



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report April 2014

Another month has flown by and life on the island is still as blissful as ever; this really is the best job in the world.

Lizards, lizards, lizards



Coppermine Island Tuatara - we want them!

One of the highlights for me this month has not actually been on Matakohē-Limestone Island but on an island a bit further offshore, Coppermine Island in the Hen and Chicks group. I accompanied the Department of Conservation crew of five and a rodent dog for a day of collecting, tracking tunnels and observing. The flora and fauna on this island blew me away and demonstrated modestly how amazing the mainland would have looked in pre-mammal times - giant geckos, tuatara, amazing flora and invertebrate life and the Suter's, or egg laying skinks, a real inspiration for our little island.



Duvaucel's Gecko; look at the size of it and I have big hands

This brings me to the next bit of good news. The permit for the collection of 50 of these beauties (Suter's) came through and, even better, we do not have to disease screen them so a direct transfer is possible, saves a heap of money. Our thanks go to Ben Barr who has the reins of this project, his help is really appreciated (and apologies to his long-suffering wife Jo and kids, Penny and Tim).



One of the dozens of Suter's skinks found on the beach

While we are on lizards Ben, trapper Bevan and I went gecko hunting one night not long ago with the target being five Auckland green females for the island. We - meaning Ben - were very successful and five absolute beauties were put into their gecko houses. They were then taken to Massey for disease screening and will soon be released on the island.



**What a beauty, to the island and populate!
Every one we find is prettier than the last**

Fauna and Flora

- More good news, the *Hibiscus richardsonii* that was planted in spring last year has reached the next level – reproduction. It was a fresh late summer's day, I was walking along the North face when what should catch my eye but some seedlings. This is awesome and the start of the distribution of this species all over the island.



**Look at the newest island babies.
May the island be covered in white flowers!**

- The petrels are due to return at any time so some last minute repairs to their burrows are required and an improved drainage system is on the cards. They will also be getting some new bedding, another camera and a better stick checking system. These guys probably should not be disturbed during this important time, especially after last year's successful laying of an egg, fingers crossed.
- I have been seeing a few German wasps over here and if anybody knows where the nest is I would happily destroy it as these guys can cause all sorts of problems. I killed a big nest by my car on the mainland but they still keep coming. This reminds me of the huge nest I killed in a petrel burrow last year.
- Weeds, weeds, weeds. Dwane has been over dealing to the veldt grass and helping me with the moth plants. I have found another four nests with one being a completely new site and the others spread from some island adult plant. Other weeds high on my priority list have been the pampas, these showing by their flowers and also some selaginella, privet, cotoneaster - dealt to by both mechanical and chemical means.
- Happily my little pal Pēpe is still hanging around enjoying his morning breakfast of moths by the toilet. He is growing up quick and chasing other pīwakawaka around the garden. Soon he will be off making more fantails for everyone to enjoy.



Pepe is really growing up, I think it's a girl, what a poser!

- There has been lots of mowing going on with the Indian summer making for good grass growing. I have been doing this every two weeks or so and it just grows and grows. Murray and Rob from Park Care Ltd have been great at keeping the walking tracks trimmed. Talking about growing, the watermelons have been maturing like crazy with all volunteers and visitors to the island getting fed up on these beauties.
- I have also been busy spraying and clearing areas for the coming planting season (with lots of help). This year we have ordered over 6000 seedlings and, with our 200+ Hibiscus will have to get our gloves, spades and backs into it. We will be picking these plants up as soon as we get some decent rain and the weather cools down.

Predator control

- Fortunately there have been no more predator tracks seen anywhere on the island. Trapper Bevan's weekly trap checks (regular/extras) and the tracking tunnels run this month have come up clean. Hopefully the rat has eaten some of the 850 baits laid around the island and will never be seen again. Back-checking previous Ranger Reports shows three rats a stoat and a weasel were caught in March 2011, so I cannot complain.
- This month I also ran the tracking tunnels with a bit of help from some NorthTec students. The amazing thing was the number of skink tracks in the tunnels and methinks the first gecko prints.
- Bevan has been trapping up a storm with three stoats, three rats and three mice caught on Knight Island and Onemama. There are a whole heap of berries around at the moment and subsequently a big rush of predators is expected, so we cannot let up on this critical work.
- This month I sent our application off to the Kiwi for kiwis funding. They usually fund the mustelid portion of our trapping so the little kiwi are safe here. This funding helps heaps and frees me up to spread the good word about conservation and the great work our sponsors are doing. Check out the sponsor bar at the bottom and support these businesses, we couldn't operate without their help.

Visitors and Volunteers

- Just like the lizard monitoring last month, a busy start and a quiet end to this month. I feel a bit guilty when I do not have any groups over for more than a week but I think I will take advantage of the break while I can as I'm sure it won't last.
- Had a delightful group over from Westmount School in the Kaipara and, as expected, the immaculately turned out kids were a barrel of laughs. I had a boatload from Westmount Dargaville last year and this group turned up with three boatloads! Good to see the word is getting out there about how fabulous the island is. These kids sent me some great cards and letters, better spelling and neatness than most adults I know, me included.
- Ollie Ball, NorthTec Conservation Tutor extraordinaire and invertebrate specialist, came over for a visit with the first year students. They had a great time setting the tracking tunnels and then tucking into lunch followed by the obligatory watermelon feast. These guys got to check out some geckos, skinks, weta and a giant centipede and were blown away by the island: best field trip so far apparently.
- A group of walkers from the Parkinsons Society paid a visit and we trundled over the island with people dropping off or going their own way, depending on their ability. We have groups with varying degrees of ability over to Matakohe-Limestone Island and the refurbished track now makes access easier.
- A couple of NorthTec students came back so I put them to work getting the Suter's skink habitat ready. Nick and Tash were a great help and enjoyed themselves almost as much as regular volunteer Hilary and her friend from Canada. These two had a great day fishing after I saved them from the Onerahi pontoon.
- Fred Tito and Te Parawhau, kaumātua, were picked up from the mainland one Sunday so they could have a day on the island and check out the progress, as well as a cup of tea and a "chinwag".
- We had a monumental regular Volunteer Wednesday with two big boatloads over to the island which included some of the NorthTec students from last month. I was extra organised this time after almost being caught out last month. We got a myriad of jobs done including more Suters' habitat, hibiscus weeding and plot preparation, flax planting and even a moth plant strike on Motuotawa Island.

Kiwi

- Todd Hamilton and I went for a quiet look around one moonless, still night with the target being two chicks over 1.2kg for release at Bream Head. The kiwi made it really hard for us but we snaffled a beautiful male 100 metres from the house. This guy was gorgeous and had beautiful blond highlights; I cannot wait to see what he looks like during the day. The second bird was caught another 500 metres up the track and Todd caught this one with great flair really showing his skills, dominating!

- Had another four chicks travel to the island sanctuary courtesy of our hard working mainland dads. There are currently around 44 kiwi on the island. Being nocturnal they make their presence known in the daytime by the amount of poo left around the place. I found five in a metre radius on a bait-line the other day, a kiwi loo! The tracking sandpit I installed by the singlemen's quarters is working better but still needs some tweaking.
- Our resident tracked kiwi, Kahui Whetu and Glen, are doing fine with big Glen not seeming to be making a second nest and Sir Ed, Kahui Whetu's partner, still AWOL. Glen seems to be hanging around the drain/flax near the singlemen's quarters and Kahui Whetu near the West face, their regular haunts.

General

- After the last committee meeting I had a lovely dinner with the FOMLI crew, great to catch up, casual like.
- A few off island happenings with a talk to the RSA widows group and one to the Lady Lions, which was accompanied by a three course dinner and a moonlit dinghy ride home. I also had a photo session at NorthTec promoting their applied Science Degree. I had had an interview with these guys a while back talking about the job on Limestone Island which came out sweet, check it out at [www.northland.ac.nz/news.aspx]
- Tractor has had its annual service.
- Computer has a new harddrive, amazing how reliant we are on these in this day and age, felt a bit lost without it.
- Finally the gate by the singlemen's quarters swings correctly.
- Cyclone Lusi made a bit of a mess of the runners on the wharf so I fixed the problem with some big bolts.
- Dinghy and trailer have needed a big repair job as the water leakage problem was getting worse and worse, dry feet now - hooray!

Upcoming

- Easier access lower steps on some board-walks as the washouts were getting ridiculous. The Parks and Reserves team at Whangarei District Council is attending to this task, cheers guys.
- As mentioned above, the kiwi release on 6 May commencing with the blessing at the Onerahi Yacht Club at 9.00 a.m. From there the birds will go to Whangarei Heads School then be released at Bream Head. All are welcome and you may even see a kiwi with sexy blonde highlights.
- Also as mentioned before, we have a huge number of plants to go in the ground soon so keep your ears and eyes open for our planting days coming up.
- Volunteer Wednesday 7 May, 9.00 a.m. at the jetty. The watermelons may have run out so I may surprise these awesome helpers with baked treats, you never know .

Hei konei ra

Your friendly island Ranger

Bernie



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