

Friends of Matakoho/Limestone Island

2012 Annual Report

(Written and presented by Pam Stevens, Chairperson at the Society's Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 17 April 2013 at Whangarei RSA Bowling Club Rooms)

Every year I do a summary of the previous year and now that we have such a high standard of monthly reporting from our Rangers I can hopefully keep this briefer. I guess the biggest event was the departure of Ben, Jo and Penny after three years. What a fantastic team they were and we all really appreciate their enormous contribution. They have left a wonderful legacy that the island will benefit from for a long time. The data system got a major work over and has set the scene for many years to come. The lizards and geckos that have now made the island their home has been a fantastic achievement, thanks largely to Ben and his considerable expertise. From our home, Grant and I see the daily challenges of life on the island and see that it takes a lot of commitment and determination. With the birth of Penny during their tenure, Jo faced extra hurdles with an impressive "can do" attitude.

We are pleased to welcome Bernie Buhler as the new Ranger. The handover has been pretty smooth, largely thanks to Bernie's long involvement with the island and his enthusiasm for tackling tasks. He is very willing to ask advice and Ben and Jo have been extremely helpful.

We have survived a beautiful, but dry, summer with Bernie and Ian Page keeping watchful eyes each day on the fire index. The Wednesday volunteers have continued to arrive at the jetty keen to work and always cheerful. Their contribution to the island is considerable – anything from weed pulling, wasp killing track clearing, tree release and much more. Tim Grove and Carol Fielding are off to Thames at the end of this week and they will be sorely missed. They go with our best wishes for their new adventures. Their constant support and practical help has been considerable. The newly designed oi burrows, with insulation and easier access are an example of their commitment. About now is when we start holding our breath waiting and watching to see if any more of our precious petrels return.

The 100th Kiwi is due to leave the island for the mainland. A huge amount of team work goes into management of the BNZ Kiwi for Kiwis programme. Special mention needs to be made of Freddy Tito and Todd Hamilton. The kiwi team go on after dark chases so that the kiwis arrive safely and on time at Onerahi for blessing and meeting the locals – no mean feat at times. Last time they were greeted by a crowd of up to 100 before being released to an even larger crowd out at the Whangarei Heads where numbers of Kiwi are definitely showing a big increase. The Ranger Report keeps us up-to-date with the antics of the kiwi on the island and some amazing photos of the ever-increasing bird life. Word is out in the bird world. We are almost too successful and have thousands of mynahs, starlings and sparrows who roost every night. The racket is unbelievable - the sky goes dark at dusk. Not only are they in competition with other species for food, but their droppings create some major weed issues. A NorthTec student has identified some of the nasties like phoenix palms and Taiwanese cherry.

Looking back over the successful gecko and lizard programme it is amazing how many people have been involved - Te Parwhau, Ngatiwai, DOC, Harbour Health Improvement Fund, Kiwi North, Manu at Massey, the Faber and Carr families who provide access and the nocturnal lizard hunters. Results of monitoring are looking positive.

Ollly Ball and students have been vegetation monitoring and producing some interesting data which seems to show our hard work is paying off. For example, there is twice as much wood on the island now compared with 2007 and leaf litter has increased tenfold. All that is good news for the invertebrates and tucker for birds. Entomologists combed the island last year and were enthusiastic about finding acanthoxyla (stick insects). An invertebrate study is underway at present which will provide useful information for the introduction of future species.

Planting days will morph more and more into tree release and weeding with room for planting disappearing. Last season we successfully planted raupo and sedges and filled in patches. One day we had 43 workers mulching, weeding and planting the picnic area by the oak tree. Most of our plants are from Tawapou Nursery and Owen Mitchell donated some. Volunteer hours are well over 1500.

In June the wonderful new website went live. Dwane Kokich is the hero, putting in hours and hours assisted by Jo and Theda Hall. We also feature on Facebook. Talking about heroes, UBER Group have been amazing providing the island with free communications, phones and fast broadband if you sign up with them the island benefits. A very big thank you to them.

Visitors to the island included seals, orca and heaps of people. With such a great summer and word getting around, casual visitor numbers have increased. The Rangers doing their presentations to groups on the mainland encourages many to book a visit or come with their families. Some of the groups visiting this year included the Whangarei and Whangaruru Tramping Clubs, Italians group, City Councillors, YHA, Out and About, Friendship Club, Hash House Harriers, Probus, Gunaikurna Indigenous Australians and groups from at least nine schools, kayakers and the Ferry Boat "Waipapa" which comes every Sunday.

It was a great step forward getting a trapping system set up at Onerahi to stop predators swimming to the island. Greg Chisnall has done a fantastic job and to date has trapped over 235 rats as well as 1 stoat, 8 mice and some hedgehogs. We continue to trap on the buffer areas around the harbour and have stopped 16 stoats, 8 rats, 11 mice and 6 weasels from swimming to our precious island. It's a great example of what a small group of locals can do. As Dr Paul Gallagher said, it can have a "halo influence". He had a dream of a rolling front with the aim of clearing all New Zealand of unwanted pests....."it's crazy and ambitious but I think it may be worth a shot".

We now have the "Matakohe-Limestone Island Endowment Trust Fund" set up with an already healthy sum. Donations and bequests will be added to grow this fund and the long term goal is to create a fund that will support the island into the future. A very big thank you to Colin Edwards, Stuart Spicer, Grant Stevens, Irene Durham and John Ward who have agreed to act as Trustees.

This year we are really keen to get the all-weather track underway. Stuart Jackson and Paul Butterini have been over and now we have to try to coordinate everything before winter sets in. Bernie has been busy using his skills repairing and maintaining the equipment, tractor, truck, fridge, house, etc. Thanks to the WDC Parks and Reserves staff who are always very supportive and to Murray and the mowing team from Parkcare. Thanks also to Ken Massey and the fencing team for their work to stop the sheep using the shelter as a hotel and ablution block. The fence has made a great difference and we now have an attractive picnic area.

As always Golden Bay Cement and Whangarei District Council get a special acknowledgement for their continuing support. The island project could not happen without them. I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful Committee, Carla, Sandy and Jan for the administration, Michelle, Ken, Gerry, Dwane and John Barber for practical support on the island Theda, Rosemary, Paul, Lyn, John Ward and Jane who all bring so many skills to the table.

Pam Stevens
Chairperson