

night's confinement in a cage very few of them reoffend.

'The experience seems to be a deterrent.'

Many unwanted pets get dumped in the area, but the team is on top of the wild cats now. Not so the mice, which constantly re-invade from surrounding suburbs and pastures. There's not much to be done except to leave them to the harrier and pukeko.

It's been a 20-year job for Forest and Bird, returning Pauatahanui from a dry, gorse wasteland to a vibrant ecosystem. And there's a long way to go yet, but the efforts of people like Stan Butcher and Ron Freeston have captured the surrounding communities — the Stout Trust financed the cottage, which was painted by the Whitby Lions, who also donated money and built a new track. The Porirua Licensing Trust donated landscaping materials;

Porirua City Council and the Greater Wellington regional council supply potting mix and gravels. Lotto grants built the barbecues. The latest grant has come from the Nature Heritage Fund; and so it goes on.

It's not just the birds coming back. Memorial trees line the driveway to the cottage. Beneath them, plaques recall the deceaseds' love of nature — or tranquillity — finding its ultimate expression here at Pauatahanui.

Stan Butcher has known there's something special about the place all along. He still gets a thrill when, each year, the godwits and knots return from their Arctic breeding grounds.


'It's a feeling,' he says. 'Something that keeps you hooked into the place.'

— DAVE HANSFORD is a photo-journalist with a particular interest in natural history.



The growth of housing subdivision above the shores of the Pauatahanui Inlet has changed the nature of the area, 30 kilometres north of Wellington. Run-off from the roads has had a particular effect on the health of the inlet, including the diminishing cockle beds.

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