



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report January 2014

Happy New Year. I hope this finds you well and rejuvenated after the summer break.

With the Christmas and New Year celebrations behind us the piles of work on offer on the island must be done. I spent Christmas on the mainland with family and had a party to bring in the New Year with some friends. I even managed a few nights off the island but, as usual, could not wait to get back to my massive swimming pool and the serenity.

The Track refurbishment is 100% finished!

As many will know, there was a problem on Matakohē-Limestone Island, the tracks over the island posed a danger when they got wet and a permanent all-weather solution was required. In 2012 the previous Rangers, Jo and Ben Barr, together with FOMLI, Northland Parkcare and the Whangarei District Council got this project started.

It was a cold winter's day in the beginning of July 2013 when the crew from Northland Parkcare arrived with a digger, power-carrier and the plans for an all-year, all-weather track from one side of the island to the other. Now, after countless hours forming, piping, building, filling, compacting and the final laying of the metal topping (using a helicopter) the track looks a million bucks and is as safe as houses.



A section of the upgraded track

This golden metallised track extends from just above the beach on the North side up past the big oak tree to the school site. From here it winds down past the weta hotel to a hibiscus site then down to the old railway track. Huge thanks to everyone who helped out and had a part in it. I would thank you all personally but the list of names would run to a couple of pages.

There were a couple of highs and a few lows this month as well. The completion of the track was definitely up there. The awesome weather that seemed to coincide whenever I had visitors over was another. However, a couple of lows were the discovery of a stoat in a trap on the West side (sand-spit) of the island and the other was locating Glen's latest chick deceased on the beach by the shelter. Upsetting as this was, it is apparently quite common and misadventure was possibly the cause. We had some huge tides at the time both these incidents occurred and that could have been a contributing factor.

Fauna and flora

- As usual at this time of the year it is full on with the lizard and ant monitoring, both underway by the time this goes to print. This year I will be lucky enough to have Marleen Baling over to do the skink survey with me. I am looking forward to hosting her on the island and hope to learn lots. She has been to the island previously, being a lizard fanatic and a friend of fellow lizard fanatics and past Rangers, Ben and Jo Barr.
- A really cool occurrence has been the regular parading of three banded rail chicks past my front window almost every morning. These three little guys all dressed in black are really cute, running and hiding with different calls from mum.



Spot the little guys, so fluffy, so young, so tiny and so vulnerable

- The shore birds have been busy with the Caspian terns raising a whole bunch of chicks as the pressure from gulls seemed to be less this year, long may this continue. There are a few Variable Oyster Catcher (VOC) chicks on Knight Island and a couple on the island have already fledged. Unfortunately I have seen no new dotterel chicks fledge this year on the main island and have no concrete evidence as to what is "knobbling" these little guys - Australian harrier or black-back gulls?
- Once again the periods of rain then sun are making everything grow exceptionally well. The plants on the island are dripping with fruit and native and introduced birds are making the most of this smorgasbord. Unfortunately the exceptional growth is also helping the weed species and this is contributing to an increased workload. Cutting the bigger specimens and spraying the juveniles with my own special island mix (depending on species) is generally the order of the day.
- We have also been busy spray-releasing several areas around the island, to help individual plants and also some general locations in preparation for the planting season. The regular Wednesday volunteers have been a great help with some of this and several have even taken to the fennel with loppers. This is to help the young *Kunzea ericoides* (kanuka) plants and others in the eastern quarry which was trial planted a couple of years ago. On a walk around with plant specialist, Iain Reid, we found a mangrove, shows how hardy this marvellous plant is.
- The new island babies *Hibiscus richardsonii* have done splendidly in some areas with the most productive site by the stile near the Edge house. The site now resembles a tiny hibiscus forest. The Wednesday volunteers helped weed this and another hibiscus site (different species) and the reward has been a carpet of young plants now the light is available. The other sites are still hanging on but are not quite so splendid.

Kiwi

- As told already, there was some sad kiwi news with the death of Glen's latest chick but at least it was not killed by a vicious mammal. However, this little guy did stand a far greater chance on Matakohe-Limestone Island, as in other areas that are not managed up to 95% of young kiwi never make it to adulthood. One of our young volunteers found the kiwi on the beach on the South side of the island. Although the chick had died it was encouraging to see that it looked to have grown a lot since we put a transponder in on 1 December. My uneducated guess was that the kiwi holed up in a burrow under a bank and the tide came in and drowned it, poor little guy.

On a more positive note, Todd and Jack Hamilton came over on couple of nights trying to catch some kiwi for release. These attempts were not as successful as on previous occasions because the nights were moonlit and a full moon makes the birds especially wary and unwilling to walk in the open. We caught three over two nights with one being unsuitable as it was under the magic weight of 1.2kg. Then we called up our secret weapon, Leslie Baigent and her kiwi dog Tohu; they managed to sniff out another three kiwi.

On 18 January the three kiwi were welcomed back on to the mainland at Onerahi for release in the Whangarei Heads area. One was named FOMLI (Friends of Matakohe-Limestone Island) which was most fitting as the bird was in fact a second generation island kiwi. The other birds were called Inyoni (Zulu for bird) and Nita. Approximately 30 people turned out to witness the event, including several children and visitors from overseas. The kiwi were blessed by our Te Parawhau kaumātua, Freddie Tito and all enjoyed his tale of how the kiwi became a nocturnal land bird and lost its colour and wings. Following brief talks by Todd Hamilton and me about the rearing of the birds FOMLI was taken from the shelter of his/her box so folk had a chance to see a real kiwi up close and take a few photos. I found FOMLI to be a rather feisty little bird who made it known he/she did not appreciate being taken from the box and gave me a small scratch as a reminder.



Feisty FOMLI with Todd and admirers

Visitors

- The visitors this month have mainly come over under their own power as the school holidays meant everyone was out and about. Sometimes the number of people on and around the island surprised me with approximately 30 boats and 3-4 groups counted the other day. I have had a few visitors with my brother and his wife over from South Sudan where they are doing good work. They came to stay overnight so we went for a fish and I sent them away full of food inside and outside. Swimming was compulsory, as with all my summer visitors in the baking sun.
- We had a children's birthday party where the theme was pirates, and they had a ball finding treasure all around the beach and the Manager's house ruins, an old pirate haven for sure,

arrrr me hearties! The Friends of Matakohē-Limestone Island (FOMLI) committee came to the island for a “boat about” and a walk on the new track. This was a great learning experience with some cool stories told I had not heard before. The trip also served as an observational one to decide where we would be planting later this year and which plants would be best suited to the locations.

- Had a great volunteer day on 8 January when many jobs were carried out and cheesecake was enjoyed by all. Some of the tasks completed were the replacement of the bait on the grassed North face, release spraying, a massive beach clean-up, flax trimming and some weeding and spraying above the barge. It was great to see long-time members, David and Janet Fellows, who have returned from the UK for the summer and turn up rain or shine to volunteer when they are back in this beautiful country. Our Dargaville fisher-folk did a tremendous job grubbing thistles by the ruins destroying a nest of them in a drain.



A happy bunch of volunteers, thanks guys

- Big thanks to our summer island sitters Donna Stuthridge, Rhiann Elliot and their daughter Grace who experienced some vicious weather and a huge tide during their time on the island. Apparently they were boogie boarding on the front beach, a good swell they reckoned. The waves were washing around the back of the barge which I had pulled out of the water.
- Eli (an old friend from my days as a chef) his fiancée Lisa and family came over for a couple of days . We had a great time and went on many an adventure. One of the highlights was finding a kingfisher nest which was easy as the babies were buzzing like bees in a hive. Another of these nests was found by the new track in a log whilst kiwi searching. Eli is the head chef at a local restaurant so we ate pretty well and I will now have to burn off some Christmas kilos.

Predator control

- Quiet on the predator front, discounting the stoat on the island which I presume must have swum over from Knight Island when the water was low during a big tide. This is my first stoat caught on the island and the first for two and a half years. The buffer has been relatively quiet with one stoat, a couple of rats and a mouse caught. Additional traps have been put out around the area where the stoat was caught and the checking frequency stepped up on the buffer.
- The re-baiting of the island is well underway with the “easy” north-face finished and Bevan and I working through the difficult south face. We will be improving access to these lines, spraying and cutting back the vegetation where needed and checking for weeds. The tracking tunnels will also be run again to ensure there are no other predators on the island.

General

- Mowing, mowing, mowing, and weed-eating and spraying, it never ends on this island but the effort makes spotting the kiwi at night a lot easier, I hope they appreciate the effort I put in!
- Getting back to my myths and legends of Matakohē-Limestone Island, I heard from one visitor of a small frog someone had seen by the ridge on the island 10 years ago. This frog he claimed had no webbing and suckers on its feet, a tree frog he reckoned? I can only think he saw an Australian brown tree frog but as I have only seen the golden bell frog on the island, was wondering if anyone else had seen any unusual frogs.
- Went for a wicked kayak up what I thought was Skull Creek but ended up in the middle of the mangroves, beautiful ecosystem in there! Heaps of fish and a huge shag rookery. I carried on around the shoreline and did a bit of exploring about Hewlett Point, what a place! Definitely want to get some predator control going here and help with some fencing and riparian planting.

Upcoming

- Yep believe it or not, more mowing, I actually had a dream about mowing the other day, must find a volunteer to do this! Got a couple lined up actually.
- Next volunteer Wednesday will be on the 5th February so see you there, who knows what treats await!

Hei konei ra,
Bernie



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