



Matakohē/Limestone Island Rangers Monthly Report – March 2008

Flora

- Pete has begun spraying out the areas for this seasons planting. We will be mostly interplanting this year which people really enjoyed last season, working in amongst the existing trees & under canopy in some areas. This helps to fill in the spaces and also provides release spraying for the existing trees & self sown seedlings.
- While on this job he found some pampas and a large moth plant, which have now been dealt to! It is amazing how these weeds manage to 'hide' in the more densely planted sites.
- The island is relatively moist for the time of year. This has meant a low fire risk for most of the summer and has greatly assisted the plants stressed by last years storms.
- The wet weather has also resulted in more mowing than usual. Thank you to Ian Page who has been helping to keep the very lush grass growth under control. The new tractor is great and makes this job a lot easier.
- Ollie and Michelle have been over to complete the Vegetation Monitoring & photo points. Ollie is recommending that this be repeated every 3 years to provide an objective assessment of the vegetation cover as the restoration programme continues. Thanks to Ollie, Iain & Michelle for their dedication to complete this job over several months.

Fauna

- This year the dotterels have successfully fledged five chicks from the island, including 2 chicks from the pair on the sand barge.
- The Variable Oystercatchers have also had a good season after a slow start, with 3 chicks in the vicinity of the sand barge, 1 at the pontoon and 3-4 on the sandspit.



The Island positively contributing to the New Zealand Dotterel population.

- Fern birds continue to be seen in good numbers especially on the grassland, while the other small birds, Fantail & Grey warbler in particular have obviously struggled a little this breeding season perhaps due to the wild winter weather last year.

Predator Control

- On the first day back from our holidays we spotted a rat swimming in the water just off the sand barge – it had almost reached dry land! After a brief encounter with the oar we fished it out to find that it was a young male Ship Rat. A surprise discovery because Ship Rats are not generally considered to be good swimmers & helps to explain the Ship Rat caught on the island last month. It shows that if the opportunity exists Ship rats are capable of reaching the island. A lucky intercept!
- A Norway rat was also caught in one of the island rat traps this month making 3 caught this year, compared to 2 rats for the whole of '07.
- In the buffer zone rats are also present with 2 caught this month & the poison baits being taken, possibly a reflection of a 'good' rodent season generally.
- The Volunteers who came over last Wednesday also worked on rodent control working hard to fill the South End bait stations – thank you for a great effort. Pete has just a few runs to finish off to complete the job.

General

- Park Care have been over weed eating the tracks, as part of the 'grass control' team.
- The lambs have been given their booster vaccinations and another drench. The sheep are all looking very well and can be left in peace now for a while.
- Cathy has completed the initial Argentine Ant survey with sample pots set on a 2-3m. grid around the buildings & also down at the plant storage area. Visually there are several different ants present but full identification requires using a microscope, which Cathy will do in the next week or two.
- Cathy also continues to work on the lizard and petrel post translocation reports. These are time consuming to write & collate data for, but provide a valuable summary of the projects to date.

Up coming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – will be on Wednesday 2nd April.** Pickup at 9am returning after lunch approximately 1.30pm.
- The diary is also filling up again after the summer break and the Conservation Corps class from NorthTec has booked for the coming semester.

Pete & Cathy



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