



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – February 2012

February is my favourite time of year, not because of the long days and warm weather, but because I have to undertake post-release monitoring of our translocated lizards. You can't exactly call it work - as a herpetologist (meaning "one who has an unreasonable fascination with reptiles") it is kind of like having to go on holiday as part of your job. Nevertheless, this work is very important as it allows us to determine if our translocated lizards are surviving and breeding and, in the longer term, becoming self-sustaining populations. The gecko monitoring will continue for another month but the skink monitoring is all wrapped up and the results were even better than anticipated. Carol Fielding, Gerry Brackenbury and Ruh Vaughan all came over to help and to get their lizard fix.

- Last year (the second year of monitoring) the ornate skinks were still very hard to come by with only two females located. This year we found seven individuals, including a gravid female and two other females that appeared to have recently given birth. Even better, the ornate skinks appear to be spreading from their release site and will start colonising other forested habitats around the island. How good it is when something goes according to the plan!



An ornate skink looking very at home on the forest floor

- The moko skink capture rate really took off this year. We caught seven individuals as opposed to one lonely female last year. Our captures included gravid females, indicating successful breeding, and these lizards are also spreading out into adjacent habitat.
- After proving more difficult to find last year (three caught) when storm surge inundated the foreshore, shore skink numbers are also up again. We caught twelve, including three gravid females. This is brilliant news and bodes very well for this population. We didn't monitor the population on the old sand barge but shore skinks are regularly seen scuttling around the rocks there.



A gravid shore skink down at the beach – look at that puku!

With these numbers showing up this early after translocation it won't be long until the island is crawling with these lizard species. Woohoo!

Kiwi

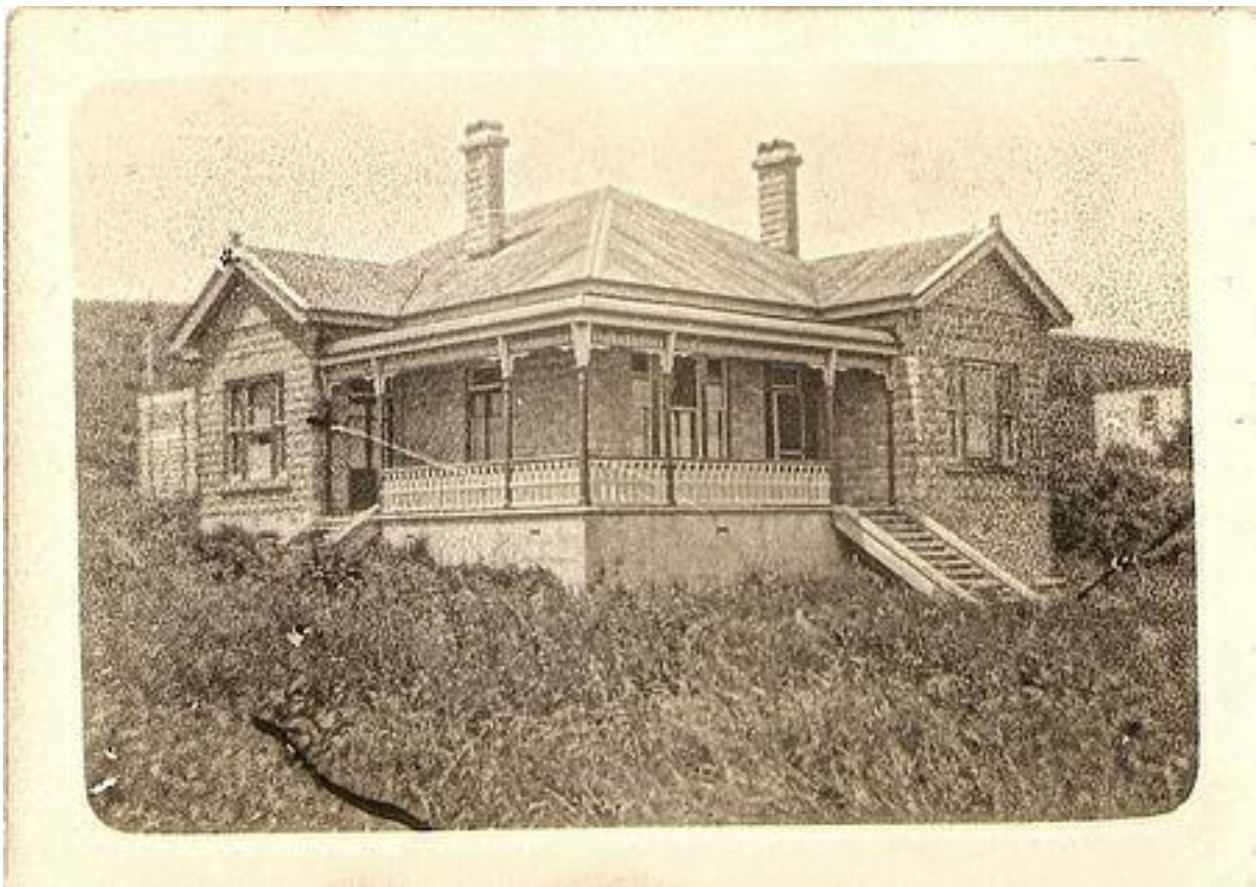
- Sir Ed's transmitter finally indicated that he had finished incubating Kahui Whetu's eggs this month. With eager anticipation I snuck up to his nest with Paul Cornille and Don Robertson from DOC and Ruh Vaughan, here doing work experience; I knew from checking his eggs last month that Sir Ed had one fertile and one infertile egg. Not all fertile eggs hatch correctly (especially those incubated in a burrow with a skylight!) so we were stoked when a perfectly healthy chick was found. We put a microchip in the chick so we can identify her in the future and stuck her back in with Sir Ed after putting a new transmitter on him. Sir Ed will now have to get stuck into some grub as he was looking a tad thin after three months of incubating with little time to feed.
- Glen has hit the 80 day mark on his nest so his egg/s are probably hatching as you read this. All going well you will be seeing photos of another brand new chick, or chicks, next month. Glen is usually a 'one egg' man but you never know.
- Baldrick got her six-monthly bio checks and was in very good condition. She was lighter than her last check, but she had an egg on board last time.
- Todd Hamilton has brought another four kiwi chicks to the island to crèche them here. I have been running around trying to find the old stock and found one of Glen's chicks from last year. With all the soft ground and numerous invertebrates he weighed in at an impressive 1800g.

Fauna

Followers of my 'random flotsam of the month' will remember the red-eared slider that washed up a few months back. This month we did one better and found a green sea turtle. It was quite an impressive animal and a shame that it met an untimely death in our waters. Sea turtles often turn up in New Zealand as 'tourists' but do not breed here as it is too cold.

Visitors

- The island has been very busy in the weekends and long weekends with kayakers, yachties, jet and waterskiers, picnic'ers, fishermen, and walkers, young and old.
- Whangarei "Green Drinks" – a social forum for those involved in all things environmental - came over one evening and were delighted with the arrival of a kiwi chick from Todd Hamilton.
- Tim Grove has been a busy bee in the Limestone garage fixing and making things.
- The grandchildren of one of the cement works engineers came over to visit. Their grandfather (one Mr Archibald Cox) lived in the manager's house in 1916. They had a photo of the house from when he lived here and a reference from the cement company. Very cool indeed.



I'm sure you'll agree I keep the lawns in much better condition than Archibald

General

- Our sheep were getting a bit long in the tooth (the ones they had left) so Ken Massey very kindly did a swap; we now have a new cohort of woolly lawn mowers keeping the visitor area short. A sheep swap sounds simpler than it was and Tim "grab it by the ears" Grove and Carol "cattle rustler" Fielding gave us a hand with this logistical challenge.
- The Wednesday wollies got stuck into some mulching on the flax knob by the oak tree. 100 wheel barrows, several hundred bucket loads later and the area is looking pretty sharp.
- I gave a presentation on progress on the island at the AGM which was held at the RSA.

Predator control

After months of predicting the summer rush, it has finally happened. The buffer has been busy and I will be switching to weekly checks from now until it slows down. This month we caught five mice, two rats and a stoat on Knight Island. I also found what looked to be a partially eaten banded rail chick next to the dead stoat - serves him right, the stoat that is. I also caught a rat on Onemama Pt and one on Rabbit Island (Motuataua). I have also seen a rat on the Onerahi foreshore and I have reports of stoats being seen there too. The traps on Onerahi caught a rat and a hedgehog, so all in all a busy month on the buffer. Unfortunately a single Norway rat managed to swim to the island but obviously didn't last long with the myriad of traps waiting for it.

Upcoming

Wednesday Wolly day on March 7th. Meeting at 9am at the jetty as usual.

Hei konei ra

Ben, Jo and Penny Kohe



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