



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report November 2013

The growing season is definitely upon us with everything either producing or feeding babies. One of the highlights this month was the discovery of our first beautiful hibiscus flower - more later. Some other good news is that the Tuis have produced three chicks and all seem to be doing well. They are flying around gathering insects and defending the area with some crazy kamikaze manoeuvres.



**Look at that beauty; I know what my screen saver is this month**

Unfortunately I also have to start this month on a disappointing note - we had a dog incident on the beach by the house. The offending owners were right in front of the two "no dogs" signs on the island! A poignant reminder of why we need vigilant and consistent eyes on the island. Other news is the trapping of a male ship's rat on the north side of the island, good/bad, a bit of both? Also, while planting some flax on Onemama with resident Ross Mallet, I heard a fern bird in a nearby gorse bush so, hopefully, this is an indication of the effect the trapping over there is having.

### **Kiwi**

- Not only have the islanders been in spring mode, the kiwi on the mainland have also been busy. A further three young kiwi were released on the island, LC 134, 135 and 137. My parents came over for one release and were rapt as they had never been so close to kiwi before.
- Todd from Landcare Trust and Kane from Northland Regional Council came to the island one night for one of the legendary kiwi round-ups. We managed to catch two weighing over the magic 1.2 kg (this being about the size at which they can defend themselves from cats and stoats). These birds will be going off to Tutukaka at the end of the month. If you want to see an island kiwi, come to the grassed area next to the Onerahi Yacht Club at 9.30 a.m. on 27 November when the birds will be brought from the Island to be blessed before going to Tutukaka.

- During the recent Kiwi Week, Rolf from the Department of Conservation ran an island walkabout and BBQ evening with about 20 keen kiwi folk. We were able to see some island sites and great views. A hit were the HUGE weta.
- Glen, our resident island legend, is still diligently sitting on his egg/s - up to 68 days at last data stream. I've painted the baby's room! and, like the rest of the islands' parents, am excitedly expecting my first kiwi chick shortly.
- Baldrick was due for a transmitter change this month and was found at the top of a cliff after Rolf and I spent some time searching at the bottom. This coincided with a visit from a group from the Out and About walking group who were thrilled to see (and hold a real live kiwi).



**Baldrick being woman-handled by an American visitor, what a star**

### **Other fauna and flora**

- For me the main flora news this month is the hibiscus, half of which were planted last month and the other half kept back in the new shade house. These beautiful natives have flourished on the island and have grown unbelievably in the short time they have been here. The plants that were too small were re-potted into bigger bags and have also shot away. While walking around the area past site B I had a quick peek, and WOW, there was a beautiful flower. The areas we planted have hundreds of flower buds and should be a sight to behold when they all explode shortly.
- The Caspian tern colony is in full swing with hundreds there now. The Black Backed gulls have moved in as well, not only to nest but also to protect the chicks as an unattended chick makes a tasty meal! The less the terns are disturbed, the more they can concentrate on defending their young. We close down some traps that are nearby at this time and encourage people to avoid the area as every chick is needed to keep this colony strong.
- The oyster-catchers are nesting all over the island in the usual dodgy nesting sites. The birds that chose to nest right in the picnic area by the ski lane have done it again, even though they were discouraged from doing so by the addition of a deterrent in last year's nest.
- The petrel station has been quiet of late with no returnees found at all this month. More burrows will be refurbished this summer as some were quite damp due to the last winter's rain. The motion camera in the area has been moved as new tree growth was blocking the view. The second camera we borrowed from DOC has been returned, thanks Lyn; hopefully we can use it again next year, what a great tool!
- An unusual happening this month was the discovery of a sunfish in the Waikaraka Marine Reserve by previous ranger Ben Barr. These huge fish occasionally get stranded or wash up dead in the harbour. We were able to get to this one before the tide went out and direct it back into the channel where it disappeared. A short video is on the island's Facebook page.

## Predator control/weeds

- The highlight, or lowlight, this month was the trapping of a rat in a stoat trap on the Onerahi side of the island. If we did not have our trusty volunteers trapping the mainland imagine how many would get through! This means an island wide mouse/rat bust is called for, so if you are keen to bait a couple of lines keep your eye on your emails/website/Facebook page. This will take place over a couple of evenings.
- Unfortunately, with the spring growth weeds have featured this month with the usual suspects, Moth plants, Taiwan cherry, palms, wattles, and periwinkle, all in the mix. Spraying the secondary growth of the vigorous veldt grass was carried out by Dwane Kokich. Dealing with the cotoneaster was *really fun!* This was tackled on various steep cliff sites with committee member Michelle and Sarah from Northtec. We will get them all girls (as soon as I get some abseiling gear) the war is on!
- Bevan our happy trapper is still finding a trickling of predators in the traps on the buffer zones with rats and a couple of weasels killed. I was over on Knight Island the other day and could smell a dead smell; hopefully it is the population of mice that bait was laid for about a month ago. Ross and Michelle (our Onerahi trappers) have been attacking the rats with a vengeance.
- I went to a BBQ with the owners of Hewlett Point to discuss a future trapping programme and even some planting. The outcome of our discussion was positive so now I just have to help get this started. This will increase our buffer and prevent more predators reaching the island

## Volunteers/Visitors and Talks

- I will start with our fabulous regular Wednesday Volunteers who re-potted the hibiscus, dug drains, mulched and planted flax above the barge. As if this weren't enough, they installed the new petrel camera and trimmed the flax on the refurbished track and the Edwards family, who are new volunteers, did a beach clean up. We also put a new picnic table in a shady area behind the ruins; check it out, needs some fern enrichment I think.
- Chris from Portland Primary School came over for a visit with her junior students. These little guys and girls had a ball – possibly future rangers! The kiwi footprints which could be clearly defined in the mud were a favourite.



**The kids from Portland Primary School**

- Three staff members from Whangarei District Council came over to check out the state of the tracks and the wharf. While they were here Pam Stevens and I had a productive walk around the island with them and several new ideas were discussed.
- I gave a talk to the Onerahi Lions who have been long-time supporters of the island, involved in various projects such as the building of the shed and an island barge.

- Taipari Munro and his niece, Joeann and Andre Hemara from the WDC came to the island with a group of employees. This was a cultural visit with the aim of informing WDC personnel of the rich cultural history around Whangarei. I really enjoyed this visit as I am very keen to learn more of the history of the island and the area.
- A German travel book/website group came over to the island to interview Gerry Brackenbury and me. I took them up to the weta site to get some close-up photos of this cool oversize flightless cricket. The island is dripping with thousands of these beasties and they are using the new gecko covers which is a good sign.
- A group of Henry Walton's descendants from Hawaii and Oregon in the United States came over to the island and they checked out the brick kiln that was built by their great-great grandfather in 1858. Walton Street in Whangarei is named after this early Whangarei pioneer family. The group had come to New Zealand to discover more about their family history. The sea was quite rough on the day but these folk took it in their stride.
- My final group for this month was ex-junior ranger Jo and Ben Barr's daughter Penny's playgroup with parents. The kids had a ball screaming up a storm in the singlemen's quarters and the manager's house ruins. They also loved it when the stoat trap went off and made a big bang!
- I farewelled my three Northtec angels, Sarah, Queenie and Abby who have each put in more than 90 hours of work on the island - cheers girls you will be missed, BBQ soon!

### General

- Put a new drain and pipe in between the ranger's residence and the manager's house ruins, hopefully this will stop the erosion around that house.
- I put bird netting over the two plum trees so I will get plums this year! The two pear trees and the apple have small fruit at the moment and the peach tree has one peach!
- Ridiculous amounts of mowing.
- Getting new fly/mosquito screens for the house, the mozzies will eat you alive out here.
- The sheep now have a backup water-tank for the summer; just need some rain to fill it! Speaking of which, another lamb brings our total to ten.
- Track, track, track; just about finished with the steps filled and all the roots chain-sawed out, now to helicopter the metal over and spread it around. Then the opening ceremony and blessings, it will be done for the summer! complete with flowering hibiscuses half way up.

### Upcoming

- Volunteer Wednesday – 4 December. Pick-up at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. See you there!
- Mouse bust volunteers needed soon!

Hei konei ra,  
Bernie



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