



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – January 2011

Happy New Year. Hope your Christmas and New Year was as lovely as ours.

I started the year off in an interesting way, off on a stinging nettle hunt with Gerry Brackenbury, guided by observant Pukenui volunteer Mark Dudley. Mark had spotted the nettles during his forest wanderings and led us right to them. The aim was to collect some local seed, with permission from the District Council, for growing this native plant for the island. Why grow a stinging nettle you may well ask? The idea is to attract the increasingly rare native red admiral and yellow admiral butterflies which feed on nettles. It was very encouraging to see many of the plants had caterpillars feeding on them – not sure if these were admirals though – we will need a more expert eye for that.

The species we were collecting is a small, short-lived plant that likes semi-shade and a bit of disturbance. Despite being small, like all nettles they do still possess an unpleasant sting but after a minute or so it is only moderately annoying. I should know – I crouched down on a patch of nettles while out there and, while the plant was rather unhappy, I was none the worse for wear after giving it a rub!



Using a hand lens to identify ripe seed.

Note the attractive yellow dishwashing gloves for sting prevention

Fauna

Down on the sand barge it is all go. Any disturbance down there sends the many sets of parents into full conniptions with the chicks running in all directions. There are currently six oyster catcher chicks from three broods in the vicinity, all at different stages of development. There are also two more dotterel chicks courtesy of a sneaky nest that Mowgli and partner hatched without us even spotting it. The first we saw of it was on Christmas day when two chicks came running out.



**An improvement on last month's rather grainy shot of an oystercatcher chick.
These are the youngest two there at the moment.**



**After they realised I was after them with the camera.
the chicks chose camouflage as their best option**

The sand spit is also a hive of shore bird activity. There are two pairs of dotterel and at least three pairs of oyster catcher. We managed to spot three dotterel chicks belonging to one of the dotterel pairs. Judging by the behaviour of the other birds they have nests hidden so we didn't linger for fear of keeping the birds off the nests too long.

Kiwi

- We went back into Glen's nest this month and the mystery egg had hatched a beautiful chick. As suspected it was a very young chick with a soft belly and still visible umbilicus. Maihi Cooper and Shaughan Anderson from Rentokil were over helping Ben to set up some nifty predator control technology so they also came along to see the chick and hear Glen growling his disapproval at being disturbed.
- A few weeks later we did Glen's transmitter switch and biometrics. He was being a good dad and was still with his chick. Despite his long stint incubating on the nest (over 120 days) he was in reasonable condition, so he obviously knew what he was doing. Now that he has moved out all that remains is to excavate the nest chamber to see if there was another egg that Glen buried. Not a pleasant task by all accounts, and one should be careful not to put one's hand through an aging egg while digging.
- Baldrick was also caught for her six-monthly biometrics and transmitter switch. She was in fine form, weighing in at a solid 2700g.



Maihi from Rentokil and Glen's very wee chick

Predator Control

- After being here nearly a year, we finally caught a rat – and we weren't even the ones to catch it. It was found in one of the traps near Shipwreck Bay by our island minders Donna, Riaan and Grace. Historically five/six rats have been trapped each year so, while pleased with the low tally, it does make you wonder what is going on in the rat communities adjacent to the island.
- Interestingly in the buffer we also had a ratty month with a ship and Norway rat caught at Onemama and a ship rat caught on Knight Island. On Knight Island the Caspian chicks are fledging and there are now black back gull chicks everywhere.
- We also had a much larger potential predator on the island this month – a very large German Shepherd (the dog that is). It had come across in a dinghy with some visitors and was happily chasing birds down on the beach when we spotted it. Once the owners were informed of the No Dogs rule and the risk to our island fauna – especially how quickly dogs can find and kill kiwi – they were happy to head back to the mainland. Goes to show, you have to be vigilant at all times.
- Ben prepared a bit more rabbit meat to get us through the stoat season. The rabbits came courtesy of several sources with people chipping in with a bucket full of rabbits.

Visitors

- Our brilliant volunteer James has donated a huge number of hours over the last month, powering through a massive body of work. He has cleared bait lines, checked traps, laid baits, grubbed thistles (some that were metres tall), done repair jobs, and cleaned out the sheep tank to name just a few.
- This month Matakoho was host once again to a wedding (according to written records the first formal wedding ceremony was held on the island in 1874). It was held on the island on the 31st and was a surprise trip and wedding for the guests. The weather cooperated well and all seemed to have had a wonderful time on the island.
- The M.V Waipapa has been back again.
- Wonderful island sitters. Many, many thanks again to our wonderful island sitters Donna, Riaan and co. This time we were away holidaying and we could relax knowing the island was in great hands.

General

- Completion of a Growsafe course for Ben.
- Fire training with DOC for Jo.
- Fixing the fridge so that it can cope with the summer heat.
- Mowing – the grass just doesn't want to quit. The rain does mean the island is still wonderfully green though so we shan't complain.

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 2nd Feb.** Pickup at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. We are thinking that a mass wattle hunt around the old shelterbelt site and quarries may be required (only a hop, skip and a jump from the shade of the house and the cool of the sea).
- Ben will be going nocturnal this month spending lots of time hunting for geckos.

Hei konei ra

Jo and Ben



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