



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – November 2011

Variable oystercatchers (VOC's) have got a whole lot more variable on the island this month. We have been enjoying the company of a leucistic VOC for the last few weeks. Leucism is slightly different to albinism. An albino bird will have red eyes whereas a bird with leucism will have normal coloured eyes, and in this case the beak and legs are also normal in colour. I've taken it upon myself to call the oystercatcher "Lucy" after its genetic condition. It is possible that Lucy is the same bird that hatched on the sandspit in 2003 as VOC's have been known to live for up to 27 years. It is by far the coolest bird on the island but methinks the other VOC's are a bit perplexed by this strange bird that is the same shape as them, sounds like them and follows them around but is just not quite right. Yes, poor old Lucy is often the third wheel at sandspit gatherings.



**Lucy hanging out with a regular VOC
and a NZ dotterel on the sandspit**

Kiwi

- Rugby fans will be overjoyed by the arrival of kiwi chicks "Webb" and "Ellis" sired by "Ray" from Rarewarewa via Todd Hamilton. Thanks Todd, thanks All Blacks. Staff from our sponsors, Golden Bay Cement came to release the chicks which scuttled off into the bush at nightfall.
- I've been patiently checking Glen's nest for hatch sign all month. I was finally rewarded with some egg membrane and a nest check revealed our first island hatched chick for the season. Emma Craig and her son Charlie came over to microchip the chick. Nice work Glen... and Baldrick!



Emma, Charlie and Glen's chick

- Sir Ed has started incubating in the bush on the Northern face: still a while to go until hatch but exciting nonetheless. Go Sir Ed.

Fauna

- I've been doing some midnight marauding and have located Pacific geckos out and about on the *Coprosma repens*. It is brilliant to see them out and about and looking healthy.
- The majority of the Caspian terns' nests on Knight Island have hatched chicks. It's like a kindergarten over there at the moment with chicks running around all over the show.
- The VOC's have starting nesting this month. The most interesting nest locations are next to the picnic table by the ski lane, on the wharf by the ruins and under an unstable slip on the north coast... not too smart these birds.
- We have two NZ dotterel chicks on Knight Island, and eggs on Rat Island, the sand barge and on the sandspit.
- The black-backed gulls are nesting making for hazardous trap checking. I've taken to wearing a beanie to protect my head even though it is sweltering hot.
- Tui are lurking around and a number of shining cuckoo have been calling on the island. Shining cuckoo parasitise grey-warbler nests in the New Zealand summer and then spend winter up in the tropics around PNG... good life!



A Pacific gecko waits in ambush for any unsuspecting insects!

Flora

- Carol Fielding stumbled across a flowering kiekie which was very exciting. The bracts are quite delicious, which is why they are a rare find. Generally possums Hoover them up as soon as they emerge.
- The flax is flowering and a plethora of animals are enjoying the nectar including silvereyes, starlings, tui and all kinds of invertebrates.
- Dr Olly Ball and Nick Bamford finished off the vegetation monitoring including the installation of four new sites in the grassland. Watch this space for final results. Nice work guys.
- We trialled a volunteer day specifically for weeding in addition to our regular volunteer day. The team did some great work including cleaning up the moth plant sites. I think we're getting on top of it at most places.
- Periwinkle spraying has continued with help from Northtec student Nick Bamford. I discovered a new site on a bluff, which was mildly annoying.

Predator control

It is still dead on the island and long may it last. Even the buffer is quiet with only a few mice on Knight Island, a rat at Onerahi and nothing at Onemama Pt, a rarity indeed. Next month things are bound to heat up.

Visitors

- The island has been a hive of activity with loads of independent visitors including trampers, kayakers and fishermen.
- Weather has caused some postponements of trips but Bigfish Creative made it over for a game of soccer.

General

- Ken Massey, Dwane Kokich and I sheared and drenched the sheep. Actually Ken did it and Dwane and I watched/caught the sheep for him. They are loving their summer coats thanks guys. Speaking of sheep, this month's random flotsam was a dead sheep that washed up on the North Coast.

- The Wednesday Wollies had a cracker of a day moving wood debris from the old macrocarpa into the forest. The purpose of this is to enhance the habitat for critters without having to wait for the natural cycling of the young forest. They also released and mulched some of the dryer planting sites on the ridge to give these vulnerable plants a better shot at survival this summer. James Brooks has been coming regularly doing trapping, baiting, clearing weeds and all sorts of other things. Thanks James.
- Tim Grove did some work on our boat trailer to make it easier on the hull.
- Look out for the Limestone Island section at the new hub info centre.
- The header tanks got a spring clean after ants blocked up the washing machine and there were ants floating in Penny's bath. Turns out there was an ants' nest in the lid of the tank and they had been falling in. The joys of island living.
- Ridiculous amounts of mowing.
- Talk given to Rotary.

Upcoming

Volunteer Wednesday – 7th December. Pickup at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. See you there.

Hei konei ra

Jo and Ben



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