



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – November 2012

There were so many epic happenings on the island this month that I hardly know where to start. Probably the fourth and fifth most exciting events for me were the two visits we had from Orca. As they were the largest animals seen I'll give them centre stage this month. It was the first time I had seen them up the harbour, so to get two visits was really special. The first time they appeared to be feeding and were on the mission, but the second time they were just hanging around aimlessly, maybe they were teenagers? I was dropping the girls off to do some shopping so we got some photos and video. There was one big bull with several hangers on including a number of calves. You have to pinch yourself when you see whales while picking up the groceries.



**A big bull exhales. You can just see the head of his friend near his tail.
Check out our Facebook page to see more photos and video**

Fauna

- The third most exciting thing this month would have to be a juvenile Pacific gecko Damian Smith found while doing some volunteer work. It is very difficult to find these guys on the island as they are still in low numbers after their translocation in 2009, so well done Damian. It was just a wee fellow so it was born on the island probably in 2011, which means it was also conceived on the island. Good news indeed. Geckos usually have a set of twins each year in autumn.



The only thing better than a Pacific gecko is an island conceived one

- What could be more exciting than that you ask? For the runner-up position you'll need to cast your memories back to June this year when we had two of our returned grey-faced petrels in a burrow together. Well we took feather samples from them and it turns out they were male and female. This obviously bodes well for the long term success of this translocation. We had been wondering whether any females would return or if they would be whisked away to other exotic locations around the country by strange males. We eagerly await next year and hope these two love birds can cement their relationship and give us some island conceived petrels! Thanks to Graeme Taylor (DOC) for analysing the feathers for us.
- One needs to watch their step down at the ski-lane/berth area. The variable oyster catchers (VOCs) have started nesting in earnest, with three pairs on eggs. The NZ dotterels MOWGLI and co. lost their chicks in the storm late last month but got straight back to business and are sitting again with three eggs.
- Things are also very busy down on the sand spit with eight pairs of VOCs seen by Sue and Don (they saw 15 pairs in total on the island).
- The Caspian terns have a heap of eggs and chicks over on Knight Island. There are also a few black-backed gulls so hopefully they don't hassle the terns too much. A small colony of red-billed gulls also seems to be establishing on the island. It's amazing what happens when a bit of predator control work is done.
- Dr Olly Ball and Eden Hakaraia came and collected the invertebrate traps. At first glance there were some fancy spiders, the odd weta and Olly assures me the landhoppers are very interesting. Entomologists (bug botherers) are far stranger than herpetologists (lizard lovers)... that's what I tell myself anyway.
- Visitors have been noticing a lot of tui over on the island this month getting stuck into the flax that are flowering at the moment.
- There have also been a number of shining cuckoos calling their hearts out. No doubt they are looking for a grey-warbler nest to lay their eggs in. They are very vocal, but are very difficult to see so sadly no photos of these iridescent travellers.
- I tracked down a fernbird nest a couple of weeks ago just to be nosy. To my surprise the nest was lined with kiwi and banded rail feathers. All their nests seem to be the same, which either means they are picky little creatures or that is all they have to choose from. Not a bad problem to be faced with is it?



Spot the nest!
Fernbird nestlings hiding amongst the kiwi feathers
Photo : Sue Davy

Kiwi

- Todd Hamilton and I have been doing some late nights on the island rounding up older kiwi for release back on to the mainland. The first two kiwi were plenty big enough at around 1.8 kg and they went out to Tutukaka where they will be looked after by the Tutukaka Landcare coalition. The second release was of two kiwi; an older bird that had evaded capture since 2009 and had got up to 2.6 kg, plus another 1.8 kg specimen. They were released near McLeod's bay on the Whangarei Heads and will become "Backyard Kiwi" looked after by the Whangarei Heads Landcare forum. The sixth most exciting thing this month... spoilt for choice.
- Eager to make up for their early hiccup and not wanting to be outdone by the "other pair", Baldrick has laid an egg or two and Glen has started incubating near the ruins. Go you little beauty.
- Sir Ed is just hanging around enjoying his early lead and no doubt catching up on some feeding after his epic incubation period.
- We ran a kiwi naming competition last month for the 25th hatched kiwi on the island and the winner by a large majority was "Hiriwa". Hiriwa means silver and represents the 25th anniversary. Congratulations to Carla Rein from Parua Bay and Chris Leadbeater from Wellington who both chose this name.

Pests

- No predators have been caught on the island this month.
- The buffer has also been quiet with just a stoat on Knight Island. I'm glad we got it before it started eating our Caspian terns. Greg reports just a few young rats on the edges of the Onerahi trapping so he's certainly on top of things.
- Damian Smith has been helping me GPS all the bait station lines, which we've now finished.
- Andrew MacDonald from NRC very kindly mapped them with a buffer around each point to see if there were any "holes". Depending on how big you think a mouse home range is the island is pretty well covered.



Baitstations (yellow dots) with 25 and 12.5 m radius buffers

- This month we have also been concentrating on spraying and pulling (with the always magnificent Wednesday wollies) Mexican devil and blackberry infestations, as well as re-checking the moth plant sites.
- We were doubly lucky this last volunteer day. Firstly we saw the solar eclipse together, but secondly, and more importantly, Johnny Kendrick came along. Johnny is a lifetime conservationist, a friend of Sir David Attenborough and is responsible for, among other things, the bird call recordings that are played on Radio New Zealand National in the morning. Not content at the age of 92 to tend his veg patch, Johnny came out to the island to pull some Mexican devil and was suitably impressed with the number of fernbirds. If he's impressed we are doing something right.



Living legend, 92 y.o. Johnny Kendrick and (soon to be living legend, age undisclosed) Gerry Brackenbury talking shop on the island.

Photo: Greg Stump

General

- Local internet provider and Island supporter Ubergroup have doubled our data free of charge so we now get 10GB. Yeehaa. Don't forget to sign up with these guys.
- With the nicer weather there have been many more visitors to the island including Waipapa coming most Sundays, Tauraroa Area School and Tikipunga High.
- I spoke at the Portland ratepayers AGM about the restoration of the island.
- Last but not least, Pam Stevens, Angela and Dwane Kokich came out one evening to help me trial shooing the weed bearing roosting exotic birds back to the mangroves. It looks like it will work but we'll need a concerted effort with lots of volunteers over a number of nights, so keep your ears to the ground for the call to arms.

Upcoming

IMPORTANT! The volunteer Wednesday is on the **SECOND** Wednesday of December (the 12th) at 9am at the jetty... yes two months in a row sorry. We'll have a shared pot luck lunch and celebrate a successful year, maybe with a spot of work. Sadly I won't be able to schedule another solar eclipse but 12/12/12 is still a pretty cool date.

Hei konei ra

Ben, Jo, Penny Kohe and... we need another naming competition (the winner gets to build a room for the new baby due in May), and yes this is the most exciting thing to happen on the island this month



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