



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report March 2014

Howdy all you mainlanders, I write this while being buffeted by Cyclone Lusi and loving every minute of it: there's something about being stuck on an island that I really seem to enjoy. The barge is out of the water, all doors are secured and I'm ready for Lusi's fury. The wild and windy weather is knocking the trees around a bit but the rain is definitely welcome - around 40mm has fallen already.

Life on the island has, as usual, been non stop with my feet barely hitting the ground this month. The bouts of sunshine and rain really get things growing and the trees, shrubs, grass and weeds are making the most of it. I found an adult moth-plant (40+ pods) right next to the ski-slope track today. You must be able to see these things growing if you watch closely enough.

As you will see under the 'Visitors and Volunteers' sections, the barge has been kept busy motoring across the water a few times a week and sometimes more than once a day - when it rains it sure pours. However, the extra help given by both volunteers and visitors is very much appreciated.

### Kiwi

- This month has been a little quiet on the kiwi front with no new chicks on or off yet, not that I am complaining, those early mornings spent looking for the little guys are taxing.
- There is certainly no lack of kiwi sign around with their poo and footprints everywhere. The kids I have over love it when I grab them some off the track. The smell is not terribly unpleasant being slightly fruity and a little bit earthy (have a look next time you are over).
- Kahui Whetu was due for her six-monthly biometrics and transmitter change and Rolf (DOC) and I managed to fit her in with a big group of Kokopu Primary School students and the headmaster even got to hold her, wow what a kiwi smile.



**Kahui Whetu helping to knock one off Mark's bucket list**

- It's that time of year again with the application for the predator trapping funding for the island due. The good folk at Kiwis for kiwi and the Northland Kiwi Forum have to make some hard decisions.
- Coming back from lizard monitoring (9:30pm) in the ute I managed to disturb a couple of kiwi on the track. I got to within 5-6 metres of these beauties before they bolted. An amazing and a poignant reminder of how easily they can be bowled by cars. Apparently at Whangarei Heads you are more likely to see a kiwi on the road at night than a possum .

## Flora and Fauna

- As mentioned in the last report the lizard monitoring was underway and I am happy to say I have now completed it. This is the second year I have undertaken this task and the results, whilst being much the same in total, were the reverse of last year's. Last year I caught fewer in the first couple of days with the numbers picking up by the end. This year I caught heaps in the beginning and thought after last year I was going to be inundated with skinks but the numbers seemed to dwindle off.

Some of the numbers this year were 118 skinks caught in total, most were copper skinks with the next, surprisingly, the moko skinks (15), although we have more traps for these. A close third were the shore skinks (14) with the ornate skinks only providing 3 specimens, which is not unusual. A definite highlight was the discovery of a giant centipede whilst chasing a small skink down a hole in the trap. Thank goodness nobody was there as I jumped pretty quick, creepy things.

- I have put up more signs around the island which provide light information about some of the island's attractions. There are now also some openable weta habitats around the island. It is surprising how fast kids go from "eee" to "wow" when you show them some of the weta's very cool features up close.
- The yearly ant monitoring has been carried out with the ants sitting in ethanol waiting to go to town for diagnosis by Ollie Ball, entomologist and my ex tutor. I definitely recommend the Conservation and Environmental Science course at Northtec with its expert tutors. The ants we are trying to identify are the invasive and aggressive amber coloured Argentine ant which would cause a real headache if on the island. Please remember to check your gear for these guys before you come over.
- Together with some of our amazing volunteers I have been busy getting the sites ready for the coming planting season. This involves spraying an area several times to remove the grasses then sometimes clearing holes in the grass for the plants. These have been ordered with more than last year so get ready to get busy planting the 3000 or so ordered from Tawapou Coastal Natives plant nursery, plus the extra 250 Hibiscus that need to be planted and some flax we are translocating.
- I am finding a huge number of invasive weeds on the island with the aforementioned adult moth-plant as well as a number of their seedlings. As well as these the palms, pampas, Taiwan cherry, privet and cotoneaster and the prickly sweet briar rose are keeping me busy.
- You will be happy to hear that Pēpe the pīwakawaka is still hanging around and flourishing on the moths and other inverts fluttering around the place.

## Visitors

Wow, have I had a lot of visitors this month. This is awesome as each person I can introduce to the island and talk to about the wildlife, threats etc. will tell a couple more.

- The first and probably the most special occasion this month was a wedding on the island, Adrian and the now Nora Bird (who coincidentally was a waitress when I was a chef) got married on the island on a beautiful Saturday afternoon. They had a really special day in front of 100+ people and the reception went till the wee hours at the Onerahi Yacht Club. The weather really played ball and the shelter on the other side looked absolutely gorgeous.



#### **Who gets to ride around with a bunch of lovely girls – I do**

- I had an group over from NorthKidz who tramped over the island on the new track and had a great time checking out the kiwi poo and the weta, followed by lunch at the manager's house. On the way home some even got to steer the boat, give one a go and they all want to do it - with a bit of help!



#### **Check out the little tykes, what fun!**

- Had a crew from the Whangarei District Council over to check out the refurbished track and the island generally. I heard talk that this must be one of the best Council reserves in the area and how lucky Whangarei is to have it on its doorstep.
- A group from the Whangarei Small Farm Owners' club came for a visit to the island on a warm and sunny Sunday and loved every minute of it. These guys were particularly interested in the predator trapping side; hopefully some will set up programmes themselves, the more the better.
- Thalia Sachtleben from DOC Whangarei came over to pin down four more spots for the *Hibiscus richardsonii*. Thalia also came to monitor the spring plantings as it has been six months since they went in the ground. Great news, most of them seem to be surviving with some obviously doing better than others (from 2cm to 1.5 meters). Now we just need some natural recruitment and my dream of the north face of the island a sea of white flowers could happen.
- Regular island visitor, Nick Bamford came to the island for a couple of days with his two sons. They had a great time doing some lizard monitoring and even seeing a kingfish chasing a small schnapper they caught.

- Finally Kokopu School came across the water with two boatloads of kids for some education in our outdoor classroom. They have been learning about sustainability and a trip to the solar power set-up and the composting toilet were a must. They also got an absolute buzz from seeing a real live wild kiwi up close as well as all the other creatures. I sent them off with messages of pest and pet control if they wanted to see these special things in their backyard in the future. What a cool bunch of country kids.



**The Cool Kokopu Kids**

## **Volunteers**

- My Dad has been over several times working on the lean-to so we can store equipment under cover prolonging its life and saving maintenance costs. The "old fella" has been a great help, even supervising some Tauraroa students when they came to volunteer.
- The Otangarei Trust has been over twice with a few guys to do odd jobs around the place. One of these was to try and find the holes in the fence where the sheep are getting out, the little woolly beggars!
- Tauraroa Area school students arrived full of energy for a day of volunteering with heaps getting done. Seed dispersal, post-hole digging, bait-line clearing and a bit of concreting were carried out. The kids looked exhausted at the end of the day, great job done, cheers guys
- Barry and Marianne Davis (regular volunteers) have been getting tucked in, weeding the hibiscus shade-house and keeping me company while I am stuck on the computer.
- Finally but what a crowd! The regular Wednesday volunteers turned up on the 5th which turned out to be a two boat crossing. This was fine but I also had another boat load over from Northtec, Conservation students who came over to experience island life and work. Being well organised I had committee member Dwane take the NorthTec students for the day while I was with the regulars.

Jobs carried out that day included weeding the yet to be planted and planted hibiscus sites, attacking the moth plants on a nearby island, marking out an access track, releasing and spraying planting areas, spraying and giving the caravan another coat of paint. I had my own dramas with the post holding the barge snapping and a new stronger one needing to be put in. Fortunately I had fresh island watermelon for all as I would never have had enough baking for the 60+ people over that day.

## **Predator control**

- As you would have heard, the South Island is gearing up for a mast year (bumper seed crop). Unfortunately this causes the rat/stoat populations to explode and when this food runs out they target natives. I think we are having a mini version in the North and consequently have increased the frequency of checks on the buffer for the last two months.

The big rush did not seem to happen and last week I went back to fortnightly checking. Whilst securing a stoat trap with trapper Bevan on the sand-spit I noticed some unusual tracks, mammal! The next day, after finding out they belonged to a rat I put out another 10 rat boxes and just to be safe, another 5 stoat traps; cannot be too careful.

I have recently re-baited that end of the island as I am cleaning up the lines on the South side. All the North face bait-stations have recently been refilled with poison as well so that is going to be one dead rat (the only good rat). I am also running the tracking tunnels next week just to check.

- On a sad note, some "lovely" person has been messing with the traps on Knight Island. What pleasure anyone would get from ripping the lid off a stoat trap and kicking our rat traps all over the place I don't know. Hopefully one of the traps gave them a good bruise to remember the incident by. Even rats are too intelligent to go near a trap that has hurt you - don't know if these people are that clever though, ha ha.
- On a more pleasant note, I have been tallying up the totals for the island and buffer pests caught for the Kiwis for kiwi application:
  - Island – 1 rat, 1 stoat
  - Our buffer – 2 rats, 10 stoats, 7 weasels and 1 mouse
  - Onerahi buffer - 85 rats, 7 hedgehogs and 13 mice

## General

- An interview on Radio Live with Graeme Hill about the island, its history and the conservation project was a surprise. Graeme is an ex- Whangarei local and a bit of a conservationist which always helps getting the word out there. He is also keen to come over to the island so I will be more than pleased to show him around Matakoho-Limestone Island and all its special features
- Gave a talk at Merrivale Retirement Village, my second which means my first attempt cannot have been too bad. They were a great crowd again with a delicious hot lunch (with dessert) much appreciated.
- Mowing and spraying - did I mention spraying and mowing???
- Some more drive-way shaping with the upgraded all-functioning grader-blade, nice.
- Upgraded track is looking better and better: Lusi did not even dent the surface, bring on a real rain event!
- Got some kiwi due off the island so a round-up is on the cards, might have to bring out the secret weapon, high ho old rusty (the ute).

## Upcoming

Our regular Wednesday volunteer day is on **April 2nd**. Meet at 9am at the jetty as usual. More site preparation for the coming planting season required and another brave lot of folk required to attack the evil moth plant zombies on Pirate Island!

## Hei konei ra

### Your friendly island ranger

### Bernie



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