



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – September 2010

SPRING has SPRUNG or, more accurately is currently springing. There have been so many exciting things going on this month I hardly know where to begin. After what has been a fairly mild winter (tempting fate) spring has kicked in here with gusto. Around the island you can see Karamu, Karo, Kowhai, Mahoe, Manuka, Ngaio, Puriri, Wharangi, and Whau all coming in to flower. This abundance is beautiful in its own right but it has also attracted some very welcome visitors with Tui being spotted everywhere. Long time FOMLI member and regular volunteer Dwane Kokich was out here two weeks ago and declared it the most Tui he had ever seen on the island. Awesome stuff.



### Fauna

As well as the Tui there has been all sorts of animal action on this month.

- Ivan has been spotted again. Whilst doing a routine check of the burrows Jo was most disconcerted to actually find what she was looking for, a Petrel *in* one of the burrows. Knowing that this is still young bird behaviour as it is too late for him to have been thinking about nesting, we checked the leg band and confirmed it was indeed Ivan (no need to check really – he savaged our hands in a very distinctive fashion). So that is thrice he has been spotted. Clearly he has a love/hate relationship with us/the island. Hopefully Ivan is not alone in his visits. There has been plenty of disturbance of burrow monitoring sticks over the last month, but also a lot of kiwi sign so it is very hard to know if it is petrel related or not. We will keep watching.



- Electrosound, the company that set up our solar powered petrel caller, has also very kindly donated a replacement speaker so we can continue to broadcast at full capacity. Many thanks
- Most people think of insects as not being quite as exciting as a bird or a lizard. However, when you show a group of primary school kids a giant centipede, capable of attacking a gecko, the response is far from dull. Jo found one of these little beauties whilst looking for a shore skink to show Kamo Primary students on their island visit. Giant centipedes are spotted from time to time on the island and are a very cool part of our mammal free ecosystem. Even though we knew they were capable of attacking lizards it is still hard to believe, so it was very co-incidental when later that same week, whilst over on the Poor Knights doing some lizard work, we actually came across a giant centipede eating a gecko – check it out. This centipede is thicker than my finger. A bit grisly but all part of the natural order of things when there are no rats and cats around.



- Knight island is currently like a scene from Alfred Hitchcocks 'The Birds' with gulls and Caspian terns crowding the shellbank, wheeling overhead and creating a raucous din. Lots of scrapes and eggs on the go now.
- A walk around any of the wetlands at the moment sounds a bit like approaching a motorcross track, with a cacophony of frog (Australian immigrants) voices coming from all sides. You can hear the ones down at the Singlemen's Quarters area from the Loop Track.
- We have also received the great news that the Northport Whangarei Harbour Restoration Fund, who sponsored the composting toilet for the ruins and all five of our previous lizard translocations, have said they are pleased to be able to fund the forest gecko translocation as well. This means the project can go ahead this summer. Woo hoo

### **Mowgli it is**

- After a very serious and official vote, our banded (M-OGW) dotterel shall henceforth be known as Mowgli. This excellent suggestion was thanks to Diane Kaiser. Mowgli is a character from the Jungle Book as well as an acronym for **M**etal, **O**range, **W**hite, **G**reen, **L**imestone **I**sland.
- Now that she has a name we can tell you what she is up to. Mowgli and friend began acting suspiciously two weeks ago and a sneaky peak revealed a nest scrape but no eggs. Since then they have ramped up their protective displays, 'rat running' any time you get close. These sorts of displays are designed to lure you away when you are getting too close so it is very likely there are now eggs in the nest. Mowgli's partner, all bluster and bravado, bravely distracted the entire Northtec Polytech group we had visiting last week when they unloaded at the beach.

### **Kiwi**

- Both Sir Ed and Glen are now sitting on nests. Sir Ed got on to it just after we completed the last ranger report and late last week Glen's transmitter changed over to the incubating pulse rate.

- Kahui Whetu had her annual transmitter change this month. We finally located her on her own after days of her sticking to Sir Ed like glue. Cathy and I had to call in the longer arms of Ben to extract her as she was in a very nice deep burrow under a huge old tree. She was gravid, probably with a second egg for the nest Sir Ed is sitting on now.
- Whilst doing the petrel site checks we found one of the culprits who have been doing the stick-disturbing up at the petrel site. Holed up in one of the burrows was one of the chicks brought over last September. He is now big enough to be transferred back to the mainland so Todd and Jo attached a transmitter to him and will track him every day until his release.

### **Predator Control**

- Stoat. A stoat was trapped along the south coast behind the mangroves. It was a large male, fortunately with a very empty stomach. That is our second for this year.
- With the help of the Northtec Polytech students we completed the N-Y lines baiting this month. The students, who are learning about predator management, were a fantastic help getting the majority of the filling completed. As a reward for their hard work they got to see the kiwi we found in the petrel burrow that afternoon when he had his transmitter attached. A big thank you to Surplus Direct who donated a large number of bags to use as bait bags – they are extremely useful. Thank you.
- The buffer has been surprisingly quiet with only one Norway rat caught at Onerahi in the last month
- Thanks again to Rentokil who have supplied us with another 40kg rodent bait for our island baiting program. This bait is crucial to our biosecurity program and is much appreciated.

### **Sanctuaries Conference**

At the end of August Ben and I were lucky enough to be able to attend the annual Sanctuaries of New Zealand Workshop run by Landcare Research. This year it was held at Great Barrier Island, one of our favourite places, so we got to spend a few days over there. The workshop was brilliant with some fantastic speakers and lots of new research and new ideas being presented and discussed. Particularly relevant to us were talks by two students, one doing a PhD and one doing a Master's degree. The first looked at past North Island robin translocations and what were the factors in success or failure, including how forest connectivity relates to dispersal. The second looked at the behaviours of mice when they invade islands and how quickly they establish and increase in number. Incredibly interesting and very applicable to Matakoho.

There was also a lot of discussion among the attendees, who are all involved in research and sanctuary projects around the country, about the successes of and challenges faced by their projects. It was very uplifting to hear all the great work being done and to compare issues and solutions. It was also great to be able to report on our successes as well as our great support and longevity.

### **Visitors**

- Those Wednesday wollies have been at it again, this time attacking those nasty weeds. A big team of us grid searched under the ski slope starling roost area. We found lots of young moth plant plants, a few ivy seedlings and lots of small barberry. Fortunately we got to them while they were all still young and haven't seeded. If we do an annual search of areas like this we can keep on top of the weeds.
- Dwane and Angela Kokich have also been over a lot this month, doing heaps of weeding and seed sowing. Dwane brought back this interesting collection of seeds from under a starling roost area; it shows just how much seed matter they are bringing in.



Two of the seed types are palm seeds, one of them being Phoenix palm seeds which is becoming a very nasty coastal weed. Seedlings of these species have also been spotted recently. Dwane also found a huge Taiwanese cherry that had obviously escaped detection for years and is now over 2m tall and up in the canopy. Goes to show the need for ongoing vigilance

- 20 members of the Whangarei Tramping Club had a fine day out despite a less than perfect forecast.
- Anne from Onerahi helped us doing some more weeding and some last minute planting.
- Olly Ball and 12 of his fantastic Northtec Pest Management students.
- Kamo Primary School (the ones who got to see the centipede) – a huge group of 66.

## General

- The 12-month progress report for the Community Conservation Fund was completed.
- More mowing and weedeating.
- The ruins were sprayed for Mexican Devil
- Jo spent a day with Paul Cornille from the DoC Kiwi Team out at Riponui.
- The driveway, which was getting muddier and muddier, was re-limed.

## Upcoming

- Volunteer Wednesday – 6th October. Pickup at 9am at the Onerahi pontoon, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. We will let you know closer to the date what we will be doing. As always it will be fun!

Hei konei ra

Jo and Ben



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