



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report November 2014

What an amazing month; off-shore islands with cute Oi chicks, French volunteers, kiwis all over the place, crazy weather and some cool school groups and volunteers visiting.

Highlight of the month - petrel recce trip to Taranga (Hen) Island

Wow, Taranga Island, or the Hen as it is known to most, full of the most amazing native flora and fauna and almost as close to paradise as I could get. The adventure started with the usual extensive DOC quarantine procedure on the Friday before the boat ride over. Once on the island no time was wasted, with petrel hunting taking place almost immediately. Over the next three days the crack team located, measured and marked approximately 140 birds for the upcoming translocation. The weather whilst on the island was gorgeous and I cannot wait for the pick-up trip in a few weeks. The petrels were the focus, but my fellow "petrel pesterers" were my highlight on this trip, the passion!



A jolly group of petrel finders on Taranga

Volunteers ,Visitors and Talks

- This month the island was "invaded" by French volunteers – four to be exact. Unfortunately Nicolas had to leave after just a day and Gwendolyn and Franck after a week. However, I had the pleasure of Elsa's company for almost a month and we carried out heaps of work. Elsa managed to make more upgrades to the petrel area, complete a bunch of bait-lines on the south side, do some kiwi telemetry, mark some A.C.O's. She also did the trapping as Bevan was away, pulled out some Mexican devil, did a round of tracking tunnels and even did some sign making and report writing.

We did quite a bit off the island as well. Spent a day with Ben Barr and NorthTec course students at Tawharanui, second time in a month. Trips to Waipoua and Ngawha Springs, up Mt Manaia, to Ocean Beach, over Tutukaka Head and then to Whale Bay were all day trips. Elsa spent a day working with the fairy terns at Mangawhai and even went to a kiwi release with Todd Hamilton, lucky girl.



Three out of four of our French connection; Elsa, Gwendolyn and Franck. Come back soon guys.

- Ben Lovell, our ever-motivated and brilliant young conservationist in the making, has unfortunately finished his time with us. He proved to be a great asset getting loads of work done and making improvements on the island. Ben always arrived with a smile and good attitude and I will miss his company. I wish him well for the future and hope he comes over again to help me with all the island work.
- Lots of groups over this month, I think they have been playing catch up from the winter. The first trips were four boat-loads of Tauraroa Area School students over two days. These guys were great fun and I even knew a couple through their parents - it's a small place Whangarei.
- I gave a talk at the Masonic Lodge in town which was well attended. On looking around I noted the walls were adorned with some amazing Freemason history. This entertaining group shouted me lunch and I found out several had been to the island last year as part of the Out and About walking group. They promised another visit and a chance for me to show off what we have here.
- My second long-awaited school group came from Onerahi Primary School. The day was a bit windy and the second boat-load back to the mainland got a bit soaked. It was great to host these guys on the island as they have a long history with the island. There were another two trips postponed the next day which meant five boat-loads the next week!



Some of the Onerahi Kids On Limestone, or OKOL as they are known

- The 23 amazing volunteers who were at the wharf on the first Wednesday of the month gave their time readily and got plenty of work done - fine tuning the petrel burrows, cleaning signs ready for the summer, trimming the flax from the tracks, pulling Mexican devil, periwinkle and wattle, and the obligatory beach clean-up. A really nice surprise was the arrival of island stalwarts, Sue and Don from Orewa. They annually carry out an island bird census and take some lovely photos.

- Morgan from the NZ Fire Service visited and noted various spots all over the island for the Response Plan. Morgan is from Canada doing a season of work in NZ while the fire risk is low there. She told me her normal place of residence is five hours from a town - awesome
- Mark from Pacific Kayaks recently got his his permit and has been bringing a few groups over after a long absence. I look forward to seeing more of him this coming summer with the improving weather.
- One gorgeous Sunday this month we were inundated with people. There has been a special deal for trips on the "Waipapa" recently and it has been running at capacity. The other folk were two of my groups, a full load (24) of photographers from the Whangarei Camera Club and the Mitchell birthday party group. These guys were happy to look after themselves and didn't want to leave at the end of the day. I reckon there were about 100 people on the island that day; they were everywhere!
- The soon to be married committee member, John Ballinger, came over for a weekend visit. John and Elsa were on hand, as observers, for a kiwi round up with Todd Hamilton and me. We saw a couple but unfortunately missed out, however, two lovely specimens were caught the next night. We also put some gravel up at the petrel station as it gets a bit slippery when wet, no free ride here!

Kiwi

- We had a memorable kiwi blessing this month coinciding with our regular Wednesday Volunteer Day. This was a bonus for these guys and they really appreciated seeing live kiwi up close. Great for them to see what their hard work is helping to achieve and a real boost, almost as much as the mango, passion-fruit and chocolate cheesecake! The two kiwi were accompanied by Todd and Elsa, firstly to Glenbervie Primary School then the release at Tawapou Native Nursery past Tutukaka.



**Hou, the lucky kiwi that went to Tutukaka,
may you live long buddy.
Photo Sue Davy.**

- There was a lot of kiwi monitoring going on this month, six kiwi with transmitters running around the island. Sir Ed has stayed in the area where he was caught, as has Kahui Whetu, Glen is still sitting on egg(s), go boy. Hihiri has been moving along the north face and the two teenagers that were coming off, Hou and Koru, were not moving far from the house.
- Good news on the Kiwis for Kiwi Trade Me auction held last month; within a couple of days the reserve was met and it was sold. The person who won the auction is the sub editor of the Women's Weekly (chance for a bit of free publicity). This visit will be over one weekend in January with Todd and hopefully a photo opportunity with some island fauna.

- A strange kiwi happening this month while committee members Gerry and John were over doing some soil testing for a possible flax snail translocation. It was about 5:30 p.m. and still very light but in a shady area of the island. We were scuffling through the bush when I heard a noise, dismissing it as a small bird I went back to work. A couple of minutes later I heard it again so John and I went to investigate. Lo and behold a large kiwi went running off under some flax, I think it was the recently translocated Sir Ed, but could not be sure.
- An update from Hugh Robertson, kiwi king, on the mystery kiwi caught six months ago; she is a BNZONE bird named Hihiri by Auckland Zoo staff. She came from Goddard's nest at Riponui on 6/9/2012 and hatched at Auckland Zoo on 13/10/12. then sent from Auckland Zoo to Matakoho-Limestone Island on 9/11/12 at 27 days old weighing 393g. She was 1800gms on 28/04/2014 less than two years later. This kiwi will be released on Sunday, 30 November at Mataia on the Kaipara after a blessing at 8:30 am at the Onerahi Yacht Club.

Other fauna and flora

- There seem to be NZ dotterel chicks and birds nesting everywhere, three little dots were on the sand-barge for about a week and one by the pontoon. The old variable oyster catcher pair has decided to nest in their usual spot right next to the sign on the beach, again! All this nesting has necessitated the erection of more protective fencing, no apologies as their eggs and chicks are just so small and precious.



Look at the cute little fella, one of the dots
Photo Sue Davy

- Taking up a moderate slice of my time is the mowing of the tracks and bait lines; the plants/grass really love the alternating wet and dry weather. Just a couple of weeks growth and they were looking shaggy and needing a trim. I must admit to enjoying this part of my job, spending a nice day driving around the island listening to the radio, it's a hard life!. I have also been annihilating a whole lot of grass under the trees, hopefully encouraging natural regeneration.
- Muzza and Darren from Northland Parkcare have been over tidying up the tracks and cutting back some impeding branches. They will need to come over soon as the grass is growing back quickly. I have been catching up on a lot of weed-eating as well, releasing some of this year's plantings.

Predator control/weeds

- Bevan has only been over twice this month with nothing to report. Elsa and I carried out the trapping for one cycle finding a rat and a mouse on the buffer and a couple of birds on the island, which shows the traps function. I noted that the Caspian terns had started making nest scrapes on Knight Island. I really miss this part of work as this is where I started helping out previous ranger Ben almost two years ago, too busy now. How time flies.
- Because this is the time of year when there are so many small chicks about, predator control is more important than ever. Young stoats, rats and other pests will be starting to disperse from areas inland, as they do every year at this time. This is why the continuous reliable trapping regime is so important, both on the buffer and the island.

General

- Big thanks go to Gerry and Dwane for island sitting and running a boating group around the island. Dwane enjoyed babysitting the French volunteers and in true French style red wine was consumed
- The caravan has been moved up by the cabin; this makes it a bit more private. This was Elsa's home while she was staying here.
- We gave the garden a bit of a clean-up and did a lot of planting including cucumbers, corn, celeriac and lettuces. I also put out a weed-mat and got a load of this summer's upcoming volunteer treats in, rock melons.
- As we have been having some crazy weather and it is still sometimes like winter I have been in no hurry to get the sheep's woolly coats off. They have started looking pretty hot so superstar shearer Ken Massey will, hopefully, be able to give them the once over soon.
- On a final note, once again the community reach of Matakohē-Limestone Island has amazed me, as was shown by the response to the call for the littlest of fish, the humble sardine. As you all know the petrels are coming and amongst the plethora of gear required are 500 tins of Brunswick sardines in soya oil. The call was put out and Pak 'n Save led the charge with 200 tins, wow. Onerahi Primary School and Onerahi New World then came on board with a further 150 tins, double wow. We now need only another 150 tins and the chicks will be well fed this year. All this without much effort on my part, really inspirational stuff.

Upcoming

Volunteer Wednesday – 3rd December. Pick up at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. I do not know if I can top last month, a kiwi and a cheesecake! As it is the last Volunteer Wednesday of the year we will have a shared lunch. If we are feeling keen we may even get some work done.

Hei konei ra

Bernie



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