



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – March 2010

Welcome to our first ranger report. The first month and a half here has been brilliant; everyone has been so welcoming and made our transition so nice and easy. The people we have met so far have been fantastic, with amazing knowledge and a real diversity of skills and backgrounds – such a brilliant resource for the island and for us. Our first impressions of the island: so lovely to wake up to the shriek of a banded rail and to be followed by curious juvenile fernbirds, the ruins are spectacular and so unique and the house and facilities are brilliant. We also can't get over the abundant insect life - moths, beetles, butterflies, slaters, cockroaches and ants – so great to see. Walking the tracks in the early morning in February was a risky business with hundreds of crazed cicadas liable to hit you in the face and take an eye out.

Predator Control

- It was a busy start for us catching up on the trapping, baiting and tracking tunnels. We found one dead mouse outside one of the traps and had one mouse track in the tracking tunnels a few days later. In response we set up an array of traps, bait stations and tunnels but the offending mouse was never seen again.
- Both ends of the island had the three monthly baiting completed which got done thanks to some keen volunteers. Chris, who had been minding the island in January until we arrived, had put in some great work on some of the lines before we got here so some of them were almost a walk in the park. Others remain more of a challenge – we don't want it to be too easy now do we?
- One large male stoat was trapped on the northern beach side of the island. We were also getting very frequent catches in the buffer, four rats, three stoats, one weasel and three possums since the start of February, so we changed to checking these weekly rather than fortnightly to keep up with the summer/autumn boom. It seems to have paid off with captures dropping off. Ben also heard a fernbird while checking the traps at Onemama. This could be overflow from the island.
- We also completed servicing the DoC 200's on the island with the fantastic help of the Wednesday volunteers Tim, Carol, Heather, Greg, David, Janet and Gerry. They are now lean mean precision trapping machines once again. We also modified the trap entrances to try to further discourage birds from investigating the traps, in particular the banded rail.

Island Biosecurity

- The high risk areas of the island had their biennial survey for Argentine ants and came up clear which is always a relief. We also went in to see Andrea Booth to get a lesson in Argentine ant identification so we can stop fretting every time we see busy brown ants.

Monitoring

- The Year 2 post release shore skink monitoring has been completed with the pitfall traps running for three days. Last year's monitoring run for seven days found three adults (one gravid female) and two juveniles – proof of breeding which is an important indicator of a successful translocation. This year's monitoring turned up five adult shore skink including one gravid female and one tiny neonate – this year's young. This is a great result for this species and suggests they are doing very well. During a walk around the island we also caught a shore skink neonate more than 100m from the release site toward the northern end of the island. Looks like they are spreading out.



Skink neonate caught in pitfall trap

- The Year 1 post release Ornate skink monitoring was also completed. Instead of pitfall traps the monitoring technique relies on placing Artificial Cover Objects (ACO's) around the release site and hoping that the lizards choose them to hang out under rather than the rocks, logs and other debris. We found plenty of copper skinks during the survey and one very beautiful Ornate skink. Ben assures me this is still a good result for this technique and for this cryptic species.
- As well as being a detection tool for predators the tracking tunnels also give us an indication of what else is out there. In the tracking tunnels run in February, 16% of the tunnels had skink tracking in them reflecting the good population of copper skinks we have on the island thanks to predator control and abundant food.
- Ben has also been checking the translocated geckos and they are easy to spot in the ruins. Official monitoring will commence next year.



Skink tracks in tracking tunnels – much nicer to find than mammal prints

Kiwi

- Cathy has still been keeping an eye on the kiwi out here to make sure they are in good hands (and because otherwise she will miss them too much). The adult kiwi on the island seem to have finished breeding for the year, though Glen had us excited about a late nest behind the ruins. There was indeed a nest, with two eggs, but both proved to be infertile.
- Kahui whetu had her six-monthly weighing and transmitter check. She was doing well. True to their past romantic form during the monthly checks, Sir Ed and Kahui are still consistently found hanging out together.
- We have welcomed four new chicks on to the island since February; two from Hancock Forest, one from Purua and one more from Hancock forest. Unfortunately the last one was found dead one day after release and will be sent for a post-mortem. Out at night there are plenty of kiwi about. Ben saw four in one night last week. Though very dry there are still abundant invertebrates around to keep them going.

Fire Risk

- Thanks to nearly no rain in the last month and a half the fire risk is at an all time high so there are some major restrictions in place on the island at the moment – no motorised equipment in use and restrictions on BBQ's. Some of the tracks are in need of a visit by Parkcare to weed eat but we are waiting for a bit of rain before letting the weed eaters swing into battle with the grass.

Visitors

- On the up side of having no rain, with the very hot and sunny weather there have been lots of independent visitors coming over by boat and kayak checking out the island. It is really great to talk to locals who have never been to the island and who are discovering it for the first time.
- We have also had a large number of enquiries from groups wanting guided trips. Ben is still waiting for the go ahead to run these trips with the barge but as soon as he gets it it is going to be busy. John Ward helped out, allowing us to run a trip with the Mt Manaia Garden Club which was brilliant. The Baptist Youth Group also made their own way over and were met by Ben for a tour of the island.

General

- The Committee undertook the annual walkabout on a lovely March evening. It was great for Ben and me to be able to pick everybody's brains and discuss plans for the year. An obliging kiwi was also found holed up in a penguin nest box which was a nice treat for everybody.
- New trough installed for the sheep fed from the more reliable toilet tanks (complete with fancy roof designed and installed by Tim).
- The tractor has had its annual service.

Upcoming

- **Volunteers needed.** The annual Poroti Rabbit Shoot is on the weekend of 16 and 17 April. We will need help the following week processing the baits. Come and get familiar with the inside of a rabbit.
- We will begin to monitor the petrel sites in April for any signs of activity. Here's hoping

Hei konei ra

Jo and Ben



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