

Report from the Chair

Annual General Meeting of Friends of Matakohe/ Limestone Island

Whangarei RSA Bowling Club Rooms
Wednesday, 16 February 2012

Earlier this year the 90th kiwi left the safe shores of the island to again boost the populations on the mainland. The number of Kiwi at Whangarei Heads has increased from 80 ten years ago to 400. Keeping the island as a safe haven is one of the roles of Ben and Jo Barr, the Rangers, and takes an enormous amount of constant and relentless hard work as well as good planning. Ben and Jo welcomed Penny Kohe into their lives in August, but somehow managed to keep the project on an even keel. We often receive positive comments about the very informative newsletters, which now have the added entertainment of Penny Kohe's contribution to island life. Ben attended the Society for Research on Amphibians and Reptiles in New Zealand and gave talks to groups, the Onerahi Gardening Club for example. Both Rangers had fire training and Jo attended a Landcare Trapping Workshop. We really value their ecological knowledge as well as their good people skills and look for opportunities for them to up-skill.

This year James has been a considerable help to Ben as a hardworking volunteer. Voluntary labour is essential to the island, whether it be Ian Page doing the occasional mowing, the mouse bust teams, the very valued Wednesday volunteers, or Jan keeping tabs on the membership list, Dwane sowing seed or Gerry dealing to the buffalo grass. Chopping up the dead hares from the Poroti shoot is one of the least attractive activities, as is the endless cutting of flax back from the tracks or dealing to the ever-present weeds. Volunteer hours were up 60% on last year at the over 2000 hour mark, or equivalent to \$36,000.00 free labour. The documentary by Marcus Lush "North" was recently repeated on Television. Ben often speaks to the increasing number of independent visitors and several have mentioned North as motivation for their visit. While keeping the essentials going it can be tricky for the Rangers to arrange and take groups round the island. Well over 1000 were transported in the barge over the last year. Mark from Pacific Kayaks has been bringing groups over quite a lot this summer, as has the MV Waipapa every weekend. As well as the usual trampers, fishermen and kayakers we have had diverse groups visiting. Some examples are the Maunu Health Active Kids, Hospice volunteers, North Tech, Tikipunga High, a Rotary group from Argentina, NAC Insurance, Smart Energy, Big Fish Creative, Life and Leisure, Jacques from Wild Vets and even some earthquake refugees from Christchurch.

Having very competent Rangers in residence on the island is key to the long-term success of the project, along with the strong networks that have built up over 20 years we are able to call on when expertise is needed. We continue to make a little bit of money go a long way. The local business community continues to support us, despite less buoyant times. We were very lucky that Golden Bay came to the rescue when our multi-repaired runabout threatened to completely disintegrate about the time Penny Kohe was due to arrive. They generously donated the money for the boat and motor from an environmental prize they had received and we all breathed a sigh of relief.

We had a farewell for Iain Reid in May; his contribution to FOMLI and the committee has been considerable as we all know. When I complained bitterly he was deserting us for the deep South, he replied he was only an e-mail away. So we intend to maintain that connection. I will miss the walks around the island when he shared his remarkable knowledge of the plants.

The stable and consistent support of the committee and loyal volunteers contributes to the success and steady progress of the restoration over the last 20 years or so. Again another big thank you to Sandy our Treasurer and all committee members who are all spokes in the wheel of a great team of people who are easy to work with. Thanks to Ken for sorting the sheep, Jane for overseeing another successful neighbours' meeting at the Yacht Club. Thanks again TOPSAIL restaurant for donating a delicious afternoon tea. Carla ensured that we are now listed on the Civil Defense warning system and our barge is now listed with GBC as part of their emergency planning. Golden Bay Cement continues to create the backbone of funding, along with the support of BNZ Kiwi, the Whangarei District Council, also Rentokil, the Harbour Restoration Fund and Forest and Bird. Publicity can be hard but we have had some really good articles and a sign now at the Hub at the Town Basin .We endeavour to mention our major sponsors at every opportunity.

Our thanks to the Northland Regional Council who helped with spraying and to Donna, Riaan and family for holiday "island sitting" again. OSNZ have now undertaken to do an annual Caspian tern survey. Also to Freddie Tito, a big thanks for turning up so reliably when needed, sometimes with little notice. It was great to have a visit to the island from past Ranger Colin and Rose. Rose helped with the petrels six years ago and it was encouraging to see her reactions as we wandered around the island. It was through her eyes you could see there has been pretty amazing growth which has been especially noticeable over this spring /summer and other progress that has been made. The stealth camera will be again our eyes watching for the petrels to return again this year. All fingers crossed.

The Harbour Restoration Improvement Fund committee has been very supportive and has assisted with the costs of translocating the geckos and skinks. The forest geckos arrived in April and represented many night hours for Ben and others in the challenging task of capture. Our thanks to the landowners who made their properties available like Raewyn and Grant Faber. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution made by Elizabeth Adams and her daughter Marina in their role "babysitting" our forest gecko with such good care up at the Museum and at Massey University when in quarantine. It is very exciting that the recent lizard monitoring is showing very positive results. We look forward to the day we have to watch where we stand on the tracks because they are so alive with lizards. It also sounds like tree weta are well and truly established. Multitudes of copper skinks and even short finned eels indicate a healthy improvement in biodiversity. Fern birds and banded rail have appeared on Onemama Point, Knight Island and the others in the buffer, no doubt benefiting from the efficient trapping done there. James trapped 16 possums at Onemama Point just before Christmas, our thanks to the Wisemans for allowing access to their property.

Treescape did a sterling job of the tree trimming around the manager's house and cottage despite the tricky logistics of getting gear on to an island. The area around the manager's house is looking better and better thanks to the happy team of Wednesday volunteers and James and Ben. We also acknowledge the very much appreciated help from the Parkcare guys.

The establishment of a Trust to manage the endowment fund is making progress and three trustees have now been appointed, John Ward, Colin Edwards and Irene Durham. They will produce a document that they are happy with and once this is approved by the committee, any monies left as a legacy can be added and help to secure the future viability of the island project.

Some of the "to do" list for 2012:

- The annual Argentine ant survey
- Repair of the memorial seats
- Going live with the newly designed website with more interactive and improved functionality.
- Finish the final poster for the shelter.
- Improve learning opportunities for visiting groups.
- Get the petrel site assessed.
- With the aid of the stealth camera watch out for more birds.

- Devise an action plan for the northern face.
- Jo is working on a detailed weed plan as part of the ongoing Restoration Plan review and the eradication of weeds.
- Resolve the sheep droppings in the shelter issue.
- Intensify grass management in planed areas to enhance natural regeneration rates.
- Look at further species translocations, such as giraffe weevil, egg laying skink.
- Get an assessment of the tracks so they are included in the long-term plan and are brought up to WDC standards to improve access.
- Look at user friendly gates to replace the stiles.
- Continue to deal quickly to any invading rats, stoats, weasels.
- And of course, the constants of monitoring, repairing traps, spraying, mowing and more spraying and more mowing.

Thank you

Pam Stevens