



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – March 2013

Well here goes, my first ranger report as Matakohē/Limestone Island's official Ranger. As a bit of a "get to know me", I am from Whangarei, grew up within spitting distance of the Island, near Otaika (with some camping trips to the island). I went to Otaika Valley Primary, Raumanga Intermediate, and then on to Whangarei Boys High School. After full-time education, I studied in Switzerland to become a chef. Once qualified I then spent the next 17 years working in this field. Having decided a change was in order I went back to study at Northtec gaining a Unitec degree in Applied Science, majoring in Biodiversity. This led to several trips and projects involving Matakohē-Limestone Island and now I still have to pinch myself to really believe I work here.

This month has again been a very busy one. The soaring temperatures and the island in an extremely dry state meant some jobs could be put off, e.g. mowing, but more time had to be spent on others – garden and animal watering. On top of the usual jobs I have been busy sanding and coating the house floor with polyurethane as well as still learning the various systems such as how to edit the website and apply for funding - thanks Dwane and Jo.

There are upsides to the hot dry weather with many visitors and swimming every day on my almost private beach a definite plus. The mullet netting has been phenomenal and the finding of huge flounder when checking the buffer traps was a bonus. Many people have asked if I get lonely or bored on the island and I say to them, with a resounding NO, I have no time for that, rather there are not enough hours in the day.

This is where the volunteers come in, the countless hours of work by so many over the years has contributed to the development of the island into such a fabulous place for which we will be forever grateful.

There have been many highlights this month with lizards featuring largely, kiwi again plentiful and a number of groups visiting the island. These included many close friends some of whom had never been over before, such a rush to introduce new people to the wonders of the island.

Kiwi

Activity over the last month started with a bang, with Todd Hamilton bringing another chick for release from Riponui. I released this baby near the last moist spot (sand spit area) with Camillia, Ella, Lisa, Darren and Gorgia. Other news on the kiwi front is that every night I go for a walk around I come across them wherever I go. This includes three I saw around the manager's house ruins last night and the one snuffling around my garden and keeping me up at night. Another excellent development was Glen's chick which hatched at the Bird Recovery Centre has been putting on weight and is almost ready for release. Ben has bagged viewing this one for his first year Northtec class. There is also a kiwi round-up in the wings as numbers on the island are getting high and a few need to come off to repopulate mainland areas. I have never done one of these before and am wondering if it involves riding around on little kiwi horses and lassoing them?

Fauna

One thing I accomplished this month was finally catching up with the white oystercatcher and snapping a few shots of it.



One variable and one white oystercatcher on another typical awe-inspiring Motu Matakohē day

One night early in the month after a full day working, Ben rang and offered to take me out for a gecko hunt and another adventure was on! We went to one of his secret spots and for someone who has never seen a gecko in the wild it was a night to remember. Over the course of the next few hours we found 16 geckos, and I found finding four of these. These endemic species are awesome and I feel really privileged to have some of these critters on the island.

Ollie Ball, Northtec tutor, Neil, Degree student, Darby, Neil's son and Ben came over from the mainland this month and laid pitfall traps for an invertebrate study as part of Neil's Northtec Degree project. After laying the traps we went to show these visitors a forest gecko Ben and I had found in an artificial gecko habitat and a quick hunt located two more. This is a great sign as very few have been seen before and even better as one was a male. No males were released last year so this one must have been on the island for two years. Ben was rapt as the translocation of this unique New Zealand species was a project that he undertook.



One of the island's awesome forest geckos

Visitors

- My first big group this month was the good people from the Friendship Force, a travel club whose members host each other in their homes. This is a great way to immerse oneself in local culture in the area you are visiting and the club is always on the lookout for new members.
- The second group was the Hash House Harriers who describe themselves as a drinking group with a running problem, also giving each other hard case and x-rated names. These people really know how to enjoy themselves with a run around the island followed by a BBQ dinner (and drinks).
- The third group were celebrating the 70th birthday of one of their friends, an ex-Port worker who used to work on the island's quarantine facility.
- My fourth group was from a local Christian home school facility. They were a delightful lot of well behaved kids who had many choice questions and fun was had by all.



Tracking kiwis with the lucky home-school students

General

- This month Jo hooked me up as a Matakahe-Limestone Facebook manager so I can add photos and stories to the island Facebook page so please check it out for some up-to-the-minute downloads and photos.
- Owen and Andy Stevens bought over some seats to replace the old rotting ones in the Mollie Stevens memorial kowhai grove site on the loop track. Come and try these seats out as they are very comfortable and a big thumbs up to these two guys who did an awesome job building and installing them.
- The Wednesday Wollies got stuck into some weeding on the flax knob by the oak tree making this area really attractive as one of the entrances to the island. Others got stuck into mulching young trees above the north-eastern quarry which are definitely feeling the heat in that dry area. The fresh muffins seemed to be enjoyed by the Wollies.

Predator control

- The thing I have been waiting for, in anticipation and fear, has finally happened with a ship's rat and a mouse being caught in the island traps. This now means a mouse bust is necessary. Some hardy awesome volunteers will help me distribute poison over the whole island so there is a fresh bait every 25 square metres to stop any incursions on the spot.
- The buffer has still been unusually quiet with some juvenile rats and a couple of stoats caught.

Upcoming

Wednesday Wollie day on April 3rd. Meeting at 9am at the jetty as usual.

Hei konei ra,
Your friendly island Ranger

Bernie



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