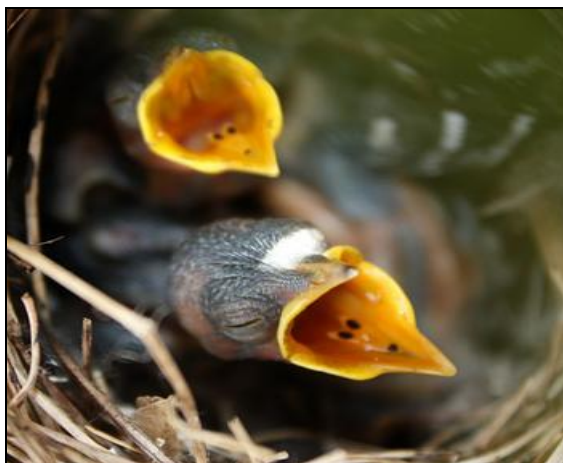




## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – October 2010

Over the last month Ben and I have been peeping into nests of all shapes and sizes. Birds everywhere are industriously gathering grass, leaves, twigs, mud, feathers, cobwebs, rubbish and the odd loose fibre from an unattended raincoat and carrying them off to their building sites. On the south coast we came across a little beauty of a fernbird nest and we have been tracking its progress all month. Fernbird nests are a deep cup shape, neatly woven from dried grass and rushes. They are usually built very low to the ground, tucked under vegetation and are lined with feathers (luxury). Into this comfy nest they lay between two and four eggs. These tiny eggs are a beautiful pale pink, speckled with a purple-brown. You can just imagine what an easy and tasty treat these would be for a rat over on the mainland. Here on the island though, the birds can incubate and feed their chicks in relative safety and nesting success here is through the roof.

You can see from the photos that this nest had three wee eggs, and if you look closely you can see that the nest was lined with kiwi and banded rail feathers – very fancy furnishings. The parents incubated these eggs for about two weeks and until the eggs hatched; in the second photo they are only a couple of days old. From this naked, helpless state they grow very quickly into beady eyed fledglings. The last photo was taken only 12 days after the second and these guys only have a few more days to go before they fly the coop.



We have since come across two more nests and there will be many, many more so we expect to start seeing stump tailed fledglings all over the island very soon.

Of course, not all nests are so fancy. Mowgli and partner take a more laid back approach to nest building, but not to parenting. After we completed the last Ranger Report we checked and they did indeed have eggs as we surmised – three in fact, hidden amongst the clover. Both of this pair are wonderful parents and have been chasing off seagulls and oyster catchers and anything else that gets too close. They also did some very convincing broken wing displays for us during nest checks. These theatrical displays are designed to convince a predator that they are an injured, easy target to lure it away from their chicks. They incubated for nearly a month and successfully hatched two of their three eggs. The other egg was likely to have been infertile. The two chicks are now running around on the barge, getting bigger by the day. They will be hanging about until mid November when they fledge.



**Mowgli's "broken wing"**

We have also been watching fantail nests, Caspian tern nests, swallow nests, sparrow nests and starling nests but more about those next month.

As well as all the nest excitement we have had a visitor up at the petrel site; this time it was "bird number 32" the second bird we spotted on the first night with Ivan. As with Ivan last month, it was found during the day sitting in one of the burrows testing it out. This means that both this bird and Ivan are showing some definite interest in the site which is very positive.

### **Kiwi**

- Kiwi chick 'Waka', found last month in a petrel burrow, was blessed by Freddie Tito and released out at the heads by Todd Hamilton and an audience of about 50 locals. Many thanks to Freddie for braving the high seas to come across to undertake the blessing.
- Sir Ed and Glen are still sitting tight on their nests. We were a bit worried about Sir Ed during the howling gales we experienced two weeks back: we had to tie the BBQ to the deck to stop it blowing away. His nest site was more exposed than Glen's but he obviously toughed it out. He hasn't got too long to go.
- During the monthly checks both Kahui whetu and Baldrick were hanging out close to their mates, perhaps providing a bit of moral support.
- We also had a night hunt this month with Todd Hamilton, hoping to find a few more kiwi chicks ready for release to go with Waka, but without success. We did however rouse a lot of drowsy fernbirds from their slumber. It seems when sleepy they are even more reluctant to fly and looked for all the world like small mammals crawling away over the grass.

### **Predator Control**

- All clear on the island this month with no captures.
- The buffer has also been quiet with only a possum caught at Onemama. This is good news for the Caspian terns and their eggs on Knight Island.

- The wonderful Work Wednesday Wollies turned up in force last work day and knocked off almost the entire A-M line baiting and also did some much needed line clearing and marking. An impressive day's work and much appreciated.
- Rentokil has made another kind donation this month: 40 really flash lockable bait stations for high visitor use areas. Rentokil's Shaughan Anderson had an island visit to share his knowledge on pest control.

## Visitors

Lots of volunteers and visitors over this month, helping out and enjoying the spring weather.

- One of our Work Wednesday Wollies enjoyed his day so much that he didn't leave for three days. Sebastian, a backpacker from Germany, stayed with us for a few days afterward and was a fantastic help finishing the cutting and marking of bait lines. We also had Kayne over doing some work training. He helped with the island traps and perimeter baiting and was there to see the newly hatched fernbirds.
- We had Gerry Brackenbury and Gines Pastor back from Channel North to do some more filming. This time they filmed the dotterel chicks on Matakahe, a dotterel nest on Rat island and the Caspian tern nests on Knight Island. They also got some great footage of fantails incubating and the fernbirds feeding their chicks.
- Dwane Angela, Tim and Carol were back again. Tim was working up at the petrel site continuing to re-set and modify burrows that have moved during the drought. Dwane, Angela, Carol and I headed to Dwane's School site to finish the weeding before the ground gets too hard for manual weed pulling. It is looking amazing in there with fantastic regeneration thanks to all Dwane and co's efforts.
- Pippa Lawlor, an educator from the museum came across with Gerry to have a look around the island and talk about teaching opportunities on the island. Hopefully we will be able to set up some cool programmes in the future for visiting schools.
- On a beautiful spring day we had the FOMLI Committee over for a walkabout. Everyone bravely ventured into the scrub to look at weeds and how the forest is regenerating; a very worthwhile exercise. It was also a chance to farewell the lovely Sheryl Mai, before she disappeared off to Italy. The island and the committee will miss you Sheryl, but we know you will be back on Matakahe again.



## General

- Ben sprayed out the periwinkle around Gerry's folly and between the six pack wetland and Manager's house. This is one of the worst weeds on the island because it is so difficult to get rid of once it establishes and it will quite happily grow in the shade. It needs multiple treatments in a year to wipe it out so it will need to be a focus for the next few years.
- More mowing in the never ending battle.
- Parkcare came over to blitz the spring growth on the tracks early this month – looks like it almost needs doing again!
- Jo visited Tawapou nursery to check it out (if you like gardening with native plants it is awesome!) and talk about sourcing plants for next year and the year after.
- Jo also visited the Punga Grove Youth Hostel. They have an info board and a donation box there for the island and will hopefully be funnelling any back packers keen to volunteer out our way.

## Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 3 November.** Pickup at **9am at the Onerahi pontoon**, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. Weather permitting we'll be off on a weed hunt, searching another revege block for lurking nasties.

Hei konei ra

Jo and Ben



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