



Matakohē/Limestone Island Rangers Monthly Report – January 2008

- Looking through the diary this month we seem to have been busier than ever with petrels, lizards, diggers, family commitments, and in the middle of it all Pete was offered a place on the weed team going to the Poor Knights. Very few people other than DoC staff get to visit these islands, and Pete was able to go thanks to Cathy, Tanya, Pagey and the other volunteers who helped out while he was away. The team was flown over by helicopter due to the rough sea conditions, which was a treat in itself, then spent four days working on Aorangi (southern island). The main things that struck Pete were the lushness of the bush thriving in the subtropical climate with lots of sea bird guano for fertiliser, the bird song/activity which is absolutely continuous 24 hrs a day, the sea birds at night calling and clambering around the tent, the Bell birds, Kakariki and Spotless Crake non-stop during the day. All in all a fantastic experience. Thanks also go to James and Keith from DoC for putting Pete's name forward.

Lizards

- We are delighted to report that Shore Skinks were released onto Matakohē-Limestone Island on the 21st of December 2007. 29 skinks passed the disease screening tests and were released at Shipwreck Bay. This was a big day in the history of the ecological restoration of the island, and represents the culmination of a lot of work by many people.



Shore Skink – this is a darker one but they vary a lot in colour and pattern

- Thanks go to Te Ihi, Te Warihi and Freddy who not only blessed and welcomed the lizards to Matakohē-Limestone, but also contributed a lot behind the scenes to help make the translocation possible.
- A special thank you also to Marleen Baling and her team at Massey University, for their enthusiastic assistance with the collection, quarantine and release of the skinks.

Petrels

- We are pleased with how the petrel translocation went this year, despite the weather making life difficult!! (See the December report). We were able to translocate 22 birds and 21 of these have fledged successfully. One bird had to be euthanased, due to an arthritis which developed in a wing joint meaning it would be unable to fly. The birds

also fledged at heavier weights this year than in previous years. This means that they left with good body reserves to sustain them until they begin feeding themselves.

- Thanks go to the many people who helped make this year a success. Special thanks to those volunteers who helped with the feeding, especially while Pete was away – we couldn't have done it without your assistance. Thanks also to Pam and Grant and to Dwane, who brought visitors to the island to see the petrels. Thank you to Andrea Booth (DoC) who banded the birds so we will know who they are when they return!
- We are hoping the first birds will return this autumn/winter to begin prospecting for breeding sites. We are working towards setting up a sound system to play Grey-faced Petrel calls to encourage them in to the site. That will be a momentous day!

Kiwi

- When checking the petrel boxes recently we found a young kiwi in one!! The bird was Sunny Tim who had come to us via the Native Bird Recovery Centre. He had hatched with the toes of one foot curled up. The toes were splinted to help straighten them and once he could use the foot he was sent to us. He is doing well and has gained weight, and is instantly recognisable by the slight curl still present in one of his toes.
- Earlier this month Cathy candled the two eggs from Glen's nest after they failed to hatch by the due date. Unfortunately both proved to have been infertile with no sign of embryonic development in either. We have had reports of a poor breeding season for kiwi around the country this year, with a higher than usual number of infertile eggs and failed clutches.

Predator Control

- Thanks to Jane Winton's efforts on behalf of the committee **Rentokil** have very generously agreed to continue their sponsorship and may even extend their involvement in the future when a more formal arrangement can be organised. For the past year they have supplied us with Rid Rat rodent poison for our bait stations on the island and in the buffer zone.
- The island traps remain quiet but buffer zone activity has definitely increased this month with 2 rats and 4 stoats caught.
- Matt has been carrying out some maintenance on the south side bait stations – replacing tags lost during the winter storms and spraying out the tunnels so they are easier locate.
- Pete also set the tracking tunnels this month, with no rodents tracking.

General

- The General Manager from **Golden Bay Cement** and his extended family visited the island this month while on holiday in the north. Cathy and Pagey spent the morning showing them around.
- The NZ Dotterels on the old sand barge have hatched 2 very mobile chicks recently and there are at least another 3 that we have located on the Sand Spit. The Variable Oyster Catchers also have several chicks around the island with more eggs due to hatch shortly.
- Due to the warm wet weather (180mm of rainfall in December) the island is really bouncing back after the hard winter. Lots of the trees are covered in fresh growth and of course the grass has also been growing like mad, but that has all helped to keep the fire risk very low so far this season.
- For the same reason Park Care have been over twice this month weed eating the tracks and still only just keeping them under control.
- The groins for the all tide berth have now been completed and all the heavy equipment for construction has been taken off the island. This is providing a very sheltered area for the barge already. There will be a little more rock extracted to increase the low tide water depth once WDC and NRC give their approval, which will make way for the new pontoon to be installed.



All tide berth taking shape.

- Pete has also been working with NorthPower this month using the barge to carry out repairs on the airport lights which are located in the harbour. Someone had removed 8 of the 9 batteries which power the lights meaning the airport had to be closed down at night until they were replaced.

Up coming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – will be on Tuesday 5th Feb** due to Waitangi day on the 6th. 9am to 1.30pm bring your lunch, secateurs and loppers – all the tracks are overdue for a good cut back!

Pete and Cathy



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