



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – December 2009

This will be our final report with just less than a month before we finish up. The four years seem to have flashed by and it has been a fantastic experience living and working on the island – many memories to be cherished in the future.

This month has seen us busy with the two lizard collection trips, preparing all the gear required, going through quarantine inspection and then a week on Lady Alice for each collection. Busy, but also very rewarding with three lizard species successfully collected. We hope to have the translocations completed by Christmas which will mean five lizard species in total reintroduced to our island. This is a significant achievement with very few locations nationally that can celebrate having six lizard species present.

### Gecko Translocation

- The gecko collection trip was carried out in the middle of November. The collection team camped on Lady Alice Island with daily boat trips to Pupuha, Muriwhenua and Middle Stack Islands where the geckos were located.
- The trip was highly successful and we collected our targets of 30 common geckos and 50 Pacific geckos in the first two days.
- The additional time was used to trial moko skink collection using G-minnow traps (see page 2) and also assisting DOC with some of their work on Lady Alice.
- Once collected the geckos were placed into quarantine at the Albany Campus of Massey University while their disease screening tests were undertaken.
- Having been cleared for disease the geckos were released on to Matakohē-Limestone Island on Friday, 4 December. Each species was released into its own pre-selected location which will provide ideal habitat for that species. The blessing and release was attended by approximately 20 committee and friends who loved the opportunity to see these little creatures close at hand.



Rosemary Drake about to release a very relaxed common gecko at the ruins

- The geckos all looked very good on their release - the Pacific geckos in particular have very active personalities and they couldn't wait to head off into their new homes
- Many thanks to all those who have helped make this translocation a success. In particular, thanks to Richard Parrish and Marleen Baling who both volunteered their time. Their expert assistance was invaluable with locating the geckos, handling, housing, species and sex identification and transport to Massey. Thanks also to Manu Barry and her assistant Kelsey for sample collection and the excellent care and attention given to the geckos while in quarantine – not an easy task to maintain the geckos in such good condition.
- Thank you to Freddie Tito, Te Warihi Hetaraka and Richard Drake for taking time out from their busy schedules to welcome the new arrivals.

### **Moko skink translocation**

- No sooner had we got the geckos settled in than it seemed it was time to get ready and head off on the moko skink collection trip.
- You may recall that we have had two attempts to catch these very speedy little lizards in the past. We trialed a new capture method, the G-minnow traps, on the gecko trip with very promising results. DoC had also extended our permits to allow for capture over the three main islands in the Chickens group.



**(Left) Pete and Gerry about to set a minnow trap on the eastern end of Coppermine Island: Taranga in the background.**

**(Right) A rare Macgregor's skink caught in a minnow trap a large, impressive creature with beautiful markings.**

- We were therefore feeling more optimistic when we headed off on this trip for our third attempt. Our optimism was not misplaced and we caught more than enough moko skinks to reach our target of 50 animals. The weather gods assisted greatly with warm, sunny weather throughout the trip – perfect for keeping the sun-loving mokos active and therefore more “trappable”.
- The skinks have been delivered to quarantine and we are currently waiting on the disease screening results. Hopefully these will be through in just over a week, with the release planned for the week before Christmas.
- Thanks to Gerry Brackenbury for his assistance on the trip, and also for his long-term vision and dedication which has been an important factor in the success of the whole lizard translocation programme.

### **Predator Control**

- All quiet on the island this month, two possums and a weasel in the buffer zone.

### **Visitors**

- Onerahi Primary School with two classes.
- Gerry Brackenbury guiding a school group.
- Peter Coates and the Farm Forestry Group.
- Te Puni Kokiri from the Ministry of Maori Development, with Freddie and Te Warihi.
- Marjorie Edwards and a local tramping group.

## General

- Wednesday volunteers were busy this month finishing off the moth plant sites and cutting back the Hill track vegetation. Pete would like to thank this dedicated group for their tremendous help over the past few years – a great team effort!
- The barge has had its 500 hour service

## Upcoming

- NB: Volunteer Wednesday – Friday, 8 January now **cancelled**.
- Finally we would like to say thanks, this is definitely a job that cannot be done without lots of support of all descriptions.

We hope you all have a safe and happy festive season.

Pete and Cathy



Proudly Supported by; Environmental Northland, Forest Floor Nursery, Harbour Marine Ltd, Marine North Ltd, Northpower, Northland Port Corp, Northland Regional Council, North Tugz, Onerahi Lions, Phoenix Boats, Red Bull Powder Co., Tawapou Nursery

[www.limestoneisland.org.nz](http://www.limestoneisland.org.nz)