



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – April 2010

April has been just as busy and as much fun as March, although this endless summer is starting to wear a bit thin. We have spent a bit of time this month watering special trees around the island to keep them alive. Even this is getting harder now with the dam on the southern end of the island drying up completely. We hope you are all out there doing your very best rain dances.

Fauna

- Looking back through Cathy and Pete's monthly reports we can see some interesting seasonal trends continuing. Once again we are seeing two reef heron regularly on the old sand barge with the shags. There are also pied stilts feeding on the mud flats in greater numbers.
- Even more interesting, we have also had a morepork visiting the cottage and checking out the tools in the shed; this is the same time as the bird that visited last year and the year before. This year we took a picture so we can recognise him next year .



- Whilst travelling between the island and Onerahi we also saw 37 royal spoonbills flying in V formation up towards the harbour entrance.
- Olly Ball and his polytech class of Environmental Science students came over to the island to learn about monitoring, how and why we do it. Ben had opened the regular lizard pitfall traps (which are scattered all over the island) the day before and the group checked and closed the traps as part of their day. Two adults and three neonate copper skink were captured in 15 traps over one night. The students also set the island tracking tunnels for our regular three-monthly monitoring.

Kiwi

- The kiwi monthly checks are due next week and Sir Ed is due for his six-monthly weight and health check – Jo is looking forward to getting her first look at him.
- We also received the post mortem results for the kiwi chick that was found dead shortly after its release last month. It was found to have internal injuries that had caused a haemorrhage. The injuries didn't seem to have been caused by an attack by a mammalian predator. It is hard to know what happened but it possibly could have been caused by an altercation with another bird or an injury sustained before he got to the island.

- The BNZ interim report was also completed last month, summarising our progress to date for this year. Since June of last year ten chicks have been brought over to the crèche and, of course, Sir Ed and Kahui Whetu produced their two island born chicks. Three chicks that had reached the required 1200g were captured in August, and returned to the mainland. The report was sent in together with our funding application for 2010-2011.

Predator Control

- We are happy to report no captures on the island this month. The buffer seems to be slowing a bit as well with one stoat caught on Knight Island and three possums, one weasel and one ship rat caught at Onemama Point.
- Tim Grove finished the banded rail prevention modification on the DOC 200 traps – a massive effort and one that both we and the banded rail appreciate. Now we need to do the rat traps.
- The tracking tunnels, put out by Olly's students and collected by the Wednesday volunteers, mostly tracked kiwi chicks and other birds this month which is pleasing. The tunnels are run every three months to monitor for rodent activity and are left out for three nights to increase the chances of detection.
- Wednesday volunteers Marjorie, Heather, Bev and Carol also began making the new corflute mouse trap covers for mice incursions. It is a fiddly job but it results in custom built mouse covers which will improve our trapping efficiency.
- The rabbits have been collected from the annual Poroti rabbit shoot thanks to John Ward. Now we have the fun job we inherited from Pete - turning them from rabbits into lovely salted baits.

Visitors

- The island was incredibly busy with visitors over Easter. Lots of family groups, boaties and kayakers.
- The Whangarei Fishing Club used the shelter for picnic lunch.
- Fred Brook and Olly Ball came for a walk around to take some pictures for the geology poster. Ben and I learned a lot about the island's geology and its fossils.
- Olly Ball (again) and his NorthTec students.
- The Wonderful Work Wednesday Volunteers.
- Our large families visited over Easter – a very full house but they all loved the island and got to see kiwi out at night.
- When we dropped off an injured banded rail to the Whangarei Bird Recovery Centre we got an unexpected trade – five Cook's petrels that needed to be helped on their way back home. Cook's petrels nest out on Little Barrier Island and frequently fly over to the west coast to feed. If the winds get nasty they can get blown off course and can get confused by city lights and crash land. Once on the ground they aren't much good at getting around or getting going again so they often get handed in to the Bird Recovery Centre. We brought the birds back to the island and waited till the next morning to take them out and get them back on track. They usually need a bit of a flap to get their wings ready and a slope to get going. All five headed in the right direction so hopefully they are back at Little Barrier Island.



Cook's Petrel warming up for take off

General

- We did have a bit of rain around Easter (a whopping 20mm – enough for us to get excited) which took the edge off the fire risk so we were able to get Park Care out. Murray did a fantastic job as usual and the tracks are looking great and are a pleasure to walk.
- It was goodbye to the five very large sacks of rubbish thanks to the Wednesday volunteers and some excellent trailer packing.
- Wednesday volunteer Greg and Jo did a weed survey on part of the South Eastern face. The usual suspects were there, blackberry and Mexican Devil, but we also found a few patches of moth plant, some scattered Chinese privet and one rogue wild ginger.
- Our thanks to Tim Grove, Carol Fielding and Rolf Fuchs for island minding so we could go to a wedding, Ben's graduation and walk the Tongariro Crossing
- Ben GPS'd and mapped the island and buffer traps.
- Ben serviced the barge with Nortel as part of the Safe Ship Management program.
- The damaged lookout was repaired by Ian Buckley and Ben.

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday, 5 May.** Pickup at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. Jobs needing doing include moth plant hunting and new sand bags for the petrel site.
- We will be doing a lot of site prep to be ready for planting in June (if it rains), mainly cutting holes to assist planting. Thanks to the helicopter spraying there isn't a lot of further spraying required. We think that not having to compete with the buffalo grass and having a nice mulch layer has also helped to protect the plants to some degree from the effects of the drought.
- We are hoping to have a bit of a kiwi chick round up to check on the birds and transmitters and monitor one that is ready to go for the BNZ Save The Kiwi formal release with their key sponsors. This is scheduled for May.

Jo and Ben



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