydney, Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island in 1893 it began a passenger service to Norfolk Island to supplement the cargo carrying trade. Passengers were occasionally offered a 24-hour respite at Lord Howe Island when sea conditions delayed the discharge of cargo. The passengers were captivated the island's natural charm and the hospitality of the residents. These short sojourns prompted Burns Philp to quietly promote Lord Howe Island as a holiday destination. The Nichols family built the first guesthouse, Pinetrees, in 1900.

In 1909 Gower and Ada Wilson opened their home to visitors. By 1913 Ocean View was an established guesthouse catering for seven guests. However, a year later the outbreak of WWI disrupted the fledgling industry. After the war Ocean View was extended to include double and single rooms, in bungalows known as *Do-Drop-In*, *Venture-In* and *Astor Flats*.

Amenities were basic before the introduction of electricity, gas and refrigerators. Pit toilets were erected in the bush, ice chests ran on kerosene, pressure lamps provided lighting and chip heaters were used for hot water. However what guests lacked in modern conveniences was far outweighed by the hospitality of their hosts. Daily activities included fishing trips and aquaplaning on the Ocean View launch *Venture*. There were reef walks mountain hikes picnics, barbecues and tennis parties. The dining room was renowned for tables of home cooking. Vegetables fruit, cream, butter, poultry, beef and pork were all locally produced. Islanders were invited to mingle with guests at a weekly dance night hosted

alternatively between Ocean View and Pinetrees. On these evening patrons were entertained by an island orchestra, while their hosts served a seemingly endless supply of supper, cigarettes, liquor and soft drinks – all on the house.

In 1933 the guesthouse added the luxury of electricity when they installed their own generator. When Gower Wilson was lost at sea in 1936, management of Ocean View passed to his eldest daughter Eileen and her husband Tasman Douglass. Gower's son Allen and Roy took over the business after World War II. Allen and his wife Eve ran the business and Roy built his own guest house Leanda Lei in the early 1970's. As Allen and Eve's sons Kevin and John grew up, they took a more active role in the management and running of the business. In the 1980's the cost of hiring and accommodating kitchen and restaurant staff became too great and the family closed the kitchen and converted the rooms into self-contained flats. Today Kevin, his wife Sue and their children Chad, Kelly with their spouses continue to run the business.

In 1936, a young lady called Lily Dunn stayed as guest at Oceanview. While she was there she wrote a diary, and this was donated to the Lord Howe Island Museum a few years ago.

Here is one days entry from this diary.

Tuesday

Breakfast - fish and potatoes. porridge - scones.

After breakfast lounge - pianola - rain - hoping for the best,

Lunch - sausages and vegetables; quinces and junket (cream)

Afternoon - mountaineering - climbed Mt. Malabar - lookouts - wonderful view of whole island - Admiralty Is. - Cathedral Rock - farms - beaches - sea - spiders - ferns - bird nest ferns - rock lilies - moss and lichens.

No afternoon tea.

*Dinner baked meat and vegetables
cherry pie and cream (oranges)*

*After dinner, moonlight walk with Gower to visit Mrs Wilson - pianola - Clive - return - monotony plus!
more photos by moonlight - wonderful moonlight etc.*

Weed dating - the new way for Melbourne's singles to get dirty

For those who feel love has led them up the garden path, there's still hope, with Melbourne singles now pulling weeds to find romance.

Forget Tinder, weed dating is the latest way to get lonely hearts mingling, thanks to Emily Connors, who brought the idea to Melbourne after learning of similar events in the US.



Singles pulling weeds together at CERES, in Brunswick East.

Ms Connors is chief farmer at Joe's Market Garden, and plays cupid at a monthly event at Brunswick East's CERES urban farm.

The event draws an average of 15 love seekers keen to put their green thumbs to work.

"It's just another way of bringing people outside and experiencing what it's like to be on an open farm," Ms Connors said.

While some are keen for love to bloom, others just want to cultivate a connection in a relaxed space.

"It's another way of providing that for people that might be feeling disconnected or isolated," Ms Connors said.

Weed daters are on average between 20-35 but plans are under way to broaden its appeal to older groups.

According to Ms Connors, the odds of a connection being formed at each event, whether for dating or friendship, are about 60 per cent. It helps that people are drawn together by common interests.

"There wouldn't be people here that just don't like to get dirty," Ms Connors said.

Once the work is done, the gardeners gather under a fig tree for a lunch cooked using produce from the garden.

"It's another way of people sitting down and meeting each other in an organic way - excuse the pun."

The weeders meet the second Sunday of every month with the next meeting on May 11.

Maybe we should be promoting the Lord Howe Island weed tours in the Melbourne newspapers!

Unusual bird sightings March to June 2019



In the first week of June a lone white fronted tern was seen flying off the Lagoon Beach. This photo captured by Pete Carr, one of the U.K. specialists here for the rodent eradication



On a couple of the pelagic trips that I do with Jack Shick, we saw this White-headed petrel half way between Lord Howe Island and Balls Pyramid

2019 WEED TRIPS

June 8 to 15 - Staying at Oceanview - FULL

August 24 to 31 to - staying at Somerset

7 places left

The June 2019 weeding ecotour is well attended - with 22 people participating in the week. Robert Coenraads is along to assist with this week and we expect to achieve a lot with such a big group.

The August trip has just seven places left; and this group will be based at Somerset.

Previous groups have stayed at Somerset and all enjoyed the hospitality there. Bill MacDonald will be along to assist with this week.



Friends of Lord Howe Island Newsletter compiled by
Ian Hutton PO Box 157 Lord Howe Island NSW 2898.
Email ian@ianhuttontours.com