



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – May 2010

What a month! rain, kiwis and, of course, GREY FACED PETRELS as reported in the Special Bulletin circulated earlier this month. Since then we have been back up at the petrel site at different times in the evening and at night. One of the birds was spotted the night after we first found them. We have not seen them again this does not mean they haven't been and gone when we weren't looking.

Rain glorious rain

- Had it not been for the return of the petrels our top story might have been about the rain. We have had over 90mm this month, most falling in the front that came through on the second weekend in May. This is getting back to more normal levels but we are still in major rain debt with a lot more needed to restore normal soil moisture levels. However, it will have made a big difference to some of the plants that were right on the edge; hopefully enough to tip them back toward survival. The grass has already responded with bright green patches springing up everywhere. The weather last weekend was also what seemed to bring the petrels in, dark with no moon and very windy. Hopefully we get more of the same soon.

Kiwi

- The petrels were found while we were in the middle of a kiwi hunt. After the first two kiwi chicks we located, Todd Hamilton caught another just after we found the petrels, this time with no transponder - the microchip that tells you who is who. That meant it was an island born chick, the first for us in our time here so another very special moment calling for another photo.



- Cathy inserted a transponder under the chick's wing so we will know who it is when we catch it again in future. One more bird was found back down near the manager's house ruin bringing the total count for the night to four. Like the first two birds found these two still had a bit of growing to do to reach the safe weight so they were measured and released. From the chicks we saw it does seem that the drought conditions have made for slower growing than usual, but now that we have had a bit of rain they should improve.

- Jo finally got to meet Sir Ed. He was due for a transmitter change which fitted in very nicely for the large group of people we had over on the island, including Tony Poulsen from Rentokil with his family and a colleague, Steve Bol from Bella Vista Motel Whangarei and some FOMLI friends and neighbours. Sir Ed decided to make us work for it and had chosen to hole up in dense flax and deep buffalo. However, he had underestimated how long Cathy's arms actually are and he was retrieved, much to the delight of those hoping for a glimpse. He was looking good having put on some weight since he was last checked after successfully incubating his chicks.
- Jo was also looking forward to meeting Glen who was also due a transmitter change. Glen was to star in a kiwi documentary Gerry Brackenbury is making with Channel North. The crew came over and followed Cathy and her antenna around, back and forth and up and down. Zeroing in on Glen's signal we determined he was in deep buffalo grass. Despite peering and reaching from all angles he evaded capture for some minutes but then he made a break for it, the buffalo grass wriggling as he tunneled. Jo rounded from above and Cathy from below. Feeling deep in the hole Jo could feel kiwi legs and Cathy's hands. There seemed to be an awful lot of legs. Cathy let go at her end and Jo pulled her set of legs out and at the end of those legs was not Glen but Baldrick his mate. She is a very distinctive bird with bald patches on her head and leg she has had since she was a chick. She had obviously holed up with Glen who was still in there. Baldrick's transmitter had failed in May 2008 so we decided to leave Glen for another day and put the transmitter on her instead. Goes to show, you never know what will turn up.

Fauna

- While Ben was waiting for Sir Ed to be extracted he had a quick search for Pacific geckos at the release site and spotted a juvenile. This indicates that the gravid females that were transferred on to the island in December have survived the dry summer and given birth to live young.
- Two of our New Zealand dotterels are back on the sand barge after an end of summer absence. Every time you go out there now there is a different collection of shags, oyster catchers, gulls, herons and dotterels all making use of the barge and the rock breakwater – great bird watching.
- There was also a large flock of little black shags around one morning this month working together to herd shoals of small fish in along the beach. It was very impressive synchronisation.
- The fantails are in great numbers as usual and very friendly, constant companions on any trip around the island, much to the delight of the school kids we had over. There has been one particular bird who spends a great deal of his time and energy attacking his own reflection in the wing mirror on the truck. So far his reflection has outwitted him.



Thanks to the predator control the only thing the island fantails have to worry about is other fantails

Predator Control

- We have had one capture on the island this month, not a stoat or a rat, but a mouse caught in one of the rat traps up near the pa site. This seems to be a bit of a mouse hot spot so some further investigation may be required.
- Quite quiet in the buffer this month with only a hedgehog and a possum caught at Onemama.
- At the end of last month John Ward had carefully selected a number of good specimens for us from the annual Poroti rabbit shoot. This month, with the excellent assistance and company of Gerry Brackenbury, we turned them into tempting stoat sized morsels for the DoC 200 traps. Once again we have a freezer full of bait (special thanks to the Summerleas in Onerahi who store it for us).



Gerry proving that even the worst jobs can be done with a smile

- Tim Grove continues on his mission to modify the trap entrances to deter banded rail. He is now half way through the rat trap covers
- Thanks to the ever keen Wednesday volunteers the northern end of the island has had its routine bait run completed.

Weeds

- Thanks to Ken Massey and the Northland Regional Council, we had Betta Contractors over two days this month and Jo and Ken worked with them to control blackberry and Mexican devil on the eastern and south eastern faces. It was steep, scratchy work with fully loaded knapsacks but very necessary. A large area was covered which will hopefully make a dent in some of the worst affected areas. However, it will definitely require some repeat treatment to get on top of it. On the positive side, whilst slogging up and down the hill Jo saw some great patches of natural regeneration under some of the older plantings.

Flora

- The plants are perking up after that bit of rain and it will be interesting to see if any of those that are looking dead are able to resprout.
- Preparation for planting is in full swing with a decision on a start date due soon.
- There is still quite a bit of autumn fruit around for the birds and lizards including karamu, karo and the large remnant tawapou. Five finger and cabbage tree fruits are also ripening. Kereru have been over from the mainland and have been seen feasting on the large fruits of the tawapou.

Visitors

- Iain Reid with the horticulture and plant ecology students from Northtec.
- 31 students, parents and teachers from the Whangarei Adventist Christian School came over to learn a bit more about trees, planting and restoration.
- The Freedom Walkers Club.
- The hard core Wednesday volunteers.
- Channel North and Emily Kernot from the Whangarei Report (lots of coverage for the island).

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 2 June.** Pickup at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. Jobs needing doing include thistle weeding and new sand bags for the petrel site.
- **Planting** - dates yet to be set but hopefully the rain continues so it is sooner rather than later.

Hei konei ra
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

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