



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report June 2014

Another fabulous month on the bluff covered in kohekohe trees, well it once was and one day will be again with the arrival of thousands of young trees to be planted in the coming weeks. These lovely specimens arrived on a cold, day from Tawapou Coastal Natives near Matapouri. 155 mm of rain over three days was predicted so it was touch and go if the plants could be collected but with light winds forecast we proceeded to carry out the operation.



A whole heap of plants destined for Matakohē-Limestone Island

About nine trailer loads of travelling forest arrived at the Onerahi boat ramp and were met with more tough, wrapped-up volunteer plant carriers. The 5000+ seedlings and young trees were whisked over to the island in no time. The slightly damp, muddy champions were really keen to get home with talk of spa pools and hot baths featuring highly in conversation.

The rain has been unbelievable and mirrors last year's. This is great for the plants and I couldn't ask for more, I think I did! As the island is basically a big rock with minimal topsoil, as soon as a certain saturation point is reached the whole island becomes a river. However, this is the first time since last year this has happened as the rain we have had all year has all been sucked up by new island growth. This photo shows some of the 155mm of rain gushing down the driveway to the front beach.



The first planting day on 15 June coincided with the first day of National Volunteer Week. Over 30 people turned out and more than 1000 trees were planted.

Flora and Fauna

- I am still checking the petrel burrows every 2-3 days and downloading the camera photos every 2-3 weeks. I have found one more petrel, E212668 which is returning this year for the second time. The camera is showing plenty of activity with over 40 images of a petrel taken in a couple of weeks. These could be of one, two or more petrels, they look pretty similar in black and white.
- On a night walk recently in the area where we released the egg-laying Suter's skink I saw a large black tail slithering into some seaweed. I have been instructed not to disturb these guys but this positive non-invasive observation is a good sign. Also, on checking some seaweed it showed a huge number of sand-hoppers and invertebrates so there should be plenty of food for our new island residents.

- Some really still, calm mornings this month enabled me to catch up on a job that I have been meaning to do for a while. 300 litres of Haloxypop (Gallant) was applied strategically to areas under the recovering bush. This will kill the grass but not the trees and should allow natural rejuvenation to occur.
- On a visit to Motutaua Island I found moth plant 'fluffies' covering some areas like snow. However, hopefully the last easterly storm blew a lot of these away from the island. I also found another couple of moth plants in both known problem areas and a new area on Limestone Island: they have been dealt with. I have to be extremely vigilant at this time of year, using vigilant and glyphosate. Not only are the moth plants spreading their seeds, the pampas and others are popping up all over the island as seedlings.

Visitors and Volunteers

- Luke from Kamo High School came to the island on two consecutive days with a bunch of students for some island education and a nice day out. These two groups included a fair few exchange students - Germans, Koreans, Brazilians and a few kiwis as well. I tried to show them a good cross-section of the island with our humble endemic weta blowing these guys away.
- On the first Volunteer Day this month 23 hardy souls turned out which was great as we had 200+ *Hibiscus richardsonii* to plant. These were the ones that were too small to plant last spring and urgently needed planting at previously prepared sites.
- Two boatloads of Pompallier Catholic College student volunteers and supervisors came over on their Service Day and cleared tracks and fences, pulled Mexican devil, prepped for the upcoming planting and built plant holders. This is the second year they have done this and a great job was done - a big thumbs up from the island.
- Another two boatloads from Kamo Primary School visited the island on a fine morning when the harbour shone like glass. We walked all over the place and the more we walked the more they listened. Glen the kiwi, the skinks and the weta proved popular. I have never heard shrieks like the ones when I revealed the weta hidden in my hand. Once they - the kids - calmed down they thought the weta was pretty cool and have weta hotels at the school.



Rolf with Glen and a happy bunch of Kamo Primary School kids doing a silent cheer.

- I gave a talk to previous ranger Ben Barr's budding young conservation students at NorthTec. I cannot commend the tutors and the course at NorthTec highly enough as, without their help and dedication, I would not be where I am, doing the things I enjoy.
- With some help from the boys from the Otangarei Trust a wooden fence was constructed beside the kilns in an attempt to stop our Houdini sheep from escaping on to the tracks. This would be fine as they keep the grass on the tracks down - if only they did not leave their squishy calling cards and did not nibble the new young trees. The OTC boys also had another crack at the graffiti in the Singlemen's Quarters and weeding at the hibiscus site.

- I recently got a call from a couple of volunteers and had a planting day out at Admirals Bay, Whangaruru. A project has been set up there called Camp Kiwi and volunteers are fixing up the old house and planning to start running camps for kids who do not have the opportunity to spend time with nature. This is a great new project and, as it is in an area where there are heaps of kiwi, a good place to see or hear one. In a previous life I spent a lot of time there fishing and absolutely love the area. Check out their Facebook page.
- Fred Tito, our Te Parawhau kaumātua visited the island with Will from Channel North to take a video to help new immigrants with local language skills. They could have chosen someone a little more articulate but it was all good on the day with some prime footage of the island taken on a beautiful day.

Kiwi

- Things on the kiwi front have been pretty quiet with three being monitored at present. Glen's transmitter leg change was due so 30 Kamo Primary students, teachers and parents got to see the big boy. The other two are doing kiwi type things and travelling around a certain area on the island. Trapper Bevan and I found Kahui Whetu in some rushes right at our feet while doing some telemetry training. This just shows how careful you have to be in the long grass and flax as they can be anywhere.

Predator control

- I am happy to say we have secured another 100+ kg of rat and mouse bait for the island. This month we hopefully have a new product to try, after a rigorous screening operation. Rentokil Initial has supplied the bait for many years and the Company's continued support is critical in keeping the island rodent free.
- I am still slogging my way around the bait stations on the South face. I was also getting a little low in bait but now I have a new supply I will be running a whole island mouse bust. *I may need some hardy souls to help out so keep your ears and emails open.*
- Our mainland trappers Michelle and Ross, have noted a slowdown in rat catches on the Onerahi front and this could be good or bad news. They may be getting on top of the rats, the rats are getting bait-shy or they are going somewhere else. Unfortunately I have noted rat prints again at the sandspit end of the island so have put some more permanent traps there. I checked all bait stations and traps in the area immediately and a few of the baits had suspicious, large, bites taken out of them. I will be running the tracking tunnels early and running a mouse bust shortly.

General

- The Singlemen's Quarters are a real feature on the island and have to be kept in tip-top condition. We needed to check the internal steel bracing of the concrete structure so one evening Pam (FOMLI Chairperson) and husband Grant came over to the island with a neat tool to do this. This tool could detect the steel reinforcing under the concrete structure and found enough so we can be assured the building is safe.
- Now I want to let you know about a project called "Adopt A Spot", that has been initiated by Committee member Dwane. The idea is to observe/weed a specific area on the island. These spots will be based around the more forested areas of the island. As these places fill out and undergrowth becomes more dense it is getting harder and harder to spot weeds. Dwane's wife, Angela and friend Dallas have adopted a spot, IIs to JJs. Spots can be as big or as small as people/teams/groups/families can handle. All we ask is that they are maintained on a regular basis. Contact me if you have any questions (09) 430 3373 or 021 132 2261 and I will pass you on to Dwane to finalise details.
- My own little project, the sandpit, is coming along nicely with the rain flattening the sand and some good kiwi prints showing up. I have put poles in on the corners and will rope it off to keep out large mammals. This will be followed up by a sign identifying the various tracks.



- Funny story with a happy ending; I had been collecting lizard scat (poo), for a student at the University of Otago. She is doing a Master's project on the evolutionary relationships of nematode parasites infecting geckos and skinks. I took this parcel into town but when I went to post it... gone! The next fine day I raced around town checking every shop I had been to. The happy ending to this story - some anonymous, kind person must have posted it off as Sarah received it in the post a couple of days later, phew!
- The trailer tyre drama continues with the plant move requiring its immediate reinstatement. With no wheels available I had a bit of a problem on my hands. This was causing a headache when at the last minute an angel in disguise came to the rescue. One of the dads from the Pompallier College group, Steve from Pitstop managed to track an original 12.5 tyre down and donated it to the island.

Upcoming

- Don't forget we have **Two** more planting Sundays coming up;
 - **Sunday, 29 June**
 - **and**
 - **Sunday 6 July**
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- Weather permitting, the boat pick up is from the Onerahi boat ramp at **9am**, returning at approximately **1.30- 2 pm**. You will need to bring your lunch, a drink, good sturdy footwear for muddy conditions and a shower proof jacket. Spades and some gloves provided. Pass the message on to your friends and family!
- **Volunteer Wednesday – 2 July** - pick up at 9.00 am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2.00 pm. Some of the work in store - petrel burrow upgrades and planting prep, with a weed check on the hibiscus sites also necessary.

Hei konei ra

Bernie



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