



## **Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report August/September 2013**

It has been a full on couple of months with plenty happening for me, both on and off the island. I was recently reminded, by the return of the Caspian terns to their colony on Knight Island, that one year ago I was carrying out my mouse study there, how time flies. I have been away for four and a half weeks obtaining my LLO (Local Launch Operator's) Certificate. This takes a month of classes, many exams and would not make for exciting reading so I will leave the details out. It also explains why this report is for both August and September. I am now happily back on the island which has flourished with the wet weather and was well looked after while I was away.

### **General**

- The track was coming along nicely and now I am back the final push to completion will happen as soon as I clear the calendar a little. During the last two months the piping and drainage, manufacture, placement and some filling of the stairs was done with more stair-filling and spreading of metal still to be completed then the new track should be ready for the summer rush.
- The track already looks good as it has dried out during the time I have been away. This shows how well the drainage put in by Jason of Northland ParkCare Services is doing its job. Hylton Edmonds from Harbour Marine Ltd steamed up the harbour to take the digger and the power carrier back to the mainland (there was no charge for this) thanks guys. We also took this opportunity to remove four huge sacks full of rubbish gathered up from around the island
- The big event in town last month was the opening of the new bridge (Te Matau ā Pohe) across the lower Hatea River. I took the island's tender and joined the flotilla at the opening event. The bridge is a great asset for Whangarei, as was reflected by the massive turnout at the opening.



**The closing of the bridge at the opening of the bridge**

## Oi, kiwi and other birds

- One of the main stories this month concerns the Oi (grey faced petrels). I can now break it to you that we had our first egg this year and were ecstatic when this occurred. Now comes the bad part as on a wet and windy Saturday, whilst checking the burrow gates and replacing a camera, I found the egg outside the burrow. Concerned about what to do I picked it up carefully to check if it was still warm and found a peck hole in the top with blood leaching out. This was a double blow as it showed the egg was fertile. It had been incubating for more than four weeks and had no obvious signs of trauma. Despite the disappointment on this occasion the find does prove these birds can be fledged, return to the island, build nests, lay viable eggs and bring them to term (almost).
- I sent the monthly kiwi data off to DOC for our resident birds.
- When checking Kahui Whetu I was still unable to find any trace of her partner, Sir Ed which is unfortunate. Ace DOC kiwi team Rolf Fuchs and Briar Cook came to carry out Kahui Whetu's yearly transmitter change. She was relatively easy to find, hiding in some long grass on the north face. Briar was up from Nelson as a trainee ranger and getting in some kiwi work. She got to hold her first kiwi which always brings back memories of the first time I held this unique bird.

**Briar from DOC with her first kiwi, Kahui Whetu.  
That's a kiwi smile!**



- Other kiwi news was the finding of Baldrick and Glen holed up together in a petrel burrow. Now finding these two together was no surprise but how they managed to fit in the burrow I don't know as, guessing from the size of Baldrick, she was a very gravid female. They were gone the next day when I checked for their signal which was a pity as this would have made for a warm dry nesting burrow.
- The bird activity on the island has been incredible with everything on full show, including some tui visiting from the mainland and entertaining me with their beautiful tunes. All the other birds are also in full display, song and colour so it's an awesome time to visit the island. I was busy loading all the petrel burrows into the GPS and Google earth earlier this month and found three more petrel returnees.
- The new motion/night camera at the petrel station is in full swing with heaps of activity from a variety of avifauna. Big thanks to Lyn Davison, long time committee member and diligent DOC worker who lent the island this camera.



**A snapped kiwi, this one seems to show up every time the petrel does?**

- On a more humorous note - one day while checking for Glen and Baldrick's data stream I came across some eggs that were suspiciously petrel looking in a deep burrow right next to the beach. Was this a sneaky petrel burrow? I was highly excited and rushed to the committee meeting with this news. Next day I went back and saw a group of ducks swimming away from the area and put two and two together and on closer inspection the blue colour of the eggs confirmed it – duck eggs ☺.
- **BREAKING NEWS:** Glen is now sitting on Baldrick's first egg for the year which will be my first official kiwi birth and a real milestone for this couple.

## Visitors

- We had plenty of visitors this month starting with the Recovery Solutions group, Peter, Andrew, John and Graham. They had a productive day planting on the south side and behind the ruins, cheers guys. A bunch of kids from the Otangarei Holiday Programme came over during the school holidays. Some opted for fishing off the wharf with the rest heading off for a walk with yours truly providing commentary. It was a hard slog up a slippery hill followed by happy screams (wetats) and the essential pa photo. Later home delivery of some tired kids meant their parents would happily let them visit the island again.
- I also took Jared Chaplin and his family for a tour of the island and they helped me rustle the sheep for docking. Jared completed a project on "The Amazing Limestone Island" and was awarded a second place for it. He then entered it in the Science Fair, won the Judge's Award and has now been invited to the Northland Regional Council Youth Summit. A highly chuffed young fella indeed and a conservationist in the making! Congratulations Jared
- Tables turned and I became the visitor when giving a couple of "off island" talks. The first was to the Parua Bay Garden Club, a delightful group of ladies who proved an enthralled audience, (thanks for the fruit).
- The second was to members of the management team at Golden Bay Cement – FOMLI's principal sponsor. The Company's historical link to the island and its ongoing support is always a talking point on my walks with all visitors. Thanks also to GBC for providing me with some wet weather gear which is so bright I should be visible from Whangarei.
- I went to Auckland University to pick up a turtle shell which washed up last year; this will be buried on the island with a blessing from our kaumātua Fred Tito.
- Finally, some of the original members of the Whangarei Forest and Bird Society came over to plant some kowhai in memory of Diana Pitham. After the ceremony the group was able to walk over the upgraded track as it had dried out so much. I also roped some of them in to help plant a couple more plants left from the planting days. On the way back in the boat we saw about 30 orca swimming around in the harbour - a great sight.

## Volunteers

- In the month before I went away three girls (Sarah, Queenie and Abby) from NorthTec came over to work off their practicum hours. They were a great help carting and hammering away on the new steps, building the new gecko covers and doing the general maintenance. Nick Bamford from NorthTec and long time Matakoho helper came over to help with the steps on the track for a day.
- I know he must be sick of the thanks but Dwane Kokich has been over many times (even staying overnight). He is not only a great help with the spraying of the Veldt grass and track construction but he can also find a moth plant faster than me (almost). His son Chris also came over with some friends and worked hard. Dwane also took this month's wollies over to the island and they finished the last of the planting for the year.
- Last but certainly not least our wonderful wollies came over on the first Wednesday of August. I had a nice job for them this month - putting the sticky piles of dirt and mud from shaping the track into the steps. They attacked this nasty job with their usual gusto and even had time to do some of the endless periwinkle weeding by the oak tree. We also had our two regular workers/fishermen/kumara deliverers fixing the fence above the ruins which hopefully will stop the sheep escaping. On that note, we have had another lamb born so that brings our total flock to ten.



### **Our awesome wollies working on the steps on the upgraded track**

- If you want to join the Wednesday Wollies, then just come down to the Onerahi pontoon at 9am on the first Wednesday of every month. If you would like a bit more information or to find out what's happening then just give us a call on 436 0923. You can come as often or as little as you like! There are always plenty of interesting jobs to do and we have a fun time and enjoy a hot cuppa and even a treat.

### **Predator Control**

- Firstly, we are happy to report two people have volunteered to take over the Onerahi trapping as Greg Chisnall has now moved to Ruakaka. The new trappers are Ross Mckenzie and committee member, Michelle Martin. This dastardly duo may be seen around Onerahi in their Limestone Island shirts or day-glow vests. Give them a wave and a word of encouragement as they are slowly depleting Onerahi of rats and keeping the stoats away.
- Another new trapper is helping out this month - Bevan Cramp from NorthTec is doing the pest control while I am busy. Whilst the island traps have been nicely pest free, the buffer traps have been sporadically producing pests. Early last month we had a run of huge stoats then three weeks of nothing, followed by a run of weasels. My three NorthTec angels also ran the tracking tunnels last month with no predators tracked just heaps of birds.

### **Upcoming**

In the not too distant future **Spring! Volunteer Wednesday will be on the first Wednesday of the month – 2nd October.** Pickup at **9am at the Onerahi pontoon.** As usual we will be returning after lunch at approximately 2pm. Get your planting hats on as we have a special treat, we will be planting a large number of the native hibiscus, *Hibiscus richardsonii*. These are coming through DOC and will be joining our other hibiscus, *Hibiscus diversifolius*, keep your eyes open for them in the future.

Hei konei ra,

Bernie



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