



Matakohē-Limestone Island Monthly Ranger Report – August 2008

The winter weather continues unabated with the island very wet and soggy. This is the first time Pete has been unable to use the tractor for mowing due to the very wet ground conditions. This month we also experienced another flood tide associated with an easterly storm. There was a lot less damage than last year but the last couple of weeks have been spent getting everything tidied up again; traps and bait stations washed out, branches down, signs washed away and part of the board walk floated off.



The latest in high rise stoat accommodation on Knight Island.

This trap was high and dry on the sand bank before the storm, fortunately the waratahs held it in place!

Fauna

- Thanks go to Damian Roxburgh who helped Pete put up a new shag roost extending off the Fisher's gantry next to the all-tide berth. The shags haven't started using it yet but hopefully they will find it and approve of it soon.
- We released a Variable Oystercatcher, which had been found injured on the Onerahi foreshore and had spent time recovering at the Native Bird Recovery Centre. On release the bird promptly took to the air, did a couple of quick circuits and when last seen was heading down past the Sandspit! A great job by Robert and his team.
- We have continued with regular checks of the petrel site to see if any of our birds have come home to check out their home, but all is quiet. In fact since the most recent kiwi capture the sign of kiwi bumbling at the site has ceased – the culprit must have headed off to the mainland!
- Pete had a follow up meeting with a group of boarders from Whangarei Boys High School. The boys are currently finalising their design for two or three watering troughs to help provide summer water for our resident birds.
- Despite the wintry weather we are seeing some signs of spring with a number of birds showing breeding behaviour. We have had territorial disputes between grey warblers around the cottage, and we have also seen them gathering nesting materials. The dotterels and oystercatchers have been making nest scrapings – they normally make a few of these before settling into the serious business of egg laying.

- The Northland Regional Council Harbour Restoration Fund Committee has approved the funding for Year 2 of the lizard project and the appropriate permits have been obtained from DoC. The collection trip for these species, Ornate and Moko skinks, from Whatupuke Island in the Hen and Chicks has been booked for early November, so all is go on the next stage of this exciting project!

Kiwi

- It has been a busy month for kiwi work. James Fraser came over with his specially trained kiwi dog, Percy, in the middle of the month. The evening weather conditions were damp and drizzly which appeared to make locating kiwi difficult. Percy found only two birds, rather than the usual 8-10. The next morning however, he found a further four birds within the space of an hour.
- We also did our bit. Cathy found a kiwi in a penguin box, and a few days later Pete also found another kiwi in a different penguin box! Both of these birds were heavy enough for release to the mainland.
- Interestingly, one of the birds Percy found was a new island bred bird! It wasn't quite heavy enough for mainland release and is probably a late season chick. It seems most likely that Ahi Kaa is the father – he doesn't have a transmitter on at present so we are not totally sure what he is up to, but it's not too hard to guess!
- The five kiwi weighing more than 1200 gms left for Whangarei Heads on July 28th. A special thank you to Freddy Tito for blessing the birds as they headed off on their new life. Thanks also to Richard Drake for his unseen and important efforts in the background.

Flora

- This month's Wednesday volunteers undertook the final planting for this year. A group of eight keen people planted around the Edge House ruins. This is planned as a release site for the Pacific Geckos in a year's time. The hardy plants, mostly Muehlenbeckia, Coprosma and Astelia went into the drier fringe areas to provide good cover for the geckos and also act a food source.
- The kowhai around the island, especially up at the Molly Stevens planting, have begun flowering – a further welcome reminder that spring is on the way!

Predator Control

- Last week Pete attended a trapper day in Kerikeri run by the NZ Land Care Trust. The workshop had several good speakers and was well attended by trappers from all round the north. NZ leads the world in predator control with several leading edge products soon to come on line; a new poison targeting stoats and at least two self-clearing/setting traps. Several bait trials have also been running for mustelid traps and it was interesting to see the results to date. Some work has also been done on modifying the standard DoC trap box to avoid killing Banded Rail and Weka as a by-catch. Pete is intending to modify 2 or 3 of the island boxes that have recorded Banded Rail catches in the past.
- The island traps continue to be quiet with routine servicing carried out. The salted rabbit bait we use is still leading the trial work, but there appears to be an opportunity in the winter/spring to run an egg as well as an additional seasonal attractant.
- Thanks again to Damian who also rebaited the coastal bait stations and checked the traps one round this month.
- In the buffer zone another very large Norway rat was caught on Knight Island. Good to catch them before they try swimming and the Caspian's who have begun to gather for breeding should also find life a little easier without the rats harassing them at night.
- Tony Poulsen and two of his staff members from **Rentokil Initial** visited the island this month. Rentokil have generously provided the island with Rid Rat poison bait for the 800 island bait stations and also the buffer zone stations for more than a year now. We really appreciate their support.

General

- **Thankyou to Golden Bay Cement (GBC)** who have extended their sponsorship of the island for another year. GBC has consistently provided operational funds for the past ten years, which has been extremely valuable to the island in terms of long term planning and development.
- Park Care have been over this month weed eating the tracks and the petrel area.

- Pete made a presentation to Mangawhai Probus, perhaps an indication of the growing interest in the island's activities reaching beyond the immediate Whangarei area.
- The all tide berth was blasted this month as scheduled, but our island limestone proved a tough old bird and will require some follow up blasting to remove a couple of high spots. Currently at low tide the outboard will still catch the bottom. Many thanks to Wayne Baird from **Red Bull Powder Co** and Tim Yeates from **Total Marine Services** who have persevered on what has proved to be a difficult, time consuming job. FOMLI are very grateful for their commitment to get the job done.



Wayne casually waiting for the drilling rig to manoeuvre into place with 6 boxes of plastic explosive in the dinghy!

- Thanks also to **Richardson Stevens Consultants** who have got the tender documents ready for the Visitors Shelter. They have been circulated to prospective builders for pricing, and we look forward to having the shelter constructed later this year.

Up coming

- We have the "Sanctuaries of New Zealand" annual workshop coming up next month. It was very interesting last year and we are looking forward to this years programme. It is also a great opportunity to catch up with other projects around the country and hear what they have been up to.
- **Volunteer Wednesday – Wednesday 3rd September.** Pickup at 9am returning after lunch approximately 1.30pm. Pete has a few jobs on the go but is also keen to do a bit more release work on last years trees, see you there!

Pete and Cathy



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