



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – April 2012

This April we will be picking up where we left off last April, chasing mokopirirakau (forest geckos). We have a permit to translocate 30 to the island in order to create a safe haven for this species and to enhance the ecosystem on the island. This beautiful creature is becoming increasingly rare on the mainland and is very difficult to find, even if you know where they are. Last year we caught all the males we needed but we came up shy by five females. The mokopirirakau is without doubt one of my all time favourite animals, in fact I formed a "gecko club" when I was seven with the express purpose of recruiting an army of (not very successful) primary school kids to help me track them down. Needless to say there was no problem when the boss ordered me out to catch the remaining five females. After many sleepless (but certainly not boring) nights we rounded up the last of the girls and they are ready to come back to the island after being declared disease free. Whoop whoop! A stupendously massive thank you to everyone who has helped out with this translocation including Te Parawhau, Ngatiwai, DOC, the Whangarei Harbour Health Improvement Fund, all the landowners such as the Fabers and Carrs, Stuart Jackson at Whangarei District Council, the team Kiwi North, Manu at Massey University, all the volunteers who helped with the gecko hunting and, of course, our major sponsor Golden Bay Cement without who we would not be able to achieve these great things. Go forth and multiply you good things.



**Go easy on the moths there buddy.
A very healthy forest gecko**

Fauna

- In a nutshell, we have a new population of geckos, a banded rail is scuttling around outside while I'm typing this, I saw 34 oyster catchers, 12 bar-tailed godwits, 2 NZ dotterels, and a handful of Royal spoonbills feeding harmoniously together on the sandspit last week and there is a weta in my jacket.
- We are eagerly awaiting the return of the manu oi (grey-faced petrel) this season. Tim Grove hasn't had any sleep this month as he has been brainstorming modifications to the burrows to make them more user friendly. Users include oi and the ranger. Using dataloggers that record temperature (thanks for the loan Olly Ball) we have compared the temperatures of various burrow options with information from natural burrows in natural colonies and found the shaded artificial burrows stay sufficiently cool during the day but cool rapidly at night if not insulated. Not all insulated options keep the burrows cool enough in full sun but they have a more stable temperature between night and day. With this in mind we are modifying the burrows in full sun to make them much more insulated and user friendly (no more sand bags).



**Petrel burrow MK3.5 and the lead designer
young Tim Grove**

- In addition to this the Weds Wollies helped clear away an area adjacent to the artificial burrows and we have designed and are installing some "natural-ish" burrows using an idea from Pete Mitchell.
- Tony and the guys at Electrosound gave the petrel caller a birthday as ants (non-Argentiniains) had found their way in through the CD slot and fried something. Grrr.
- Almost everything is fine with kiwi on the island. We have been seeing lots of footprints in the mud around the island. I was surprised when I found a signal for one of the birds coming from Rabbit Island. I dashed over there to find the transmitter sitting in the mangroves. We have developed some theories as to how this happened but it is certainly very strange. Any hypotheses?

Flora

We've been finding the odd stash of moth plant during search and destroy missions. One plant had half a garbage bag of pods. If you see this plant around your yard by all means pull off the pods and try to kill it (cut the stump and paint the stem with vigilant). If you live in Onerahi I can lend you some vigilant as the seeds will fly over to the island - a stitch in time saves nine. Thanks to Carol Fielding who has been making a special effort to attack weeds on the island



The stitch in time.

Several thousand baby moth plants that will never see the light of day

Predator control

- No pests were caught on the island this month, which is quite unusual for autumn. I'm not complaining though and in fact I shouted myself a ginger beer and a moro bar. Northtec ran the tracking tunnels and found a whole lot of skinks, bugs and birds but no pests - and another ginger beer for me thank you very much.
- The buffer is still ticking along and there appear to be more mustelids moving around. We caught a stoat, a weasel and a rat on Onemama Pt and a stoat and four mice on Knight Island, plus a rat at Onerahi. Michelle Martin was excited to see a weasel and a rat in the same trap box at Onemama.
- Speaking of Onerahi, last month I mentioned we secured funding from NRC to ramp up our pest control there. This month Greg Chisnall and I have been busy making rat tunnels and establishing the control network. We now have a deadly arsenal including 10 stoat traps, 10 baitstations and 20 rat traps - up from 2 stoat traps. We are sure this is going to make a huge difference to the island. Thanks very much Greg and all the property owners who are very generously making a home for these traps. I, and all the critters on the island extend our appreciation to you.
- Richard Aubrey very kindly allowed me and Tim to collect some rabbits from his farm. If you know of any rabbits making a nuisance of themselves let me know. Better still if you are partial to collecting them yourself then please do so as we always need more.

General

We are excited to have a few students getting involved with the island. Bernie Buhler (no relation to Ferris) and Greg Prinsloo from Northtec will be investigating novel ways of detecting and capturing mice, and the impacts of exotic roosting birds on the island respectively. Bernie also has a scholarship from the good folk at Golden Bay Cement and is getting some work experience there. Good luck guys. We also have a Geography student all the way from Sweden who is doing a mini thesis on the uses of the island. Tack sa mycket Sigrid Andreen.

Upcoming

- This month we have an excitable ensemble of entomologists (invertebrate botherers) coming to the island for a field trip as part of the Entomological Society Conference. I'll be capturing them at the Visitor Shelter and not letting them leave until they complete a workshop on options and strategies for invertebrate translocations to the island. It's not everyday you get an opportunity like this.
- Volunteer Wednesday May 2nd. 9am at the jetty. Keep an eye on your emails as we had to postpone due to weather this month. Call me if you are still unsure.

Hi konei ra

Ben, Jo and of course young Penny Kohe



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