



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – February 2013

Welcome to my first ever ranger report! My name is Bernie Buhler and I am the interim ranger and have just completed a Unitec Applied Science Degree majoring in Biodiversity Management.

The last few weeks have been hectic but really awesome. The amount of on the job learning is great and putting the skills learned throughout my degree into practice has proved indispensable.

It was really sad to see Ben and Jo move off the island and if the next ranger(s) can do half the job that they have done they should be happy. The flora and fauna on the island constantly surprise me with something new revealing itself every day (e.g. the berry laden karaka and kawakawa – unmolested by possums as they would be on the mainland - and the secret tamarillo trees). Everyone has been super helpful - the Committee members, the Wednesday Wollies, visitors and even the crazy kids jumping off the wharf! This island is amazing and the more time spent here the more I realise this.

### Predator Control

- I have been trapping and baiting on the island and the buffer for some time now and the importance of checking traps and tunnels is constantly being reinforced to me.
- The buffer at Onemama Point, and Knight, Rabbit and Rat Islands has been quiet of late with no hits over the last couple of weeks, after a bit of a glut at the end of last year with four stoats and a weasel on one day (hard to figure out what the little buggers are up to).
- I have started refurbishing the buffer traps with the help of the Wollies as the salt air certainly takes its toll on these highly exposed traps.
- The new plastic rat traps are lethal and they are able to be finely adjusted to the micro-pressure of an ant. I have to be extra careful around them i.e. no heavy breathing as a black nail will be (and has been) the outcome.
- Unfortunately still catching the odd banded rail but as Ben reminded me, without the traps nobbling the predators they wouldn't be there in the first place.
- Just want to reinforce that no stoats were caught on the island for the whole of 2012 and what a huge milestone this is - hats off to everyone involved in this monumental achievement!.

### Island biosecurity

- Ben conducted the biennial ant survey before he left, for which I now have written the report and it looks like the island remains once again in the clear from the dreaded Argentine ants.
- These ants are on the world watch list as one of the most invasive species with one super colony in Europe which ranges over 6,000 km from Italy to the Spanish Atlantic coast, effectively forming the largest co-operative unit ever recorded.
- A reminder to check your packs, boats and even kayaks before landing on the island as we need to keep this little paradise free of these tiny terrors.

### Monitoring

- Lizards were one of Ben's many specialities and he has been bringing me up to speed on the monitoring of skinks (with geckos still to come). This was a valuable learning experience over the four days that this was conducted (9.30 pm one night with a nice drizzle of rain, using the scissor action to measure them). Some huge gravid (pregnant) skinks were caught which bodes well for their future here.

- These unbelievable little critters are well unbelievable and it is sad that many of these cryptic species are only confined to islands and other protected sites, maybe Gareth Morgan has a point with the cats as they predate on this species like lollies.
- The three skink species monitored - shore, ornate and moko - were plentiful and interspersed with the even more plentiful copper variety. Fortunately no introduced rainbow skinks were found amongst them.



**Ben with a 12.5 gr gravid moko skink**

## **Kiwi**

- There has been much activity on the island over the last month: Firstly with Glen abandoning his nest after months of patient incubation and a late night egg rescue effort carried out by Ben and me. The egg was taken to the Bird Recovery Centre for incubation and then we got the good news on the 16th that the egg had hatched.
- The second piece of news was the release of another kiwi chick on to the island, supplied by the knowledgeable Todd Hamilton. This release was overseen by 25th kiwi naming competition winner, Carla Rein and her husband Ian.



**My first island kiwi release (photo courtesy of Carla Rein)**

- Thirdly the release of another two kiwi chicks, again supplied by Todd Hamilton, and the release was overseen by five awesome local kids and their dads (thanks Richard, Tai and Nick with Shay, Ella, Quin and the boat shy Nate).
- Out at night there are plenty of kiwi about. I saw two in one night last week. Though very dry there are still abundant invertebrates around to keep them going.

### **Fire Risk**

Even though there has been hardly any rain in the last month, the fire risk is still moderate but the island is very dry so there are some restrictions in place at the moment: No smoking or BBQ's on the island. There are also two buckets of water behind the shelter at the ruins (just in case).

### **Visitors**

- On the upside of having no rain, with the very hot and sunny weather there have been lots of independent visitors who have come over, by boat, kayak and even by floating picnic table on a pontoon! It is really great to talk to locals who have never been to the island and who are discovering it for the first time.
- I have also had a large number of enquiries as well from groups wanting guided trips and will soon be busy, as will the new ranger when he/she start work.
- Fishing around the island has also been going on with heaps of boats and kayakers taking advantage of this situation.

### **General**

- As one baby left (Penny) another turned up - a new lamb (strange time of year).



#### **The new island baby**

- An awesome turnout of Wednesday Wollies with a full boatload of 23. Took me by surprise with a few jobs having to be made up on the spot. Promise I'll be more organised next time.

- This massive wasp nest was cleaned out of the petrel box (#22) on the day the Wollies were there and they were amazed as the wasps had even built comb in the tunnel.



**The massive wasp nest, lucky no petrels found it**

### **Upcoming**

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 6<sup>th</sup> March.** Pick-up at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. I may even make some muffins this time to make up for my disorganisation last month
- The 100th kiwi is due to come off the island soon so a massive celebration to recognise this milestone will be taking place. Keep your ear to the ground.

### **Ka kite ano**

### **Bernie**



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