



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – November 2008

This month we would like to acknowledge the many, many, people that assist us with the job here. Without your help we simply couldn't get a lot of the work done. The more than 40 volunteers that turned out to help transport building materials for the new Visitors Shelter particularly highlighted this – almost three truck loads over two evenings, a fantastic effort!! As you will read below the lizard collection trip would have also proved very difficult without some outstanding support from the committee and local businesses.

Kiwi

- Kiwi chicks continue to arrive on the island. Todd has brought 4 chicks over this month hatched by his monitored males from Purua. Pete Graham from DOC delivered 2 chicks, which were hatched by Robert Webb and his team at Whangarei Native Bird Recovery. These eggs came from nests in one of the DoC Kiwi Sanctuaries at Purua, after their fathers abandoned them. This brings our current tally to 25 kiwi on the island.
- The resident island birds have also contributed to the kiwi population. Sir Ed hatched a chick earlier in the month – his first baby! Sir Ed is a young bird (3 years) and his mate, Kahui Whetu an island-bred bird, is also a youngster (4 years), so the pair has done very well. Hopefully this will be the first of many chicks this pair produces.
- The new chick has had a microchip inserted as its lifetime identification. Sir Ed has also had his annual transmitter change and 6 monthly biometric check done this month he has lost more than 200gms, or 13% of his body weight, while sitting on the egg for his 80 day stint, a big effort!
- Glen, our other resident male, is incubating with his clutch due any time. Pete Graham from DoC had a quick look when he was on the island the other day and Glen was sitting tight. We will have another look this week to check on progress and microchip the chick if it is old enough to be handled, i.e. when the yolk sack has been fully absorbed, which usually takes a few days. The chicks are micro chipped while still in the nest whenever possible so that their parentage is recorded.
- Cathy has also been collecting faecal samples from the new arrivals, for Kerry Morgan at Massey University's Veterinary Department as part of her PhD research project into Coccidiosis in kiwi.

Predators

- We have had our first stoat catch on the island for this year. The stoat was a young male – these young lads tend to be pretty mobile at this time of year, chasing girls. It is good to get the catch, but it has completely blown Pete's hope for a clean slate this year. Maybe next year.
- We continue to catch predators in the buffer zone. Two possums, a weasel and two large male stoats were all caught at Onemama Point. The buffer islands were quiet predator-wise, which is good as the Caspian Terns and Black Back Gulls are busy nesting.

Fauna

- The Caspian Terns appear to be having a very successful season. Pete counted 23 chicks and several nests with eggs on a recent visit.
- The preliminary, scoping trip for the Petrels was carried out in the middle of October. The data gathered from this one-day trip has indicated that there are reasonable numbers of chicks present and that they are on track to mature at the usual time. This means that we can plan our collection trip for the beginning of December with a good degree of confidence. Thanks again to Martin Hunt who generously transported the team on his launch 'Manaaki'.
- The dotterel pair on the sand barge were absent for almost three weeks and we were concerned that something had happened to one of them. However we are delighted to report that they are back, we

can recognise the female of the pair by her leg bands. They are showing strong territorial behaviour and have two nests scraped out.

- The Variable Oystercatchers on the barge are also very active. We do know of one nest, which was predated – probably by either Harriers or Black Back Gulls which regularly patrol the area.

Lizards

- The lizard collection trip went well. We caught the lizards with a combination of pitfall traps and hand catching. The Ornate skinks did not like the 35 pitfalls we set for them, and we caught the 30 we were after by hand – Gerry and Pete really got this sussed out on the second day and there was no holding them back!



All loaded and ready for the run home with 30 precious lizards on board. Photo – Marleen Baling

- We now have 10 male and 20 female Ornate skinks in quarantine at the Ecology and Conservation Group at Massey University, Albany Campus. Preliminary test results are through and it looks good for the skinks to pass their disease screening. We are planning to release these lizards on the island when the tests are through in early-mid December.
- The other species we were after, Moco skinks can only be caught in pitfall traps. The cool windy weather we experienced meant that their activity level was low, and unfortunately we did not catch enough animals for translocation to proceed at this stage. The good news however, is that the pitfalls are all in place (but not set!) and we are booked to return at the end of February when the weather will be more favourable. It was encouraging to see plenty of these very attractive little lizards on the beaches where our traps are, so we know they are there!
- Special thanks go to Richard Parrish (ex DOC, with many years of experience on the Hen and Chicks behind him) and Marleen Baling (herpetologist from Massey University) who both volunteered their time and expertise and were invaluable in ensuring the success of the trip. Thanks also to Gerry for his unrelenting and infectious enthusiasm.
- Murphy's Law also contributed to the trip, with our usually very reliable, never miss-a-beat outboard giving up on the first day! We would like to say a special thank you to John from **Anchorage Marine**, who lent us another 15 Hp outboard while ours was under repair; and Dean from **Dean Marine Charters** who ran the replacement outboard out late in the evening so we could continue with our work the next morning. Thanks also to Pam and Grant who fielded the SOS call and got the outboard sorted/on its way in double quick time; and to Ian Page/John Ward who looked after the island in our absence and ran the builders back and forth. As you can see a great team effort all round.

Visitor Shelter

- Work has begun on the visitor shelter this month with good progress being made. Homeworld are anticipating being finished by Christmas. Te Ihi and Freddy Tito blessed the site and then 10 days later laid the Mauri stone before dawn on the morning construction began.
- Many volunteers helped transport building materials to the island. The first load in particular was a tremendous effort, finishing just on dark. Debbie and Ian from **Top Sail Restaurant**, provided absolutely delicious finger food and drinks to the hard working team. Richard Drake organised a post rammer for ramming the shelter piles, an impossibly heavy piece of gear to shift about, but it's amazing what you can achieve with a bit of manpower and kiwi ingenuity! And Grant and Gareth from **Richardson and Stevens Consultants** are carrying out the building inspections required for the Shelter as the job progresses. Thanks to all involved.
- We will have one more truckload to move in December to finish the job – keep an eye out for Sheryl's e-mail.

General

- The committee have visited the island this month for a walkabout and evening get-together. This provided a good opportunity to have a look at some of the current projects and plan for the coming year.
- Iain Reid has also been over to assess last years planting and look at sites for the coming season.
- Park Care have been over doing track maintenance.
- A small group of boys from Carruth House, Whangarei Boys High School (WBHS) were successful with their 'bird trough' project, coming fourth equal in the national Community Enterprises Project competition sponsored by BP. They now have \$1000 to turn their design into reality and install the troughs on the island.

Visitors

- Another busy month for visitors despite a couple of cancellations due to rough/wet weather. Visitors this month included; Graham Severenson and the teacher trainees from the University of Auckland Course, Hospice Nurses, WBHS pupils with Te Wharahi from Ngatiwai, Hukerenui walking group, Auckland YHA, two classes from Saint Francis Xavier School and an Onerahi walking group.

Upcoming

- The fifth, and final, petrel collection trip will take place in the first week of December. If all goes to plan, the chicks will be arriving on Matakoho-Limestone Island around midday on December 5th or 6th. A welcome and blessing is planned as they arrive. Please contact Pam on 436 0246 if you are interested in attending, so she can let you know once the details are finalised.
- **Volunteer Wednesday – will be on Wednesday 3rd December.** There was some mix up with the postponed date last month but we would like to assure everyone Pete will be at the wharf at 9am and be returning after lunch approximately 1.30pm. He is planning to work at the Petrel site, getting ready for the arrival of the chicks at the end of that week.

Pete and Cathy



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