



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report October 2014

Another month already! I don't think my feet have hit the ground: it's all too exciting. I think I need to check my pants for those Argentine ants I'm always on about in the pre-island briefings.

The most thrilling news this month (for me) again involves not only Matakohē-Limestone Island but another nearby island sanctuary, Taranga, or Hen Island. As you know we have been planning another translocation of 50 Grey Faced petrel or Oi. When this report goes to air we will hopefully be on the three day 'recce' trip so we can be ready for the pick-up of 50 chicks in mid-December over six days. We will be replicating this next year as these top-ups are best practice for a self-sustaining population.



Taranga – Hen Island, where the Oi reside - gorgeous

A second highlight was the opportunity to visit another project, Tawharanui Open Sanctuary, just east of Warkworth. Ten *Porphyrio Tawharanui* [*Notornis*] *hochstetteri* or Takahē were released on a cold and windy Saturday afternoon. Some of these guys were dug out of the snow in the South Island that morning so the conditions would have felt almost tropical to them. After the blessing we marched up the hill, the boxes were opened and with nary a backward glance they were off. Tawharanui is a great place to check out. Ranger, Matt Maitland and the team at TOSSI do a magnificent job. The bird life there is remarkable - our volunteers Greg and Heather Stump managed to spot four saddlebacks in one tree.

Visitors and Volunteers

Lots of visitors this month, everybody wants a nice summer trip to the island - gives me a chance to bombard them with a bit of NZ conservation knowledge.

- My first school visitors this month were the delightful kids from Rooms 13, 15 and 19 at Kamo Primary school. These five and six year olds arrived with a hiss and a roar and kept the parents, teachers and me busy running all over the island. These guys were full of questions and one little guy is still adamant that he will design the official flag for the island, sweet! There were two boatloads of kids each day providing heaps of ears for some island information and heaps of screams when the spiky tree weta were revealed.

- The second school group lined up was a couple of boat-loads of Whangarei Intermediate (Room 5) students with Glenis their awesome teacher. Glenis comes over every year with her students and gives them a little project to complete on the Pa summit. This ongoing programme with schools provides a great outdoor classroom experience. Matakoho–Limestone Island is an amazing, accessible treasure which not many cities have on their doorstep, go Whangarei.

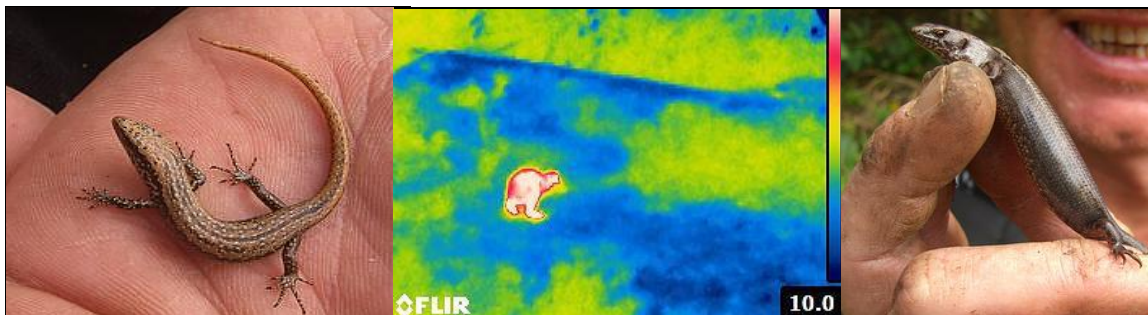


- Our Adopt-A-Spotters, Dallas, Dwane and Angela, as well as Pam and Jane (who travelled over under their own steam) have made trips to the island to check out and work on their areas. Pam and Jane have adopted the bush area above the six-pack quarry. More Adopt-A-Spotters would be most welcome. We will give guidance and direction where needed, as well as provide tools, sprays and whatever you need.
- Our regular Volunteer Wednesday went off without a hitch with 21 keen people waiting for a pick-up at the wharf. A multitude of jobs were carried out on the day including staple removal, more modification of the modified petrel burrows (sorry Tim). These burrows will go back together when the second top-up is over. Some release spraying and the never-ending beach clean-up were also in order.
- The boys from the Otangarei Trust have been visiting regularly and getting lots of good work done. This has included getting posts ready to take off the island, removing graffiti, helping move the caravan, and some new access steps by the barge harbour area, thanks guys.
- Removing the caravan has opened up the area below the deck which I envisage as a volunteer rest area. There is nowhere for our long-suffering volunteers to sit sometimes as my deck is not quite big enough for the multitudes. This would be great but the area is lacking some picnic tables, I need about three octagonal tables to fill this space, hint-hint!



What's needed is some picnic tables

- This month the wet and wild weather has sometimes almost trapped me on and off the island. The spring weather can be so changeable, as was shown whilst I had the Whangarei Walkers group over on an island walkabout. We landed by the ruins and by the time we had walked around the coast to the Pa it was getting wet and windy. We reached the Manager's house ruins and found the sea was getting rougher which meant a hasty exit was required.
- On one really nice sunny day I had the company of 40+ horticulture tutors on the island and they were absolutely blown away. They have a countrywide conference every year and this year NorthTec was the host. I was happy to bring them over and show them around the island. NorthTec has been good to me and I would recommend it to anybody looking for a place to study.
- One visitor to the island was Tibor who I met at the recent Waimate North Trappers' Workshop. He has a thermal imaging camera so we went for a night walk and managed to photograph a couple of kiwis. This was not the golden ticket I thought it would be as the buffalo grass is a great insulator and identifying them through it was not possible. Tibor had a great time and we got to see four different species of skink the next day. We found one very gravid ornate and a juvenile shore skink which is encouraging for the lizard relocation programme.



A selection of photos from Tibor, check out the thermal kiwi

- Weeds are still popping up all over the island but after almost two years I think I know where to look and find incursions before they pose a problem. One weed that persists is the periwinkle. This seemingly innocent ground-cover seems to pop up from nowhere and even constant spraying only just enables me to stay on top of it. There are two problem areas, above and below the Manager's house ruins and below the back ruins track. Ben and I have nailed these populations a couple of times but constant vigilance is required.
- Spring cleaning – the Ruins' toilets washed out, cabin and house vacuumed and dusted and the shed cleaned for the up-coming summer rush! Tony from the Big Red boat the "Waipapa", is reporting record numbers already with his big new sign obviously working.

Kiwi, Petrel and other Birds

- The coolest kiwi news for some time: whilst showing Ben a bit of kiwi telemetry on a check of Kahui Whetu, who should be in a burrow with her but long-free (two years) partner Sir Ed. I had not met this guy before as he had thrown his transmitter about a month before I started on the island. We put a nice new transmitter on his leg and made sure it was good and tight. He was a scrawny looking fella and I could see why the last one fell off. Sir Ed showed his displeasure poeing all over the place during the attachment of his expensive anklet.
- Our excellent sponsors, Kiwis for Kiwi, are holding their kiwi month fund-raising on Trade Me at the moment. I have supplied an auction item, wine and cheese on the beach (or house) with an evening island kiwi walkabout with none other than Backyard Kiwi man, Todd Hamilton from Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum and me. Check this out at

[<http://www.trademe.co.nz/Browse/Listing.aspx?id=794020811>].

- Todd has delivered me five bundles of joy, brand new kiwi chicks for Matakoho–Limestone Island. These guys have had a big day by the time they get here so I try to make the rest of the trip as relaxed as possible. I have recently released a couple into petrel or penguin boxes and found them still in there up to a few days later. I visually check them daily to make sure they are OK and if I have a group over give them a peek. Welcome to the island LC142, 143, 144, 145 and 146.
- I have just checked the photos from the Petrel cameras and surprise, surprise, there are still birds coming back to the burrow area. This is great news and a boost for the programme as we had no eggs laid this year.
- The petrel burrows which have consumed much of my time are about 90% finished and looking pretty smart. The tracks around the petrel station and also the burrow entrances have been getting a make-over. To give the incoming petrels a maximum chance the local muehlenbeckia is getting a whack and a couple of launching ramps are being built. My NorthTec practicum student Ben, as well as the regular Wednesday volunteers, have been helping. By the time this goes live the area should be signed, sealed and delivered.



Five star petrel burrows

Predator Control

- I have been skinning, gutting, chopping and salting a bunch of wild rabbit for our stoat trapping programme, mmm. We were lucky enough to procure another “bunch” of these but will always need more, so if you have any rabbit problems to be dealt to let me know.
- Bevan, my friendly trapper and our Onerahi pest annihilators Michelle and Ross, have been nailing the few pests that dare to venture on to the surrounding island or mainland. The numbers are very low with rats and mice making up the majority of catches. We did get one hit - a mouse on nearby Rabbit Island where I have never caught anything before. Other projects seem to be hitting a quiet patch so we await the rush.

General

- Still wet-wet-wet, well apart from a couple of clear windows when I have managed to do some release spraying and a small amount of track mowing. Nine hundred litres of Haloxypop spray (kills grass) under thicker tree canopies will hopefully allow seedlings to regenerate, as is happening in other areas naturally. This is a cheap and easy option for natural restoration of the native island flora, meaning we save a bit of money. Whilst mowing I got a bit conceited nearly getting the tractor stuck on the lower north face, amazing how wet it stays down there.
- I have been busy altering the garden layout with one being removed and the raised bed I built last year being enlarged. This one is about four times bigger and twice as fast with extra-large and sweet melons guaranteed this summer.
- I am real busy getting ready for the petrel 'recce' trip which, as anybody who has been to an offshore island sanctuary knows, is a lesson in cleaning with every seam and crack checked out. I cannot wait till we get there as I have never overnighted on Taranga and stories abound.
- The alarm system has been given an upgrade as it was going off randomly at all hours. Gavin from Sutherland Security Centre Ltd came and installed some new sensors and replaced the batteries. This will help me concentrate the next day as the alarm going off three times in one night is not ideal.

Upcoming

The next volunteer Wednesday is on the first Wednesday of November - 5th). Pick up at 0900 at the Onerahi jetty. I will see if I can beat the last bribe, berry cheesecake, no promises. There will be plenty of jobs available to suit different tastes and skill sets. Hope to see you there.

Hei konei ra

Bernie



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