



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – September 2011

Baby animals are a springtime specialty, so smack bang in the middle of that spell of gorgeous weather we enjoyed, I whipped Jo off to Whangarei Hospital where she conjured up a third ranger for the island... Penny Kohe Barr. Astute readers will note she shares her middle name with her new island home and at the time of writing she has spent 96.7% of her life on the island and thus has a very special connection with it indeed. It has been a busy first month adjusting to her, shall we say, 'demands', so this report may not be that comprehensive! However, Penny is not the only major development the island has seen this month. Read on.



Ranger team Matakohē Limestone August 2011

Just in the nick of time

First of all a huge thank you must go to Golden Bay Cement. They recently won the Fletcher Building Award for the Most Effective Sustainability Initiative with their entry entitled "Replacement of Fossil Fuel with Renewable Biofuel in the cement manufacturing process", and chose to donate the prize money received to FOMLI for the purchase of a new 13-foot work dinghy with 15 horsepower outboard and road trailer. This was to replace the old dinghy and outboard which had come to the end of their long life. In fact the old dinghy was literally sinking - you could see the sea through the hole in the bottom. Golden Bay Cement didn't think this was ideal, especially considering Penny's imminent arrival, so plans were hatched and purchase of the new boat arranged. Marine North then helped further by providing the dinghy at a substantial discount and the new boat arrived just in time to ensure safe passage to the mainland to have Penny. It is a major understatement to say we are very pleased to have our flash new (and dry) means of transport. We'll include a photo next month when it has its fancy sign writing completed. Many thanks to the team who worked to organise it, especially John Ward, Paul Bonetti, Dwane Kokich, Sandy Page and Pam Stevens.

Timber!

Normally we *add* trees to the island but just before Penny's arrival some major tree removal took place. A number of the large macrocarpas near the Manager's House ruin had become unsafe, some needing limbing while others needed to be removed entirely.

This, of course was no small job, complicated by island isolation. So, in a logistically challenging operation Whangarei District Council organised for the professionals to come over and tackle it, along with a huge chipper and digger which had to be barged on to the island. Hylton Edmonds from Harbour Marine Ltd, who had been working at Portland for Golden Bay Cement, came to our aid to do this. Three talented gentlemen from Treescape spent a week on the island to complete the job. It was an incredible process to watch – when some of the big trees came down we developed a new appreciation for just how big they were. It was also incredible to watch the chipper in action. This was a serious piece of machinery, capable of 'eating' large branches and turning them from an unsightly fire hazard into useful mulch for the island. As well as making the island, and the ranger house, a safer place, it has also opened up a great new view shaft and picnic spot and means we will be able to get on with new planting and landscaping around this major arrival area of the island. Huge thanks to Whangarei District Council for financing the Treescape team, and to Golden Bay Cement and Harbour Marine who shared the cost of the barge which was so essential for this project.



**The chipper makes its way very carefully on to the island...
they don't like salt water....**

Much of the medium sized wood has been scattered around to create woody debris habitat for creepy crawlies and the rest of the smaller stuff has been chipped to use for mulch in future plantings. To keep our carbon balance up to scratch, Gerry has already been over planting some of the clearance site with pohutakawa supplied by Alan Willis and kowhai leftover from the planting season.



Going



Gone

Predator control

We completed the "Mouse bust" with help from a gaggle of volunteers and are planning a second pulse this spring with the help of NorthTec students - and anyone else we can rope in. Things are still quiet on the island with no captures. Long may it last. The additional traps on Knight Island still seem to be catching critters with two mice and a rat caught there this month. We caught one weasel on Onemama Pt and a couple of rats were trapped at Onerahi. Low captures are fairly typical at this time of year as the predators have not had time to breed after winter when a lot of them die due to adverse conditions. The buffer should start "heating up" from here on in so our new dinghy will be coming into its own.

Flora

- The "A" team turned up on the island with their wits about them and planted a grove of *Urtica incisa* on the south coast of the island. These low growing stinging nettles were grown from seed collected in January from a population near the Whau Valley Dam that Mark Dudley of Pukenui fame kindly showed us. This species is not particularly common so it should have a welcome reprieve on the island and, fingers crossed, it will provide excellent habitat for red and yellow admiral butterflies. Good vision Gerry.
- In other flora news, a clucky collection of Wednesday Wollies were bribed on to the island with the promise of a sneak preview of the new ranger. After much cooing, we planted the last 800 umbrella sedges in Gerry's folly wetland to replace the exotic buffalo grass that had taken hold.

Kiwi and other fauna

- As well as Penny, the island has been joined by eight other babies this month. Todd Hamilton from Whangarei Heads Landcare has brought over seven new kiwi chicks and a further chick has joined us from Auckland Zoo. This influx will boost our numbers back up after we have had a bit of a kiwi 'clean out', with quite a few birds going off recently and not many coming on last season. This included 'Charlie', a kiwi that has been here since November 2009. We think he was one of the birds who have been calling near the house. We caught him when the Treescape work was underway; he was holed up in the tree debris soas removed from the danger zone' and released out at McLeods Bay.
- The kowhai are in full bloom at the moment and a number of tui have been over getting into this great food source.
- As we noted last month, the grey warblers are into their breeding well and truly. I recently found a nest that had been predated by harrier or a morepork. On closer inspection it was found to be lined with the downy seeds of moth plant – a clear sign that we need to keep up our weed work on the island.

Unusually, we have also had a baby NZ fur seal carcass wash up on the south side of the island. We will bury and bless it with our Kaumatua Freddy Tito from Te Parawhau.

Upcoming

- If you have a spare half day and are keen for a walk with a purpose, then get in touch and arrange a time to come over to help us finishing the second pulse of the mouse bust.

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