



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – April 2009

Just a short month between committee meetings this time but as you will see still lots happening. The beautiful autumn weather continues unabated and lots of people have been visiting the island, making the most of the calm sunny days. We don't keep a full record of independent visitors for obvious reasons but numbers continue to be noticeably up.

Fauna

- Cathy continues to regularly monitor Pakotai, who will be released to the mainland in early May as part of a special Bank of New Zealand Save the Kiwi Trust release day. Pakotai was found in a penguin box last month – maybe we should rename these boxes 'kiwi boxes' as we find kiwi in them on a regular basis. Pakotai has been on the island for 18 months now and is a good-sized bird at just over 1600 gm.
- The two transmittered male kiwi on the island continue to be checked at least once a month. Both have their favourite haunts – Glen is currently spending his days in the Flax Fields and Sir Ed is usually along the shoreline below the Edge House Track.



The native Reef Heron enjoying a quiet moment with the shags on the sand barge.

- With the autumn weather we are noticing a change in the activity of the birds on and around the island. Two Reef Heron have been seen regularly on the old sand-barge. Pied stilts have also been gathering up and busy on the mudflats and eight were seen on the Sand-spit one day. We have also had a Morepork visiting the cottage in the evenings lately; this is a similar time to the bird visiting last year.
- Olly Ball and his class of Environmental Science students came over to the island, looking at our monitoring programmes. Pete had set the regular lizard pitfall traps the day before. The group checked and unset the traps as part of their day. Five adult and one juvenile copper skink were captured in 15 traps over one night – a very good catch rate! The students also set the island tracking tunnels for our regular three-monthly monitoring.

Predator Control

- The island traps have been quiet this month. In the buffer zone the sand banks continue to show rodent activity but it is slowing down. Buffer zone catches included two Norway rats, a stoat, a wild cat, and a weasel.
- The tracking tunnels were set this month with the help of Olly and the North Tec Environmental students. The tunnels are run every three months to monitor rodent activity and are left out for three nights to increase the chances of detection. We had mice tracking in three of 48 tunnels, and in response put out mousetraps, which caught two mice. We also put out extra tracking tunnels where the mice were detected; these have been completely quiet since the mice were caught. Traps have been left set at each detection site and one more mouse has subsequently been caught. A good result, but unfortunately you can guarantee, not the end of the story!
- Thank you to the team who came over on Sunday afternoon and replenished the northern end bait stations. It was a beautiful autumn evening and the whole northern end was rebaited in just less than two hours! The mouse tracking highlights just how important this regular baiting is. With the bait stations all replenished in the last two months and the onset of winter we anticipate that the mice will once again drop to undetectable levels.
- Pete has also been in contact with the technical team from Rentokil and they have put together a mouse response package for the island. We will reset the tracking tunnels again soon to monitor what's happening out there and respond with the new kit as required.
- Thank you to Tim Grove and Ian Buckley from the Wednesday volunteers for their work building extra rat/mouse and stoat trap covers.

Flora

- Pete has carried out the last lot of Gallant spraying in preparation for this year's planting. We have a busy planting season coming up with 8,000 plants on order.
- Moth plant and blackberry also received attention this month. The Wednesday volunteer group did a great job visiting the known moth plant sites and pulled a number of seedlings. An adult plant with pods was also found and dealt to. We continue to find the occasional pampas plant on the island and Pete and Cathy also removed pampas plants from the buffer zone sand banks last week.

Visitors and Off Island Presentations

- A keen group of volunteers turned out last Sunday afternoon to fill the North end bait stations – it is always amazing how much a group of people can achieve in a couple of hours!
- A group of GBC staff and their families visited the island this month. A treasure hunt was organised for them and the weather provided an absolutely perfect day for exploring the island.



Golden Bay Cement 'Family day' visit to the island – yet another beautiful Northland day!

- Olly Ball and the Environmental Science students looking at our monitoring.
- Work Wednesday volunteers on the first Wednesday of the month.
- Pete gave a presentation to the South Whangarei Rotary group at their regular meeting, and was able to show them the new shelter. It was good to be able to update them on progress for the signage for the shelter, which they have very generously sponsored.
- The FOMLI Committee have been over for their annual walkabout to help plan and prioritise for the coming year.
- Peter de Graff, freelance reporter, visited the island and has written two articles that will be published in the local paper shortly.
- Pete also spoke at the meeting for Senior Net last month and a group of 35 visited the island this month.

General

- Cathy completed the Petrel report this month, covering the fifth (and final) translocation. Dwane has now posted it up on the website for those who are interested. Pete has re-installed the bird caller, so fingers crossed for returning birds this winter. Cathy has recently been corresponding with Colin Miskelly (DOC scientist Wellington) and he said it could take several years before we start to see significant numbers visiting the site. This is based on recent Mana Island work he has been doing translocating seabirds there.
- Cathy also checked the Argentine Ant samples this month; all were clear except for one sample which will be referred to an expert at DOC or MAF as a precaution, Cathy has yet to track down the right person.
- The tractor received its 200-hour service this month.
- Pete also serviced the barge while it was out of the water as part of the Safe Ship Management program with Nortel.
- Steve, a shift team leader from Golden Bay Cement visited the island last week to see what is involved in concreting the shed floor. Steve's shift crew from GBC are planning to spend a day after Easter doing this job, which will make the shed a much better workshop space and will also mean it is more secure when locked.

Upcoming

- There will be a Kiwi blessing on the Onerahi foreshore Sunday 3rd May. This is a great opportunity to see one of the island birds as it heads off to its new life on the mainland. Please contact Pam a day or two before Sunday to confirm the time. Ph 4360246.
- **Volunteer Wednesday – will be Wednesday 6th May.** Pickup at 9am returning after lunch approximately 1.30pm.

Pete and Cathy



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