



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – November 2010

Where would we be without the volunteers? I suspect somewhere without a paddle. This month the Work Wednesday wollies turned up in their droves and completed a huge area of weed control on the South Coast. It was the last chance this season before the ground gets too hard for grubbing and pulling the weeds out by hand. We targeted moth plant and Mexican devil and a bunch of other assorted nasties. A few new adult moth plants were found along with the odd privet and woolly nightshade. Both moth plants had spent pods so we will need to keep on top of those sites into the future. It made a huge difference so thank you to all those who helped.

The burly Ken Massey was also over this month to shear some of the fattest and woolliest sheep in the district. Ben and I, and the sheep, were all very glad to have the expert help.



Ken doing an outstanding job as always

Fauna

- Fun with nests has continued this month. The fernbird nest featured in last month's report fledged successfully with Ben finding an empty nest while doing the traps. We thought that would be the last we would see of them but out at night kiwi hunting we found all five – mother, father and three not so small babies all crammed back in, sharing a now rather flat nest for the night. Very heart warming.
- Mowgli and her man continue their expert parenting. Both chicks are pretty much fully grown now and we can barely tell them apart from their parents. Excellent work Mum and Dad. Two pairs of dotterels are also nesting on Rat island and a single pair are on Knight Island.
- The fantail nest near the house also fledged successfully. The stump tailed babies can be heard in the trees around the house demanding dinner. Like many parents the adult fantails are looking pretty ratty and harried and in need of a good post-nesting moult. Another nest we had been watching over on the south coast didn't make it – destroyed by winds or possibly by a morepork or harrier. Such are the vagaries of island life I suppose.
- We had also intended to bring you photos of the hoards of Caspian tern chicks from Knight Island this month but they proved to be too 'sprightly'. They are old enough now so that when danger threatens (eg. Ben trying to do the trap checks) they take to the water. That would be fine except that with a swift tide they can end up at Bream Head. Ben had to rescue and return a few of these little puff balls *a' la* Baywatch and now insists I call him David Hasselhoff.



Caspian terns - grown ups instead of the babies!

Kiwi

It has been a very busy and exciting month for Limestone kiwi this month - Just the way we like it.

- Perfect conditions for kiwi hunting (no wind, limited moonlight and an excellent kiwi team of Ben, Jo and Todd Hamilton) resulted in a bumper catch of five kiwi, all ready to go off the island. Admittedly Ben and his superior eyesight and agility caught all of them but I'm sure Todd and I helped with moral support. We finally caught up with Steph who has been evading capture for three years and she weighed in at a massive 2450g. It was just in the nick of time too as she was very friendly with Jen (actually a male) whom Ben also caught and they are probably a pair. No doubt they will continue their friendship on Mt Manaia where they were released together.
- Three of these kiwi were met on the Onerahi foreshore by a group of neighbours and FOMLI supporters for a blessing - many thanks to Freddie Tito. They were then whisked off and released in front of 65 adoring fans at Mt Manaia. The other two kiwi, Finn and Kelly Slater (it is hard to know if this bird was named by Ben or Pete) were taken to Bream Head where they will be looked after by their old friends Pete and Cathy. They are in very good hands.
- Glen is still sitting diligently on his eggs - good on ya mate. Sir Ed's nest turned out to be in a very tricky little spot but could not evade Cathy's eagle eye. The first nest check revealed Sir Ed had one chick and was still sitting on an egg. A week later and Sir Ed was the proud father of two very cute chicks which were "transpondered" by Cathy, Ben and a new vollie named James. So cute... the kiwi that is.



The big and bonny 'Steph' and a beautiful bouncing island baby.

- The Lizard Wizard Ben found a gravid shore skink this month, but this time it was on the other side of the island to where they were released! We can only assume that the island beaches will be festooned by these awesome creatures in the coming years. It's times like these you can all give yourselves a pat on the back. This project is really working.

Predator Control

- A ghastly stoat. Makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up when you come across one in a trap. This is the third for the year which is higher than we would like, especially since the buffer is quiet and it is not quite 'stoat dispersal season' yet. Dissection again revealed that it had an empty stomach which is always a relief.
- The buffer was quiet with no captures this month.

Visitors

- One of our favourite parts of this job is talking to the school groups that come over. They make you think outside the square and remind you that you have a really cool job. They also let you know you are making a difference. Favourite quotes from the last visits " I want to be a DOC when I grow up" (key information not quite grasped but close enough) and " we should make a weta house at school when we get back – that one was mean as".
- Kaurihohore school – 24 kids plus parents and teachers really wanted to help the island and decided to do a beach clean up. As a reward for their good deeds they got to see one of the kiwi that was being taken back to the mainland and everyone felt privileged and excited by the rare opportunity.
- Westmount school - 41 students and parents over with expert guiding provided by Gerry Brackenbury.
- Tikipunga High School – a 38 strong team circumnavigated the island as part of their social studies subject.
- Kevin Summerlee and 12 intrepid Canadians from Rotary. We arrived on the beach just in time to see one of the Oystercatchers lay an egg right in front of us. The Canucks were sure it was a robot that Ben was controlling.
- Marcus Lush and the "North" film crew came across and interviewed us, taking in the sights and sounds of the island. They were amazed by how much history was crammed into a rather wee island. Thanks to Fred for the loan of the most beautiful and lovingly handcrafted dinghy in Whangarei, so that Marcus could make a grand entrance.



**Some of the wonderful kids from Kaurihohore school
with a small portion of their haul of beach debris**

General

- Jo was interviewed by a Kamo High School class who are studying sustainability, along with Samara Nicholas from Experiencing Marine Reserves.
- Remco from Skyworks did an early morning flyby to do some aerial spraying this month with a selective grass herbicide. We targeted areas for next year's planting and releasing younger plantings from the grass. This made a big difference with the drought last year reducing competition for water with the grass. Jo got to jump in the chopper too – great to see the island from the air.
- Mowing - just for a nice change.
- Murray and the Parkcare crew to keep those tracks looking shipshape.

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 8th December.** Those of you paying close attention will realise this is the **SECOND Wednesday in December** not the first as usual. Pickup at **9am at the Onerahi pontoon**, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. Since you have all been so wonderful this year I think we should have a shared lunch to celebrate and we will make sure there is nothing too strenuous lined up.
- **MOUSE BUST.** Fun for everyone (except perhaps the mice). The 6-weekly island baiting will be due and we need your help to do it. **Thursday 9th December.** Pickup at **5.30pm at the Onerahi pontoon**, returning approximately 7.30pm. It is a lovely way to spend a December evening and will prepare you well for the upcoming festive season. You will need old clothes and good shoes. Long pants or gaiters is also a good idea if you are game to try the southern slopes.

Hei konei ra
Jo and Ben



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