



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report May 2014

Welcome to the May 2014 report: where does the time go! I guess when one is having fun the time just melts away. There have been some really great highlights this month with two species of lizard being released on to the island. Two kiwi have also 'graduated' from this island crèche and are now adding their genes to the Bream Head population.

The first highlight was the release of seven very special Auckland green geckos. These guys were released from quarantine with a surprise - two tiny geckos which had been born during their stay in Auckland. The geckos arrived and, as they were the last green geckos for the island, a small welcoming ceremony was called for. Freddie Tito blessed the lizards and they were released at a site where they will get plenty of sun and lots of moths and other invertebrates.



Look at that cute little guy, all head and gorgeous, and giving a high five

Big event number two was the gathering, transportation and release of the Suter's skinks from Whatupuke and Lady Alice Islands at the Hen and Chicks. The project was made possible thanks to sponsorship from the Onerahi Lions and some hard work from a great team. The skinks were collected over two gorgeous days by a crack team of skink warriors. The little guys, although plentiful, would disappear down amongst the bowling ball sized boulders and could prove elusive. The best part was that we did not have to do disease screening so were able to do a direct transfer.

This is the end of an era for the lizard species (for now) as all eight suggested have now been translocated to Matakohē-Limestone. The project started in 2007 with the shore skinks, 2008 the ornate skinks arrived, 2009 was a busy year with the pacific gecko, the common gecko and moko skinks. 2011 heralded the start of the forest geckos and the greens a few weeks ago and finally 50 gorgeous Suter's skinks from the Chicks.



A happy budding herpetologist at work with a Limestone Island bound Suter's skink

The third big event on the island was the move of two kiwi 'teenagers' off the island and out to their new home at the Ocean Beach side of Bream Head. Todd Hamilton, from Backyard Kiwi, and I ran around and gathered the two we had previously put transmitters on then measured them for the release. All was well with these two and they were dispatched into boxes for a blessing from our Te Parawhau kaumātua Freddie Tito. One of the birds, named Christchurch, was an absolute stunner as it was covered in blonde highlights, very fancy.



Check out those highlights and wings

From there the birds went out to Whangarei Heads Primary School for an audience with an excited bunch of very well behaved kids. The kids were able to see a wild kiwi up close. This kiwi was named Gail after a teacher in recognition of all the support the school has given Todd over the years. Both kiwi then travelled out to Bream Head and were released to supplement the expanding population there. Ngaire Tyson from Kiwi Coast and Adam Willetts, new Bream Head project manager/ranger were also present for the release. On behalf of FOMLI, I extend a warm welcome to Adam and his family.

Fauna and flora

- We have been carrying out improvements to the petrel burrows with fresh leaves going in, sand around the entrances to hold the gates in place and I.D tracks. Whilst carrying out this work with trapper Bevan and another volunteer Sam, we found our first petrel for the year. This return mirrors last year's by about two days and was a real treat for all of us (and they smell nice). The upcoming petrel top-up has been applied for with Pam busy arranging sponsorship. All sea bird twitchers out there keep your ears open for some Oi work at the end of the year.

More Oi news was the discovery of a second bird of the year in the burrow where the egg was found last year. This could be the male of the pair which nested last year. The camera we have on site was duly moved and I got some cracker shots of this bird over the next few nights. This Oi needed to be processed so the opportunity was grabbed and 'petrel man' Derek Bettesworth, duly removed the petrel from the burrow. The bird proved to be one that was found in the burrow last year.



Look at that beauty! may many more return

- An interesting but slightly disturbing floral incident was the discovery of some super moth plants on Motuotawa Island. Bevan, Sam and I spent a couple of days on this picturesque island dealing to the weeds. Two and a half bottles of Vigilant and 120 litres of spray later we were causing a dent in the weed population. This is where the super moth plants come in from, several with stalks as big as my wrist, Wow! There is also a cool cave on this island with a hidden entrance.
- If you come over to the island make sure you walk up the ridge line; I counted up to thirteen fantail fluttering around me at some stages.

Kiwi

- Our resident kiwi have been pretty quiet with no new nesting going on and still no Sir Ed with partner Kahui Whetu the couple of times I have checked. I had a month of monitoring the two 'teenagers' while the release was being set up. It was interesting doing it every few days as they seemed to move around a bit. The birds would stay in one spot for a few days and then move to a new area but never too far from where they were caught - weird.
- Of course we had the release ceremony for these two which was covered in the introduction above. I still cannot believe the blonde highlights on Christchurch, the male kiwi. Apparently Todd caught this kiwi for release on the island on the first anniversary of the big quake down South. Catching these two proved to be a bit of a doddle as we had them both in under an hour. I could imagine it all going wrong if left to the last minute as the day is a finely tuned affair.
- I finally figured why my TR4 (kiwi transmittery pick up signal thingy) was working intermittently. I pulled it apart and found a broken wire which I had soldered up by the good folk at Compass Computers for all your electronic repairs (shameless plug).

Predator control

- Still slogging away at the bait-station lines and after the knocking down of many trees in the storm after Cyclone Luci this will need to be done again. I am up to S line and will need some more bait sooner than later. I must take this opportunity to thank our kind bait suppliers, Rentokil Initial, who help us get rid of those nasty predators.
- Bevan and I have had an average month with three stoats and four rats and a mouse caught on the buffer. The island and the buffer traps are getting refurbishment so should be glowing shortly.

Visitors and Volunteers

This month has been a bit of an odd one with some last minute cancellations and also last minute bookings - keeps me on my toes.

- My first visitor/volunteer this month was a young guy called Sam from the Netherlands, a quiet young fella who, at 16 was pretty brave to come all the way to N.Z. Sam, Bevan and I spent a week getting stuck into a few island jobs, petrel station upgrades and the first wave of a full on assault of Motuotawa Island. The cape gooseberry and Super moth plants were attacked and other nasties were also dealt to. Still waiting are some gorse bushes and a nice find were some tamarillo trees, yum. We also spread some limestone rocks on the Hill track to make the slippery parts not so slippery and help drainage.
- An ex committee member and one of my great Northtec tutors, Lorna Douglas, came for a visit with her son Finn. There was a walk all over the island, then a bit of quick fish tuition, though nothing caught, before going home. This is when it got exciting as whilst we were fishing I saw a big yellow fin come out of the water near a buoy. While taking Lorna and Finn back to the mainland I cast the popper from the boat and, BOOM, the whole one meter+ kingi jumped on my lure, no dice and no further take, but what a show, one very excited young man.
- Committee member and 'Johnny native seed', Dwane Kokich still comes over occasionally, he should really come more as he is such an asset with his drive and plant knowledge. His personal vendetta with the veldt grass is great, takes that hassle off my hands. John Ballinger, another committee member, came for a visit to take the reins of some of the website work, thanks John. The Island and I would also like to thank all the other committee members who work tirelessly behind the scenes (and for free) without whom the island would not be the special place it is. Cheers all

- I gave a talk at the Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum AGM which was well received. I told them about the fabulous island where some of their kiwi had grown up. The various Landcare groups out at the Heads are doing a marvellous job as the huge increase in kiwi numbers shows. The main direction of these groups is to bring the community into the picture as without them there is not much hope if it is left just to the government. Dog advocacy is the big issue once a good trapping system is in place. **Remember** keep your dog on a lead in kiwi areas; my stunning highlighted kiwi, Christchurch, is out there somewhere.
- I had a lovely couple of walking parties over, the Kauri Walking Group and an informal family group with their friends. I always seem to get enthusiastic people over to the island but this group really stood out. The kids got to sit on the tractor, play with weta and steer the boat. Later on Bridie, the group leader, and family invited me to lunch and proved to be just as enthusiastic off the island, cheers guys.



Young Isaac with a tree weta

- Our trusty Wednesday volunteers came over in their droves, 15, which was great because I only had chocolate éclair seconds for some. We got a phenomenal amount of work done on the island, sand bags on the petrel burrows, sumps and drains cleared, beach cleaned, wattles and periwinkle pulled and hibiscus moved. The volunteers also got to see the petrel that was found on the day at close quarters.
- Nic Gardner came for an overnigher and managed to see a kiwi close by which proved a thrill for this ex Aussie second mate, now to convince her to dispatch some of the possums near her house! We also got a surprising amount of work done, she was sure not afraid to get her hands dirty.
- I had the guys from the Otangarei Trust over to carry on with sheep retaining and also removing most of the graffiti from the singlemen's quarters.
- Ex rangers, Pete and Cathy Mitchell, popped over for a visit with Pam Stevens to discuss the state of the petrel burrows and any modifications needed for the upcoming top-up translocations. We had a delightful morning with glorious weather, had a walk around the island and talked about improvements and the island's history. All in all an informative, entertaining morning with some great company.

General

- Check out the flash new sign at the Onerahi boat ramp, great information and the photos are very professional.



- Took Mum to Helena Bay Café for Mothers' Day, nice place, wish I could afford some of that art, amazing.
- Need to get cracking with the mowing as it will soon be too wet to do any. I have already had the Ute stuck once on the hill track.
- Helped Freddie Tito, our kaumātua, move house to a much more manageable one and it has a big bike park next door for mokopuna, Riko .
- I put a hole in the tractor tyre which was funny as to deal with it I had to drive back to the house quickly. As tractor tyres are filled with water it was spraying in a cool pattern all the way home, doesn't take much to amuse this ranger!
- Another funny story, I left two not flash tyres by the start of the wharf at Onerahi to be picked up on my way past. I parked my car quickly and came back, no wheels! Someone must have thought I had dumped them there and were doing a good turn taking them away.

Upcoming

- Volunteer Wednesday – **4 June.** Pick up at 9a.m. at the Onerahi jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. Who knows what treats await and will they be sweet or healthy.
- **Planting Days commence 15 June and for the next four Sundays.** Pick up 9a.m. at the jetty - weather permitting.

We have timed the start of planting days to coincide with the first day of National Volunteer Week. **This year will be a big one for planting with 6000+ plants to get in the ground including hibiscus, and fancy fertilizer tablets, so we need as many hands on board as possible, tell all your friends!**

Hei konei ra

Your friendly island Ranger

Bernie



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