



Matakohē/Limestone Island Rangers Monthly Report – September 2007

- We managed to get away for a few days with our two sons this month, skiing at Mt Ruapehu, which was great fun. Back on the island we have been fairly busy and typically for the modern world, still seemed to cram in a month's work despite having a week off!

Flora

- Kaka beak, Kowhai, clematis, manuka and Karo have all been flowering this month.



Kaka beak flowers

- North Tec Conservation Corps have been over helping to move flax and astelia from the northern quarry in preparation for the dredging work associated with the new all tide berth. The plants were all replanted closer to the shoreline out of harms way. The students also had time to help with staking trees in this year's planting sites.
- Pete has also been staking wind thrown Kowhai at the Molly Stevens site and trees in the petrel area.
- Weed spraying between showers has been topping the list, periwinkle being the main target. Mexican Devil is also beginning to flower. The tracking tunnels and pitfall traps have also been sprayed as part of their routine maintenance.

Kiwi

- We have been regularly checking on Glen and Baldrick, however they appear to have abandoned their egg, as sometimes happens. Emma from DoC came over and candled the egg – a light is shone through it to determine whether an embryo is developing. There was no embryo yet and the egg looked normal for a newly laid egg. At this stage of development artificial incubation of the egg is not usually successful. In consultation with DoC and Auckland Zoo it was decided that the best approach was to leave it in the hope that Glen would return.
- We had a very successful round up of juvenile kiwi with James Fraser and his dog Percy. We caught 8 birds in total, with 6 over 1200 gm and big enough for mainland release. Four of these birds were released on Saturday 15th September, at Kauri Mountain and McLeod Bay. Thank you to Damian for helping with the Saturday morning roundup. Special thanks to Te Ihi for blessing the birds as they left the island; we really appreciate the time taken out of your very busy schedule. Approximately 25 people attended the blessing.
- One of the birds caught was Wilson, who was named as a chick by the staff at **Golden Bay Cement**. Wilson is the offspring of Glen and Baldrick, hatched last November. She has grown well in the last 9 months and now weighs a respectable 1500 gm! Some of the GBC senior management had the opportunity to see her last week as we changed her transmitter. A special release of Wilson into the Whangarei Heads area is planned with GBC staff this coming Wednesday afternoon weather permitting.



'Wilson' taking it all in at the blessing on Saturday morning
great photo by Richard Drake

- Another bird caught was Sir Ed, a male who is now a 2 year old. In the process of monitoring him before release we discovered that he was sitting on an egg! In discussion with DoC, the egg has been collected to become part of the Operation Nest Egg programme (ONE) and will be artificially incubated at Auckland Zoo.

Fauna

- Spring has definitely sprung, with the arrival of dotterel eggs on the sand barge. A scrape with one egg was seen earlier this month, and two eggs are now present. The

birds are not yet sitting, though they are showing defensive behaviour. We assume sitting will start in earnest when the full clutch of three eggs is laid.

- The Caspian Terns are also gathering up on Knight Island, preparing for nesting. Pete noted the presence of at least one egg on his rounds last week.
- When visiting the island, take the time to check out the weta house, near the sign on School House track. Two female Tree Weta took up residence in the house very shortly after Pete put it up. Thanks to Gerry for providing the five star accommodation!
- We saw a magpie around the Managers House one day. It was the first time we have seen one on the island, but we haven't seen it since.
- A pod of about 10 dolphins were seen on two occasions playing around the island earlier in the month. A group of 15 – 20 Royal Spoonbills can still be seen feeding on the island shoreline especially at the Sandspit and down below the cottage on this side at times – they appear to be staying on a little later than last year.
- The Permit Applications for our upcoming lizard translocations have been made to DoC and the consultation paper work is almost complete. All going well we will have the official go ahead in time for the planned Shore Skink collection in November.

Predator Control

- North Tec Conservation Corps have been over twice this month, also helping with the south end bait stations. The group is smaller than usual for this semester but they worked well together to complete the job.
- The buffer zone is hotting up with 3 stoats and a rat caught this month. It seems early for stoats but Todd Hamilton (Landcare Trapper at the Heads) is also reporting stoat catches. This brings our tally in the buffer zone to 5 rats and 12 stoats for the year to date.
- On the island we caught a large male Norway rat on the southwestern shoreline this month. Our tally on the island is 2 rats, 0 stoats for the year to date. This time last year it was 4 rats and 3 stoats, hopefully we can maintain this trend!
- The new stainless steel DoC 200 stoat traps finally arrived this month after a long delay. Pete has made a start on fitting them in the boxes.

Visitors

- Thanks to Michelle who spent a full day on the island – reinstating the tracking tunnels and setting out plywood pads for the lizard work planned later this month.
- Maromaku School enjoyed a nice day on the island after initially postponing due to wet weather.
- Many thanks to the volunteers who turned out on Sunday. As always many hands make light work with larger trees in the new planting areas now staked and the petrel site all up to date. It never ceases to amaze me how much work a group of people can cheerfully get done in a few hours on the island! Thanks to Pam, Sheryl, Michelle and Jane from the committee who helped on the day. Almost forgot **Colin** who also came over for the afternoon (in the north for his 'tropical' winter holiday!) – he couldn't get over how much the trees had grown and how well they looked despite the winter storms.
- Park Care have also been over doing a great job weed eating the walking tracks.

General

- We have a newly born lamb on the island, mother and lamb both well.
- **Pub Charity** has generously provided \$30,000 towards the new tractor and front-end loader for the island. We have been very fortunate to have their support over recent years; providing funds for the new barge and now the tractor.
- The island also received two other donations this month; first a very nice book from Whangarei Native Forest and Bird Protection and secondly, a cash donation along with

30 cans of sardines and a life jacket from Glenbervie School who chose the island for their 'Sea Week' programme. Thankyou.

- This month we have made two Power Point presentations to community groups off island with another booked for the coming month. Great to see peoples interest and enthusiasm for the project.
- Last week we had a very 'interesting' phone call from two gentlemen with very broad Irish accents. They were actually phoning from Ireland, (found Matakohe-Limestone Island on the internet), wanting to know if they could purchase manuka seed from us. Turned out they were a couple of enterprising bee keepers who had discovered Manuka Honey and thought they might have a go at producing their own Irish version!

Up coming

- We have two interesting trips coming up this month. Cathy is off to Rotorua on a Kiwi Egg Candling course where she will learn how to judge the stage of development of the embryo by shining a bright light through the egg. Pete is off to the Land Care Research Sanctuaries workshop which has several papers directly relevant to current projects on the island including lizard monitoring, managing mice, seabird translocation, disease screening and measuring the success of ecosystem restoration.
- Several groups are also booked with the calendar starting to fill up after the wet winter season.
- **Volunteer Wednesday October 3rd**, pick up at 9 am, back around 1.30 pm after lunch, at this stage planning to continue with tree cutting in the ruins, bring loppers and secateurs if you have them.

Pete and Cathy



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