

# Friends of Matakoho/Limestone Island 2013 Annual Report

(Written and presented by Pam Stevens, Chairperson at the Society's Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 16 April 2014 at Whangarei RSA Bowling Club Rooms)

A couple of weeks ago I went over to the island with the Wednesday volunteers. The numbers have been quite large with two boat loads this month and three (nearly 60 people) in March. A group of the most staunch volunteered to help clear the moth plant on Little Motutaua Island, a very tough task. Another group walked the length and breadth of Matakoho-Limestone Island to weed around the sites where the now flourishing *hibiscus richardsonii* are planted. Dwane Kokich took a team off to plant the seeds he had collected and I joined a team enhancing a habitat for the imminent arrival of the Suter's skinks. At lunchtime we all squeezed on to the deck of the Ranger's house, hot and tired but with an impressive amount of work achieved. People are busy and, no doubt, have lists of chores to do at home, but they cheerfully contribute to this community project. The 'always busy' Ranger, Bernie transported people hither and thither, making a good job of ensuring everyone was welcome. He frequently uses his chef skills to bake for the team, this time supplying island grown, refreshing watermelon.

Bernie also works hard off the island and has this year talked to many groups including Selwyn Village and Merrivale Rest Home residents, and Parua Bay Garden Club. On the island he has hosted an amazing cross section of our community, for example the Friendship Force, a 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party, the Currie family wedding, Whangarei Forest and Bird members, Hash House Harriers, Recovery Solutions Group, Otangarei Holiday Programme participants, ex-Ranger Jo's children's playgroup, Out and About Walking Group, descendants of Henry Walton from Hawaii and Oregon. Other visitors have included people who heard of the island through a German travel website, 70 delegates from the National Wildlife Vets' Conference, Probus members, students from Otago University/USA Exchange, People Potential, Pompallier College, NorthTec Conservation Management course, Portland Primary and a number of other schools, Hora Hora Scouts and others. Organised groups barged over to the island number upwards of 700. It is hard to measure the number of casual visitors but, with such a long summer, there have been a lot, landing in all sorts of craft. Some more numbers: Bernie has given off island talks to nearly 600 keen listeners: visits to our website numbered 2,377 in the 2013 calendar year – 69% new and 31% visited two or more times. Of these 82% were New Zealanders, 6% Australian, approximately 2.5% from USA and U.K. As well as others from France, Canada and even Morocco. Dwane Kokich and Jan Frederick do an excellent job of keeping the site current and Dwane is also able to report that the average visit is 3 minutes 40 seconds long.

Chores that always need to be done include trapping, weeding, mowing and monitoring. Bevan Cramp has been a big help to Bernie, working five hours a week, largely managing the trapping. Numbers of pests caught on the island during the year were 1 rat, 1 stoat and 0 mice. In the buffer zone 16 stoats, 4 rats, 5 mice and 7 weasels and the Onerahi trapping team caught upwards of 102 rats, 14 mice and 10 hedgehogs.

Whangarei District Council staff and our local Councillors are always keen to support us whenever possible and John Nicole, Paul McDonald and others came over with Paul Bonetti to see what we have been up to and are helping out with a few repairs. The Council has also assisted us with an invaluable annual grant and we are also fortunate to

receive a few other grants and donations.

Golden Bay Cement's long association with the island has continued. The Company has recently reviewed its sponsorship and, much to our relief will continue its support and look to a closer relationship. This continued support not only provides security but also means FOMLI is able to plan ahead with projects.

Whangarei's new Mayor and our local Councillors, Sue Glen and Brian McLachlan came over to the island to help open our all-weather track, named by Freddie Tito, Ara Ataahua. With diggers, crawlers and a serious amount of hard work the drainage and steps were put in then a helicopter was used to deliver the gravel. The track surface will settle over winter and looks as though it will last many years.

We like to keep the ranger's living area up to standard and improve it where we can. Bernie has been very understanding, appreciates the new mozzie screens but misses the fantail visits inside. He has set his long-suffering father to work improving the machinery storage area and has upgraded the spare bedroom / caravan. The track around the cottage has been much improved as successive rangers have put in drainage and harder surfaces which has dealt to the winter mud issue around the whole manager's house area for many years.

Bernie's monthly reports keep everyone up-to-date with kiwi movements and antics but I do need to make special mention of the 100<sup>th</sup> kiwi which came off the island during the year and acknowledge the support Todd Hamilton has given Bernie upskilling him and assisting him as he works towards his handling permit. Bernie studied hard last winter and now has his LLO (Local Launch Operator) and NZ Safe Ship Certificate.

The Onerahi Lions helped us many years ago with the construction of the well-used workshop and have continued to support us ever since. We were truly delighted when they granted us some money to assist with the Suter's Stink transfer. Dwane, you are a champion for keeping the link going and securing the funding. We are keen on more translocations but, as you know, this is quite a process. Interestingly, the invertebrate survey identified we are completely missing some keynote species, namely carbide beetle and the native dung beetle. Our invertebrate species population is apparently two-thirds of what would be expected. However, we do seem to fatten kiwi nicely. Our dreams of the lovely wetapunga are on hold for, probably three years until we grow more Nikau and become a more suitable habitat. Some have just been translocated on to two islands near Auckland so we will watch their progress with interest.

The last few years we have taken a "steady as she goes" approach with projects, being careful not to over-stretch financially and labour wise. As we secure funding we can plan more long term. We have a couple of complex issues to tackle - how to slow the deterioration of the cement works' ruins and the manager's house and also what is best to do with the north face archaeological site, "the Maori gardens".

The "thank you" list: Ross McKenzie and Committee member Michelle for the excellent trapping they do on the Onerahi foreshore, Paul Butturini and the track team, WDC Parks and Reserves team, Cathy Mitchell now resident on Little Barrier Island but who is progressing our oi (grey-faced petrel) top up application, Jo and Ben for assisting the handover to Bernie, Julie Hawkins and John Hackett from the Poroti Outdoors Club for the very essential dead rabbits, Clive Stone of Ngatiwai, DOC Northland, Peter Bray, Danny Bourke and Marion Ackers at Golden Bay, Harbour Marine Services, Freddie Tito and our Treasurer Sandy, Theda, Carla, and Jan; Gerry and Dwane for planning the planting, and

the rest of our excellent committee and also our Endowment Fund Trustees Stuart, Irene, Colin, Grant and John, and Bernie who has been with us for over a year now, a big thank you for your commitment and passion.

Some of the events and tasks ahead are, very briefly:

- The boat harbour is silting up and needs a clear out
- The Pou is nearly finished and will probably be installed at Matariki
- Plan for a concentrated war on weeds
- \$10,000 worth of plants to be put in the ground in June and July this year
- Green geckos to be returned from Massey and put in their new home.
- Direct translocation of the Suter's Skinks from Wharepuke.
- Fix the trailer and the leaky boat
- A welcome brochure for the Sunday "Waipapa" Ferry riders
- Renovate the petrel burrows , put in more of the new design and apply for funding
- Move the toilet nearer the new track on the Onerahi side
- Upgrade and add some signage around the ruins
- Find an Archivist
- Increase awareness of the Endowment Fund and its purpose.

Thank you

Pam Stevens

Chairperson