



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report February 2014

Welcome to the long days and crazy weather and life - a crazy abundance of life on Matakohē-Limestone Island. The noise from the cicadas is deafening and the constant molestation by fantails everywhere you walk is amazing. Weta nymphs are all over the place at the moment and surely providing the island's kiwi with a good feed. Speaking of which, I keep hearing a mature male calling on the Onerahi side of the island so I'm sure you could hear him from the mainland, listen out. The plants are doing really well so come visit and check them out, remember no pets, ants, fires or rubbish.

Track opening

During the month we celebrated a special occurrence - the official opening of the upgraded school track by Whangarei's Mayor, Sheryl Mai (long time member and supporter of FOMLI). The ceremony was attended by a small group of guests and dignitaries. Following a blessing by our kaumātua, Fred Tito of Te Parawhau, the ribbon was cut and the guests then walked over the track to the Shelter on the other side for drinks and nibbles. All in all an enjoyable occasion with even the weather playing ball.



Visitors and volunteers

This month has certainly been one for visitors as hardly a day has gone by that someone has not come to call.

- I have had visits from my parents who are starting to do a bit of regular work on the island beginning with a shelter for the wood under the trees, as well as renewal of the curtains in the island caravan. I surprised them with a quick round-up of a couple of sheep which were due to come off as the grass supply was getting a bit low. These lanky rams were bundled into "sheep whisperer" Ken Massey's ute and taken to greener pastures, thanks guys.
- Descendants of the Edge family (former island residents) came over for a walk about and I dropped them off by the Edge house ruins. They then walked around to the cement works' ruins where I met them and we walked around to the site of a second Edge cottage, both with beautiful vistas.
- I had a crew over from a Dargaville Club which included 'me old mate' Keith who does a bit of fishing on the island and keeps the ruins area thistle free. This visit was also special as his wife came over too and it was good to have a chance to tell her how much the bespoke bailing twine seat covers she made for the barge are appreciated.
- Sandy Page, FOMLI Committee member, brought her family from Canada, over for a picnic and walk around.
- Nurses from Ward 15 at Whangarei Hospital came for picnics and walks.
- On Northland's Anniversary weekend I had a call out of the blue from a group who wanted to visit. I picked them up and they braved the high seas then had an enjoyable walk around the island. The family gave a nice donation to the island as most groups who visit do. Donations (koha) are really appreciated and go towards the running of the island and making it a really special place.
- If this was not enough I also had a DOC volunteer training/brainstorming group over who used our volunteer base as an example of a good project.
- The Hash House Harriers arrived en masse (41) for their yearly island run. These guys perform some strange rituals, new shoes mean you drink out of them!!!!

- Sean Harsant who planted trees on the island in 1990 came over and was amazed and delighted to see how different the island looks now.
- The final visitors were Guy and Sandra from Tawapou Nurseries at Matapouri who came to do some consulting.
- Now we get to the volunteers and there were plenty including two visits from a group of enthusiastic young people from the Otangarei Trust Programme. These guys will hopefully become regular volunteers for work on the island.
- Sport Northland staff decided to give a day to the island and 40+ fit workers descended and did a truck load of work. They followed this up with a trot up to the summit and some obligatory photos.
- Last, but certainly not least, our regular Wednesday Volunteers were on time with smiles on their faces and work in their blood. Twenty-three showed up and a plethora of work was completed, including the dreaded never-ending weeding and mulching on the area above the barge. I was a bit surprised by them this month as it seemed only a short time since they were last here (no baking). This and all the other voluntary work done behind the scenes by the committee and countless others is what makes Matakohē-Limestone Island what it is.

Kiwi

- As told in last month's report we caught several kiwi both by hand, night stalking and also with Leslie and her fantastic dog, Kahu. We caught six in total with three being fit for release at Whangarei Heads. These kiwi went to McLeod Bay for a pre-release show in front of 350 people.
- One of the birds caught was big enough to come off the island but was too genetically similar to other birds at Whangarei Heads to be released there. This was an island-born bird, an offspring of the prolific breeder, Sir Ed (who has not been seen since the end of 2012) and did not have a name. This is where our sponsors, Golden Bay Cement, came on board and named the bird Goldy. She turned out to be a lovely big bird with a relaxed demeanour and it was decided she would go to Maranui in the Brynderwyns. Maranui Conservation Limited is a group of share-holding families who have worked together for over 25 years managing the land and implementing a comprehensive animal pest management programme.



**Goldy with a staunch BNZ Kiwi for
Kiwis supporter – what a star!!!!!!**

Following a blessing on the Onerahi foreshore Goldy was first taken to Mt Tiger, another area where, thanks to Ngairie Tyson from Landcare, local residents have become involved in the kiwi project. After a brief visit there so these folk had an opportunity to see a kiwi up close, Goldy was finally taken to Maranui where she was welcomed and released into the bush on private land.

Flora and Fauna

- I have completed the lizard monitoring with numbers up on last year and many gravid females. I would go on a bit more about these little guys but previous reports by ex-Ranger and herpetologist Ben Barr (a lizard nutter) are much better and his photography skills outshine my feeble attempts.



Moko Skink

- Marleen Baling was also over for a few days during the month to carry out some monitoring. The weather was fairly atrocious and not conducive to the lizard monitoring planned but despite this some beautiful specimens were caught, duly measured and photographed.



Marleen with one of the Island's beautiful shore skinks

- With planting season coming up we have been busy both prepping sites and ordering plants from our friendly suppliers, Tawapou Nurseries at Matapouri. This also involves spraying the grass under the current plantings so taller larger trees can be planted/take hold and a bigger canopy cover can be established. It is amazing to see the small seedlings pop up when the grass cover is removed.
- Whilst completing the baiting on the south side I have found that it is not only the natives doing well but the introduced pest plants are flourishing. Moth plant nests, briar rose, pampas and other nasties are popping up everywhere. The trees are still dripping with fruit and the whole area down the old Maori trail smells like fermented karaka berries. This means we will have to be on our toes this autumn/winter for the increase in predator numbers.
- I would like to introduce you to Pēpe the pīwakawaka which has chosen to make his/her regular hunting zone around the house and garden. This little guy is a new chick from this year and is so friendly I can sit and hand feed it. He/she is very partial to moths with the compost bin also providing a handy flying snack.



Pēpe the friendly pīwakawaka

- An increased number of lizards are being caught on the island at the moment with some common brown skinks showing up near the house. Hopefully the extra kingfishers are not eating too many of these. The chicks from this year's nests are flying around and seem to be catching the cicadas on the wing. I found out the buzzing noise they make in the nest is not only a cry for food but can attract predators so effectively blackmails the concerned parents to shut them up with a mouthful of food.

Predator control

- Bevan, our trapper, is doing a fabulous job changing baits and catching the predators around the place. I put out a new stoat trap on Knight Island and was immediately rewarded with a stoat a week later in this trap. This is a high catch area and the sooner I get some sort of programme going on over on the southern mainland the better. Grand total this month on the buffer has been two big stoats, a rat and a mouse with the island clear.
- Ross and Michelle, our volunteer trappers, have been doing a grand job over on Onerahi with more traps going in and a re-jigging of the traps in the area. The recent works on the shore may be chasing the rats out of the rock wall according to Ross and heaps are being caught over there.
- I have been cleaning up, spraying and refilling the bait-stations with Bevan as some were disappearing into the grass. Whilst doing this we have been discovering kiwi tunnels everywhere. The little men in brown jackets must have a great time cruising around at night in their own little road system, I wonder what they do at intersections?

General

- There are new more informative ranger notices around the place as the weather had knocked the old ones around a bit. Check these out and keep your eyes open for new ones as education is a big part of Matakohē/Limestone Island. A new island information board is going in over at the Onerahi foreshore soon as well.
- The gates all around the ruins are now able to be walked through but be careful as some snap closed behind you pretty quickly. This means no more having to hop over stiles, although they are still there so feel free to use them.
- I gave a talk to an appreciative audience at the 60's Up Club at the Kamo Club. They couldn't believe the size of the kiwi egg.

Upcoming

- Heaps of watermelons in the garden (50+ plants), visitors look out
- **Volunteer Wednesday on March 5th.** Pick up at the jetty at the usual time – **9am**. I may take a group over to Rabbit Island to do a search and destroy mission for adult moth-plants, weather and tide permitting.

Ka kite anō

Bernie



Proudly supported by; Environmental Northland, Forest Floor Nursery, Harbour Marine Ltd, Marine North Ltd, Northpower, Northland Port Corp, Northland Regional Council, North Tugz, Onerahi Lions, Phoenix Boats, Red Bull Powder Co., Tawapou Nursery.

www.limestoneisland.org.nz