



## **Matakoho/Limestone Island Rangers Monthly Report – November 2007**

- Another month has flown past and Christmas is almost here not to mention the petrels! Cathy sat the final for her Avian Medicine paper this month achieving a mark of 90%; and it is nice to have her back again after all that study. Pete made a flying trip down to Wellington to pick up Matt our youngest, with a brief stop over at the Cape Kidnappers project in the Hawkes Bay, which was great. Among other things, he got an opportunity to see their seabird translocation site and a sound system that has recently been installed to call in passing birds.

### **Kiwi**

- Pete also attended the Kiwi Taxa Plan meeting this month. The management of kiwi in Northland is being reviewed for the next ten years. FOMLI has made a submission, indicating that the project is committed to providing a predator free environment and would like to continue as a crèche island, providing a safe habitat for young kiwi.
- Our two monitored males continue to sit tight on their eggs. Both clutches are due in mid December. Sir Ed has been sitting now for nearly two months – a great effort for a first time Dad.
- We have taken delivery of six chicks so far this season, taking the number of kiwi on the island up to 22.

### **Lizards**

- We are delighted to be able to report that our first lizard translocation is now underway! Thirty Shore Skinks are currently in quarantine at the Albany Campus of Massey University while the disease screening is carried out.
- The skinks were collected from Mimiwhangata beaches using a combination of hand searching and pitfall traps. The collection went very well with good numbers of skinks being caught by both methods. We reached our quota in just under a day of searching, which exceeded our expectations.
- The thirty skinks (a third male and two thirds female) will form the basis of a new population here on Matakoho-Limestone Island. Historically shore skinks will have been on our island and all around the Whangarei Harbour. A combination of the effects of predators and human activities meant they have been lost in these areas.
- Special thanks go to Pam, Richard Drake, Te Ihi Tito, Te Warihi Heteraka, Andrea Booth and Donna Stuthridge for their valiant last minute efforts to ensure that the permits came through in time. Thanks also to Richard, who on behalf of Ngatiwai started us off with a karakia on our arrival at Mimiwhangata.
- Thanks also to Marleen from Massey University, for once again giving us the benefit of her expertise in catching and handling the lizards. It is great to see someone get so excited about catching lizards, even after working with them for many years!



**Gerry, Sandy, Pete, Marleen and Cathy, hand catching at Mimiwhangata (Pam out of shot), photo by Dwane**

- Once the results of the disease screening are known, the transfer to Matakohē-Limestone Island will be undertaken, with a welcome planned for the lizards. The Shore Skinks will be released at Shipwreck Bay which has been identified as the most suitable habitat for them.

### **Fauna**

- We carried out the preliminary petrel reconnaissance trip this month. A team of six spent the day on Taranga, taking measurements of the chicks we found. There was quite a lot of damage on the island due to the winter storms. Trees were down across the track in places and a number of very large trees had come down leaving a big hole in the canopy. The petrel chicks we found were at a similar size and maturity to those of previous years. There did however seem to be less of them – perhaps due to the hard winter.
- The seabirds around the island continue to have a difficult season at this stage; Caspians on Knight Island are laying eggs steadily and hatching the odd chick but they continue to be predated. The NZ Dotterel here on the sand barge are showing nesting behaviour but we are yet to spot the second clutch. Interestingly the Variable Oyster Catchers are also nesting later than last year.

### **Predator Control**

- We have caught our first stoat for the year on the island this month - a large male in good condition, fortunately with an empty stomach.
- Ollie's class from NorthTec have been over this month helping with the north end bait stations. The south end stations are due for their three monthly re-bait at the end of this month.
- The buffer zone has been busy with two stoats and a rat caught.
- Pete has also sprayed out the north face bait stations and made a start on the southern side ones as well.

### **General**

- Thanks to Dwane Johnstone from Chill Out Refrigeration who resuscitated our gas fridge.
- Total Marine Services barge and digger have carried out a test dig for the all tide berth – as expected, silt overlying Limerock was encountered.

- The 'Total Fire Ban' signs have been installed this week which is perfect timing as the island has dried up very quickly in the last fortnight with the dry windy weather. Seven signs have been placed at the main landing points.

## Visitors

- A teacher and pupil from Blomfield Special School have been over with Gerry to look at the weta houses. The teacher is interested in making some for us with the students. Cathy also found two cave weta at the petrel site this month, we believe a first for the island.
- One of our regular volunteers, Greg Stump visited the island with John Kendrick and two other ornithologists who were very interested in the petrel translocation having worked with seabirds for many years. While here they identified 26 different bird species in less than two hours!
- We have also had two schools visit this month; two classes from Tikipunga High and two from Onerahi School. Onerahi were particularly interested to have a look at the area they have helped plant and also reported they have collected more than 100 tins of sardines for the petrels, a great effort.
- NorthTec Conservation Corps have been over for the last time this year. They have been a good group this semester and worked well together. We would also like to wish Damon the tutor well in his new venture and thank him for his hard work and enthusiasm over the past two years.
- Thanks to Joan Maingay who arrived with helpers from the museum and Historic Places Trust to carry out an archaeological dig on Saturday; investigating the site for the new shelter. Several European objects were found in the surface layers – bottles, saucer, various metal objects. Deeper down was the remnants of a shell midden; Joan has taken samples to help determine the age. Thanks also to Pam, Jane, Pat and Eileen who helped out.
- Te Warihi and family also visited on the weekend with Richard and Rosemary Drake, Pam and Grant, to discuss possible carvings for the new shelter building and surrounds. Te Warihi is very keen to carve something for the project, which will certainly be a major feature for the new building.

## Up coming

- Our 4<sup>th</sup> Grey-faced Petrel collection trip is planned to get underway on December 5<sup>th</sup>, with the petrels scheduled to arrive on Matakoho the following weekend (8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>). A keen, fit team of people is raring to go – all we need now is good weather!
- **Volunteer Wednesday December 5th**, pick up at 9am, back around 1.30pm after lunch. We will be on the final countdown for the petrel chicks, carrying out last minute site preparation, gathering straw for the nests, grubbing thistles etc.

Pete and Cathy



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