



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report December 2013

The island is going off. The long dry periods, followed by over 75mm of good soaking rain, have made it burst into life with new growth (weeds as well). All the shore birds are defending chicks making walking hazardous. Aerial bombardments and pretend broken wing displays are common and extreme care must be taken to avoid standing on these almost invisible chicks.

Speaking of chicks, Glen the champion island kiwi managed it again, my first island hatched chick. This little gal (or guy) weighed in at 300gm with a bill length of 45mm, what a cutie. The momentous occasion was observed by Rolf from DOC (who inserted a transponder) and a rapt crowd of friends. I also put a shiny new transmitter on Glen.



**Glen and Baldrick's new baby.
Look at that attitude already**

Predator control

- Ross and Michelle, have been active over the pest spring breeding boom with Ross getting six rats in one day. He thinks the recent work on the rock wall on the foreshore has scared them out of those hidey-holes.
- Bevan has had a relatively quiet time with a stoat caught on the east side of Knight Island, next stop would have been Rat Island or Matakohē-Limestone Island. We usually get a rush of spring stoats at this time of year so will have to be extra vigilant.
- Committee member, Dwane and I also went to the annual Poroti pest hunt and scored a year's worth of bunnies and hares for our stoat traps. These were skinned, beheaded and gutted then chopped up into bait sized pieces and salted. Thanks to Julie Hawkins and John Hackett from the Poroti Outdoors Club for this kind donation and for doing a great job getting rid of a bunch of these predators every year.



Bunnies in the car: Stoats look out!

- It was a year ago I started working on Matakoho-Limestone Island doing the weekly trapping. How time flies, it feels just like yesterday I was baiting the traps around the island with no idea I would be working here in a few months.
- **Remember** it is possible that pests can hitch-hike a ride from boats housed in garages over winter. Upon landing somewhere these pests “abandon ship” which, hopefully, is not on the island. If you are coming over please have a good look in the crevices in your boat, especially for Argentine ants and Rainbow skinks.
- I went and helped out doing a poison drop in the Pukenui Forest which was a good opportunity to see another project and give them a bit of a helping hand. It was also good to get into some mature bush as this is lacking on Limestone Island. This huge forest is right on Whangarei’s doorstep and is little used by the public; there are many huge trees (kauri and kahikatea) and even native bats.

Kiwi

- Glen’s chick as mentioned earlier.
- We released another kiwi chick from Todd Hamilton (Backyard Kiwi) at the petrel station with Pam Stevens and her French student, Baptiste, along with a couple of guys from Opus. This chick was full of beans and raring to go, see you in a year or so little fella.
- Went on another kiwi round-up (my second) with Todd and Kane from Whangarei Regional Council and managed to snaffle two, Legs 11 and one of Sir Ed’s chicks. We caught another Landcare bird a week later as we needed three for the release at Tutukaka, what fun. These kiwi were destined for a life in the Tutukaka hills in a kiwi stronghold managed by the Tutukaka Landcare group (TLC). When you have these shy nocturnal birds on hand it is a good time to show them off as few get the chance to see a wild bird. This happened at Ngunguru Primary School where Todd worked his kiwi magic with four groups of enthralled staff and kids.



Legs 11, Todd and some of the Ngunguru School kids

- On the monthly check of Kahui Whetu I still could not locate Sir Ed (her partner) who I see, on perusing an old Report, lost his transmitter a year ago this month. There’s a rogue kiwi on the island.

Volunteers/Visitors and Talks

- As you can imagine, with the awesome weather visitor numbers have gone through the roof. A wet, rainy volunteer day on the first Wednesday of this month discouraged many although a hardcore group of seven turned up. We kept it casual and carried out some weeding on the hibiscus sites along with salted rabbit packing and a bit of construction work.
- Had a talk/walk with the Hora Hora Scout Group who were full of questions that really tested my New Zealand ecological knowledge, e.g. were dinosaur a risk to kiwi? hmmm.
- The Sherwood playgroup came over for a visit with these little kids enjoying the usual screaming in the reverberant singlemen’s quarters and throwing stones into the water at Shipwreck Bay.
- I needed to make two boat trips to get all the older kids from Portland Primary School across. I think I have had most of the school over now fostering a good relationship with these locals. Maybe I could get them doing some trapping?
- I gave a talk at the Wildlife Vet Conference this month and then hosted them on the island for the day. They really enjoyed themselves and not only did it give an opportunity to show off the island, but also provided a wealth of knowledge for me. We were lucky enough to find a juvenile forest gecko in the new Artificial Cover Objects (ACO’S), as well as the usual multitude of weta. There were approximately 70 people on the island for this. My largest group ever.



- Had the planners for the Whangarei District Council on the island for their Christmas 'do'. We went for a walk to the pa site and build up an appetite for lunch. A delicious spread was accompanied by secret Santa and some dodgy office awards; these guys really know how to have fun. Will have to try to get more free lunches this way - office break-up parties anyone?
- Finally we had a couple of extra special visitors this month. Starting with Iain Reid, who I had heard a lot about but had not met. His plant knowledge is extensive and he was bombarded with questions when he came for a visit. Iain was a long time committee member and a pivotal member of the team who drew up the early re-vegetation plan for the island. Secondly, Ken Massey, expert shearer and all-round nice guy came to the island with a friend and they relieved the sheep of their hot winter coats: the sheep thank you guys.

Other flora and fauna

- The tui chicks have fledged, so if you see a couple of really friendly tui playing around the island it could be them - they have been up to all sorts of crazy antics. These two I have christened Bill and Ben as they seem to be little scallywags.
- Weeds, weeds, weeds, the hot sun and good rain have kept me on my toes with prolific weed growth, including the lawns and tracks. Periwinkle, cotoneaster, wattles and finding another seven adult moth plants sure tests your mettle.
- The Caspian Tern colony on Knight Island is in full swing with the annual survey by Forest and Bird to be conducted soon. If possible avoid this area as the chicks are vulnerable to attack from gulls when the parents are disturbed, as is the case with all the shore birds with young.
- The petrel station is all quiet with the nesting season over till next year and the video camera only showing pukeko in the area, not even a kiwi.

General

- Whangarei Heads Landcare group and NorthTec hosted the release of the Rod Morris and Peter Hayden book "An Extraordinary Land" which I attended. This book features some awesome Northland initiatives and should be checked out by every New Zealander.
- While in the process of getting the pontoon and various steps assessed to be repaired by Transfield services, Opus and the WDC, Golden Bay Cement (our main sponsor) also chartered the island barge this month so the guys from Opus could carry out their wharf inspection.
- I changed the hinges in the weta hotels and boxes to brass ones so access to these without them falling apart is now possible. I caught my first legal snapper off the wharf on the other side of the island, mmm delicious.
- Finally the hibiscus photo I promised for the last Ranger's Report is now possible: I snuck up and photographed them when they were not looking! This could be a new Christmas flower for New Zealand (at least for Matakoho-Limestone Island).



Check out these beauties

- The yearly check of the island's seven fire extinguishers reminded me **it's fire season now. Friendly reminder... if you see smoke on the island please call 111 immediately**

Upcoming

The next volunteer Wednesday will be in **the second week of January (the 8th)** so if you turn up on the first week you may be waiting a while. Enjoy the festive season, be safe on the roads, swim as much as possible and we'll catch you next year.

***WITH ALL BEST WISHES FOR
A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR***

Hei konei ra,
Bernie



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