

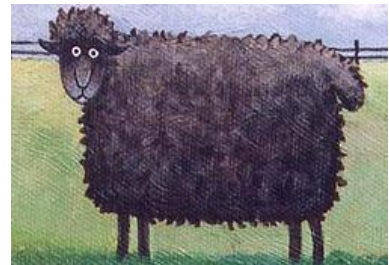


Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – April 2013

Once again a really interesting month with non-stop action. I finally moved in - experienced a real "Piano" moment with my lounge suite and other household items scattered all over the beach. The weather has been absolutely awesome with just about every day shiny and blue. The reef herons that seem to arrive every year at this time on the old sand barge have done it again. There seems to be only one of these there this year with the other one over by the cement ruins area, maybe they had a domestic? The white oystercatcher has again been spotted, but this time around the front of the island by the Edge ruins.

Fishing around the island has definitely been phenomenal the few times that I have been out, and I have caught four-pound schnapper, good amounts of mullet in the net and flounder from my secret spot while out trapping the buffer, wow fresh fish! Fred Tito and fellow Te Parawhau kaumātua Paddy and Patrick, as well as Fred's mokopuna, Riko paid a visit to the island and sang some beautiful welcoming waiata for me. Work on the island has also still been full on with weeds playing a big part in my life at the moment, dreaming about periwinkle and pampas. If you have these plants on the mainland as well as the dreaded moth plant, please annihilate them as once mature the adults spread millions of seeds near and far.

This month I would like to include some myths and legends of Matakohē-Limestone Island. The previous ranger, Ben Barr, told about a long lost missing sheep from the last flock that may or may not be roaming around the island. Story goes that this feral sheep has wool longer than Shrek's and is only seen on full moon nights and eats visiting stragglers - I've only lost three from my visiting groups so far - believe it or not!



Fauna

- Once again awesome is one word to describe the fauna on the island even though the drought has driven some species to be a bit stealthy and some easier to spot.
- One really cool thing happened last night, as I went outside to grab some milk I heard a rustling in the bushes so grabbed my red headlamp and proceeded to investigate. The result was a 20 minute encounter with a young kiwi not more than six feet away hunting for insects and worms and not at all bothered by my presence. This young kiwi even walked closer to me, what a buzz. This is what mainland New Zealand must have been like before humans introduced mammalian predators to the environment.
- Other fauna of note this month include the first flock of royal spoonbills that I have seen flying and feeding in the area. Bar-tailed godwits have also been flying by and feeding around Knight Island and the sandspit.
- The grey faced petrel are due to return any day now (fingers crossed) and, hopefully, this will be the first year they breed on the island. I will add a Barry White number to the petrel caller to get them in the mood.
- With Emily Burns, a Otago University volunteer, I carried out some pacific gecko monitoring with one beauty of 23.25 grams found under an artificial cover object (ACO).

- There are a crazy number of paper wasps flying around so be careful if you are walking around as their nests are everywhere and their stings really hurt.
- I also caught a banded rail in a mynah trap and had to extract it, man can these things squawk, but you have to love their gorgeous plumage and bright red eyes



**That's one cool looking bird and the island is just dripping with them.
Amazing what happens once you remove the predators.**

- Another really cool bit of fauna Ben showed me this month was an "ant lion", not a lion that eats ants but a weird looking hairy, furry insect with huge jaws that builds a little funnel in the dry dirt that has crumbly sides which ants fall into. They then get snaffled up by this "lion" which detects the ants' struggles with hairy tufts on the side of its body. Cool! These are up by the top end of the ski slope track if you want a look.



**Yep that's an ant lion! Not a lion ant
One of the craziest looking nymphs I've ever seen.
Get to the island to check them out**

Flora

- As mentioned earlier, weeds are a major issue at the moment as many of them are now in flower and it is the best time to spot pampas with its feathery flowers.
- The always helpful Wednesday wollies were over last week and did a great job digging up hundreds of baby moth plants in a nasty area that Ben pointed out earlier in the year, thanks guys. The wollies also helped to do some mulching up at the petrel station to hopefully stop some of the young plants dying.
- The island's native plants have really taken a hammering with this dry weather, some of the Coprosmas looking particularly dodgy, all brown and leaves curled up.

- On a semi positive note, the big dry will really be sorting out which plants/species will survive in the future on the island and in particular areas. These will be noted for future planting in similar areas and could even be used on other restoration projects (conservation in action).

Predator control

- Tracking tunnels were run this month with no pest tracks encountered just lots of ants, weta, bird and lizard ones.
- The island traps have been very quiet this month which is a relief after last month's rat and mouse. Even the extra mouse traps I put out haven't caught anything.
- The buffer has also been quiet with no mustelids caught, only a couple of rats and a few mice, some in the big DOC 200's which shows just how accurate these are.
- The rabbits that were organised through DOC unfortunately went rotten on the trip up from the South Island. This was a shame as it was such a good idea because they have heaps and we (and the other trapping projects around Northland) need heaps. So if you are into shooting these lagomorphs, chuck them in your freezer and I could come and collect them.

Visitors

- As to be expected, with this endless summer, independent visitors have been plentiful with yachties, boaties, kayaks and jetskiers all turning up on "my" beach for the awesome swimming and the general nice hanging out to be had there.
- Neil Skit (third year Northtec student) is currently carrying out a invertebrate study so with ex ranger and Northtec tutor Ben Barr, as well as Ollie Ball and Neil's son Darby, visited twice this month to first plant and then extract the traps used for this.
- The first year Northtec conservation management class came over twice in a week, the first time to release a kiwi chick and then to do a trapping and monitoring workshop. Some of the lucky students got to hold Baldrick the kiwi (which we thought was Glen, long funny story) and see some of the results of a successful conservation project.



**A lucky Northtec student holding Baldrick one of the resident kiwi
I think its love at first sight**

- The other big group I had over was from Probus Onerahi which is an international social club. They proved to be an informative and delightful bunch and taught me a few things.
- I also had an Otago Uni student volunteer over for a week which was indeed a pleasant change from being alone in paradise. It was nice to show Emily Burns around, not only the island but also bit of Northland - Waipoua Forest. Emily is doing an environmental issues degree in her home state New Jersey and decided to do a semester in good old NZ.



Emily Burns, the volunteer from New Jersey via Otago Uni. getting up close and personal with a pacific gecko. (She gave it a kiss just after this photo).

General

If you have any stories or “myths and legends” about the island email or ring me and I will endeavour to add these into next month’s ranger report. I will be away in Auckland in the middle of April for my graduation and then again in the middle of May for the kiwi hui in Cambridge.

Upcoming

- As soon as I organise some bait a mouse bust will be going down so keep your eye on your emails as Jan will be sending out a request to all the regulars for some help with this.
- Volunteer Wednesday, 1 May - 9am at the jetty. I may surprise these awesome helpers with baked treats, you never know.

Hei konei ra,
Your friendly island Ranger

Bernie



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