



## **Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – May 2011**

After the thrilling return of the oi last year we were starting to get excited about the possibility of seeing last year's birds again as we headed into the end of April and the start of May, and we were secretly hoping for a few more. We are happy to report that our hopes have already been fulfilled with, not only one of the birds back from last year, but another TWO birds spotted up at the petrel station. Absolutely brilliant. The two new arrivals are 'E212610' and 'E212669', from the 2005 and 2006 transfer years respectively. Both were found lurking in burrows during the day.

The bird back from last year is not Ivan but the other bird we have taken to calling 'May' E212633. In another really positive sign, May was found sitting in the same burrow we found him/her in last year obviously taking a second look.

We have also had confirmation of birds up at the site overnight on at least four other occasions. We cannot tell if it/they are the same bird or different birds but it is great to know we are getting fairly regular visitations as this increases the chance of birds interacting on site. May and E212669 were found in burrows on the same day so hopefully they became acquainted.

E212610, and Ivan if he is also around, are now five years and eight months old – making them more likely to consider breeding. The next step to hope for.



**Another bird in the hand! E212610**

## **Planting season ahead!**

Being May it is of course nearly time to get some plants in the ground. We have been blessed (and occasionally cursed) with plenty of rain over the summer and autumn so the digging should be easy. No promises though.

Planting will begin on the Monday of Queen's Birthday weekend, Monday 6th June, and then will take place every Sunday after that until all the plants are in the ground. As usual we will pick you up from the Onerahi boat ramp at 9am, returning at approximately 1.30pm after lunch. Bring your lunch, good footwear, a shower proof jacket, and gloves if you have them.

Ben has been undertaking further site preparation recently with a follow-up second spray at the planting sites to make doubly sure the buffalo grass has been severely knocked back prior to planting. He has also begun the task of weed eating so that you don't have to fight through all that dead grass. Thanks Ben.

## **Predator Control**

We are continuing with our heightened level of vigilance for pests, maintaining the increased frequency of trap baiting/checking this month. We have caught a Norway rat and two mice on the island so we clearly cannot relax yet.

Numbers are obviously still high in the buffer too with a stoat, four ship rats, two Norway rats and three mice caught. It is enough to make us hope for a very cold winter.

## **Kiwi**

- Our island kiwi are in good spirits and so they should be – food and bugs everywhere. Glen and Baldrick have been keeping very tight over the last month and a half which is quite unusual for them. Hopefully they will get off to an early start breeding this year. Conversely, Sir Ed and Kahui whetu haven't been quite as cosy as they usually are but maybe they just need some 'alone time'.
- One of the (few) benefits of having to get up in the middle of the night to visit the outdoor toilet is occasional kiwi spotting. Jo surprised a small chick near our back door the other night but was not quick enough in her slippers to catch it once it bolted for the bushes.
- Jo travelled to Napier this month to attend the National Kiwi Hui, sponsored by the BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust. It was a fantastic two days of presentations and workshops and a great opportunity to catch up with other groups doing kiwi work all over the country. A major theme from the Hui continues to be around the importance of sharing the message that 'dogs kill kiwi'. Northland will be the home of a big dog campaign over the next year so we will be helping to spread this message. Did you know that elsewhere in the country adult kiwi survivorship is to between 45-60 years, but here in Northland, thanks by and large to the impact of dogs, the average age is only 14 years! A dreadful statistic that we can hopefully help change through better dog management near kiwi populations. There were also some very interesting talks about ferrets causing havoc and killing adult kiwi in the large mainland island projects, some amazing developments in acoustic monitoring technology and some very useful and interesting talks about conservation genetics in small populations.
- We have also completed our annual funding application to BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust. BNZSKT have been funding kiwi work on the island for many years, allowing us to maintain our traps and trapping regime which is so crucial for keeping the island predator free.

## **Other Fauna**

- Eagle eye Ben has been at it again and has found another nine forest geckos to join the fifteen already on the island. They will head off to quarantine this week for disease screening before they are brought back to the island for a blessing and release. We will keep you posted.
- Since the release we have seen forest geckos out and about but not using their refuge boxes. However, the refuge boxes are not sitting empty. After only having been on site for a couple of weeks they were already occupied by weta of all sizes (along with native bush cockroach and the odd ants' nest). It is fantastic to see this abundance of large invertebrates – great food for other species and pretty cool in their own right. We have also been spotting quite a few weta out and about at night over the last month, often gathering together on a tree or group of trees, having a party or a hui about weta business.

- If you keep an ear out at the moment on the island you might just hear a tui . We have been hearing a few around the house and elsewhere on the island. We haven't figured out yet what they are up to but it is probably due to the abundance of autumn fruit around.
- The morepork are here in good numbers as well – lots of varied calls all night.



**A very 'juicy' female tree weta expressing her displeasure at being disturbed from her pozzie in one of the gecko houses**

### **Visitors**

- The Wednesday wollies did a marvellous job this month re-bagging sand bags for the petrel site and re-setting some of the burrows so the site is as appealing as possible for the returning birds. In a fortuitous coincidence, perhaps as a karmic reward for their dedication, it just so happened that the vollen day was one of the days we discovered birds on site so they all got to take a peek at what all their hard work was for.
- Olly Ball and Gerry Brackenbury came across this month and worked with Ben to complete the long term vegetation monitoring. This monitoring is starting to show some fantastic development in the plantings toward self-sustaining communities and complex habitats which is great to see after years of planting. The buffalo grass is still an issue in some areas and this will be a focus for the years ahead.
- We were visited by another class from Waipu Primary, 31 students and parents in all. They came across again with Gerry Brackenbury as their guide and had a fantastic day. Another two trips to go.
- Seven volunteers from Hospice came over and spent their time releasing plants around the Singlemans' slip area and planting some puriri kindly donated by Owen Mitchell. The releasing is so important to ensuring we get the most from our planting efforts, especially since this warm wet summer means the grass and weeds have gone crazy.

### **General**

- Ben has been spraying the many bait station sites to ensure we don't lose them to the grass.
- Ben also used a selective spray to release the native hibiscus sites from competition with grass.
- Ben gave a talk to at the Whangarei Landcare Forum AGM, with a definite slant toward geckos!
- Murray and a team from Park Care came across again to keep the tracks in check.
- A bit of mowing of course.

## Upcoming

- Planting begins Queen's Birthday Monday, 6th June and will continue on every remaining Sunday in June, until all the plants are in the ground. Pickup from the Onerahi boat ramp at 9 am returning at approximately 1.30pm after lunch. As always bring your lunch, good footwear, a shower proof jacket and gloves if you have them. Contact us if you have any queries or to check if its on in case of nasty weather - 09 436 0923.
- Volunteer Wednesday – 1st June. Pickup at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. See you there.

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

[www.limestoneisland.org.nz](http://www.limestoneisland.org.nz)