



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – December 2008

The island seems busier than ever at the moment, consequently we are running late with our report writing and you will find it a little briefer than usual.

Grey Faced Petrel

- This is the fifth and final year for the translocation with 41 birds collected from Taranga. This year the collection team: Grant Stevens, Laurie Mead, Theda Hall from Golden Bay Cement, Rowan Keys from Ngatiwai, our son Matt, and Cathy, experienced near perfect weather, making for a much nicer week with everything running pretty much to plan.



Laurie, Theda and Matt on Taranga, heading back to camp with the final eight birds.

- The birds were welcomed onto the island by approximately 30 people, thanks to Freddy Tito and Te Warihi for blessing the birds and to the many helpers on the day.
- The birds have settled in well with most switching to the artificial diet without problems. The birds are growing well with wing growth rates up to 5mm per day, with the first expected to fledge within a week.
- There have been 2 or 3 birds needing a little more attention and unfortunately one of these birds deteriorated very rapidly over night and died. There were signs of a possible infection and it has been sent to Massey University in Palmerston North for post-mortem.
- On a more cheerful note, thank you to the volunteers who have been helping us with the feeding. Thanks to Tanya Munro who is helping for the fifth consecutive year, a key part of the team and also to Nigel Miller from DoC who banded the birds.

Kiwi

- Glen and Baldrick's chick has hatched this month and Baldrick has wasted no time in laying another egg nearby which Glen is now incubating. Looking like a very good season for them.

Predators

- Many thanks to the hard working Wednesday volunteers who not only helped set up the petrel site but also made a start on the south end bait station runs which are currently due, all on a very hot day!
- The island traps have been quiet this month but in the buffer zone 2 stoats and 1 Norway rat have been caught.

Fauna

- The Ornate skinks have now been released on the island after getting a clean bill of health from the disease screening process. Thanks to Te Ihi and Te Warihi who blessed the skinks before their release.



A beautifully marked Ornate skink about to be released onto the island.

- Twelve pitfall traps have also been set over seven nights to monitor the Shore skink population released this time last year. Three adults were captured with two appearing to be gravid (pregnant) and two juveniles were also caught. This is great news showing that the population is not only surviving but also successfully breeding.
- The Caspian Tern/Knight Island update; Pete counted 34 chicks swimming out off the beach (to safety) plus 10 more small chicks in nests and about a dozen eggs on his last visit. This is well up on the fledging rates for the past two years. A small group of White Fronted Terns are also incubating eggs, this is the first time they have been present in the three years we have been on the island.
- The New Zealand Dotterel pair on the sand barge have three eggs in a shallow scrape and are sitting tight, hopefully with chicks not too far away. There are also three Variable Oyster Catcher nests in the vicinity of the sand barge.

General

- The new Visitor Shelter is now finished with the roof going on last week and the builders finishing on target before Christmas.
- Thanks to Ken Massey for organising Better Contractors to do a follow up spray for Moth plant and Pampas on Motuotaua (Rabbit) Island. NRC have funded this program over the past few years to help clean up Motuotaua and also reduce wind borne weed infestation on Matakohē.
- Thanks also to David Templeton from Enterprise Northland and Paula Horsley from Whangarei Boys High School (WBHS) for their involvement with the bird bath project on the island. We are hopeful that having water available to birds in an area that is drier than other parts of the island will encourage their visits, and perhaps breeding.

Visitors

- A group of artists from Whangarei Heads visited for a day of sketching and fossicking about.
- WBHS – Carruth House boarders working on their bird bath project.
- WBHS and representatives from the BP Community Enterprise Project officially handing over the bird baths to the island.

- Three other groups from WBHS have also visited including two elective classes helping at the petrel site and an environmental study group over with Gerry Brackenberry. Gerry also invited Wade Doak and his wife to join his class and they were very interested to explore the island taking lots of photographs.
- Classes from Tikipunga Intermediate School also visited this month and a class from Hukerenui School helped Pete install the Shore skink pitfall traps and trim flax on the Hill Track.
- Damian Roxborough bought Cubs from the Shackleton Sea Scout group to the island as part of their field work to achieve an Environmental Badge.

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – will be on Wednesday 7th January.** Pickup at 9am returning after lunch approximately 1.30pm. Pete has a few jobs he would like to tidy up before we head off on holiday.

Wishing everyone a very happy Christmas and successful New Year,

Pete and Cathy



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