



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – January 2012

Happy New Year everyone. Jo, Penny Kohe and I had a great break off island but were equally glad to be home again on our island paradise.

Unless you were holidaying in another universe you would have noticed how much rain and cold weather we experienced in late December and early January. Fortunately for all holidaymakers the weather has now warmed up and the plants on the island have also been revelling in it. These warm wet conditions are excellent news for our younger plantings – gets them off to a flying start. This is also great for the general wellbeing of the island, with thick new foliage everywhere and an abundance of delicious invertebrates for our swag of hungry baby kiwi. It does however bring risks, as pest plants and animals will also be doing well. So while we are enjoying the buzz in the air, we need to be extra vigilant with our pest control programmes.



**Ned scaled the brick kilns to spray weeds, with a harness of course**

### Kiwi

- It has been kiwi, kiwi and more kiwi on the island this month so we will kick off proceedings talking about these large, flightless, brown birds with long beaks that many of you will be familiar with. The large, mostly flightless, Todd Hamilton from Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum, has also been a regular fixture on the island this month.
- We have three new chicks on the island from Riponui, courtesy of Todd's hard work. "Legs 11" came on early in January and was joined ten days later by his sibling and their mate from up the hill. They join the now quite large number of chicks that have already been released on the island this season.

- To make way for all these younger birds we've been trying to clear off some of the older crèche birds that are getting close to being 'over-stayers'. While the girls and I were away, Todd came across to the island with James Fraser and Natasha Coad and their specialty kiwi dogs. Unfortunately they only managed to locate our resident birds as conditions were far from perfect with the weather working against them and limited time. Many thanks to Todd for organising this in our absence.
- In addition to using trained dogs I've been donning my new running shoes and doing night searches around the island. I'm no Usain Bolt but I've managed to rustle up three in as many nights, which is not too bad. One of these birds was Sir Ed's chick from 2009 – a chick no longer, weighing in at a whopping 2.5 kg. Definitely time for him to go! Todd, Ari Stevens and some friends have kept me company on these night stalks - thanks guys. Two of these birds have been repatriated to the mainland so far, one to Taurikura and the other to Ngunguru.



**One of Sir Ed's chicks from last year is captured for release by our friends Nick and Gina. Believe it or not this isn't even the big one!**

- Sir Ed is dangerously close to hatching his chick. His transmitter got a bit muddled up with the silly season so I had to sneak a peak at his eggs while he was out feeding at night. Rather foolishly, Sir Ed had made a very lacklustre nest with a "skylight" so would have been getting very wet last month. Hopefully he will learn his lesson for next time. Nevertheless, one of the eggs is about two weeks off hatching. The other appears to be infertile. I'll be inspecting the nest regularly so we can microchip his chick. Watch this space. Glen's nest is due next month so I've isolated it in case something should go awry. He had kindly nested among flax at the base of a mothplant vine that I wasn't aware of. It is nice when a threatened bird helps you find a nasty weed.

## **Fauna**

- The shore skinks are really taking off on the Northern side. I had a quick rustle under some refuges and noticed a beautiful gravid female last week. She took off and disturbed a nice adult male nearby. She will be giving birth shortly so then we'll have up to eight more, not to mention all the other ones lurking around. I will be doing lizard translocation monitoring next month so please feel free to get excited about what we might find!



**An extremely gravid (pregnant) shore skink hides in the beach leaf litter**

- I have found a few fern birds nests during my kiwi hunts and many of them are lined with kiwi feathers. They seem to be a favourite padding, and why not? Tui have also been visiting intermittently, cleaning up the scraps of flax nectar
- The action continues with the shore birds. We have new variable oyster catcher nests, fledged birds and everything in between. Ne'er a day goes by that we aren't squawked at by an over zealous parent. Helmets will soon be necessary when visiting the island (not really).

### **Predator control**

- My battle with mice on Knight Island continues. Six were taken there this month, but still no rats or mustelids there or anywhere else in the buffer. I caught one mouse on the island this month, but I suspect it may be a straggler from last year.
- A boat at the ruins pontoon had two dogs aboard. I intercepted the owners and dogs before they crossed the fence. They were only small lap dogs but any dog can be devastating to a kiwi. If you see any dogs on the island foreshore please give us a call so we can get them off. Our eyes can only be at so many places at once.

### **Visitors**

- The Page family came over with their son-in-law Ned, aka. Spiderman, who scaled the kilns and sprayed the weeds. We like to keep them free of vegetation to preserve their structure. This is not an easy task for those who don't really like heights (me) so it was GREAT to get this done by a skilled mountain man. Pagey also had a play on the tractor and did some much needed mowing for me. Thanks Page family.
- A team from Northland Regional Council came across at the end of last year and we got stuck into spraying blackberry and other weeds on the western face, as well as clearing some tracks. It was an absolute scorcher but the team got a fantastic amount done and then re-fueled with a delightful Christmas picnic.
- Big thanks to our summer island sitters Donna Stuthridge, Riaan Elliot and their daughter Grace who did a stellar job once again. My mum and dad also did a stint and thoroughly enjoyed themselves, in particular on New Year's Eve, by all accounts.

- Regular summer volunteers David and Janet have returned to NZ for the summer and lost no time in coming over and clearing tracks.
- Mark from Pacific Coast Kayaks has been doing lots of kayak tours to the island, as has the MV Waipapa.
- Now that the summer has finally kicked in many a scream of delight has been wafting up from the beach and the manager's house ruin, as families come over to picnic, explore and water ski.

## General

Mowing, spraying, mowing, spraying, mowing, spraying.

Hei konei ra

Ben, Jo and Penny Kohe



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)