



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – May 2009

The island is feeling a little wet and soggy after several days of rain, but looking at the rainfall data we are actually down compared to the last two years. Buffalo grass over the sprayed planting areas is dying back nicely and the holes are due to be cut this week so we are all set to go for **planting Sunday 31st May**.

Kiwi

- Two kiwi left the island this month, in a special release for **Bank of New Zealand Save the Kiwi Trust** sponsors. We have had 'Pakotai' running around with a transmitter on for the past 6 weeks (and she certainly covered a lot of the island in that time!). Todd Hamilton from the Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum came over for a night and we had a kiwi hunt on foot. It was a pretty quiet night kiwi-wise, but we managed to catch another bird – 'Heather' who came to us as a chick via the Native Bird Recovery Centre, in November this year. She has grown well to be ready for release just six months later.
- We gave Todd a hand at the release, which was attended by seventy people, many of whom had travelled up from Auckland for the day. Fortunately the weather played its part and we had a beautiful fine day. The birds were released on Heather and Martin Hunt's property on the Taurikura Ridge, where they are undertaking some intensive predator control work, making the area safe for kiwi and other native fauna. The visitors had an opportunity to see kiwi close at hand and all were very interested to hear of the work being undertaken in the Whangarei Heads area for kiwi, including of course the island's role as a crèche.
- 'Sir Ed' was due for his regular six-month check and Cathy was able to tie it in with the visit from the **GBC** (Golden Bay Cement) Shift 2 Team who were over volunteering their time to concrete the shed floor.



Shift 2 from Golden Bay Cement checking out Sir Ed

- We have two island-born kiwi on the island at present. One of these will be named by the students at Onerahi Primary School as part of their ongoing relationship with the island. The school is running an essay writing competition to choose the name and the winner will come over to help us with the next kiwi capture/release.

- Pete has completed the annual report to the Bank of New Zealand Save the Kiwi Trust (BNZSKT) and also submitted the application for funding in the coming year. The BNZSKT has sponsored the majority of the trapping work for many years – vitally important in ensuring that the crèche remains a safe haven.

Fauna

- The winter time sees changes in the birds seen around the island. Up to 20 spoonbills have been visiting the island, the pied shags are gathering around the sand barge and large groups (up to 100) of little black shags have been hunting along the foreshore for sprats. One day Cathy saw one of these groups using the all-tide harbour as a convenient fish trap, having herded a school of bait fish in.
- The regular dotterel pair (identified by the leg bands on the female) are returning to the sand barge now and then, making sure they retain their territory.
- We continue to hear a morepork around the cottage at night – we are happy to be woken up by the call right outside the window! The morepork seems to have been around for a longer period than in past years.
- A tui also made a brief visit, singing in the macrocarpas around the cottage one morning recently.

Predator Control

- The island was a little quieter this month with one rat caught along the northwestern shoreline. Following on from last month we continued with the mouse response for the first two weeks and put out the new 24 hour multi-catch traps supplied by **Rentokil Initial**. No further mice were detected or caught.
- The tracking pads were put out by the Wednesday volunteer team and left out for four nights. No rodents were detected. Whew!
- In the buffer zone, one stoat, three rats, one possum, and a very large weasel were caught.
- Pete has also been hearing banded rail call for the first time on Rabbit and Rat islands, once again indicating the steady improvement in habitat.
- Pete has begun pulling in the stoat trap boxes for a clean, repaint and lubricate. Most of the traps have been out for over two years and it is expected to take several months to work through them all.

General

- Steve Lawson, Team Leader, and Shift 2 from GBC have concreted the shed floor this month as planned. The guys arrived at the boat ramp with 30 bags of fresh cement, (Steve didn't like the look of the old slightly hard bags that have been on the island for a couple of years), two concrete mixers and all the gear needed to spread and float the concrete off. By 11am the team of 11 had everything finished with all the gear cleaned down, a fantastic effort. The shed is now a lot more secure when the doors are shut and the surface is clean and dry to work on, a huge improvement on the clay floor that got wet and sticky for a good part of the winter.



Preparation and action on the day concreting the shed floor

- As you can see in the photo preparing the base, and then reinstating all the gear back into the shed afterwards kept Pete busy for a couple of days.
- Shift 2 subsequently invited us to visit the GBC works at Portland for lunch and a look around. The lunch was very good (thanks guys) and we had a fantastic afternoon looking over the operation including the ship. Apart from the sheer scale, which is big, we were also amazed to see the whole plant being run by just 11 men!
- Many thanks to the Wednesday volunteers who not only set the tracking tunnels as mentioned above but also transplanted almost 200 flax plants into the flax fields at the old quarry site behind the cement works ruins.
- On a completely different note, the sheep have taken a fancy to the shelter now that the weather has turned, with little piles of 'evidence' marking the spot. Pete will build a small barrier in an attempt to deter them, hopefully this will be achievable without detracting too much from the look of the building.

Visitors

- A group from Probus came over and enjoyed their morning on the island.
- A new immigrant group called WINGS, braved showery weather one Sunday this month. They had a very good turnout of more than sixty people despite the weather. One of their number, a librarian from the Whangarei library, has subsequently had a display promoting Tim Clark's book, "More than Just a Little Island".

Upcoming

- **Planting begins Sunday 31st May**, pickup at 9am returning at approximately 1.30 pm after lunch. Bring your lunch, good footwear and a shower proof jacket – spades and some gloves provided.
- **Volunteer Work Wednesday – will be Wednesday 3rd June**. Pickup at 9am returning after lunch approximately 1.30pm. We will be planting by then so bring your favourite spade!

Pete and Cathy



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