



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report July 2014

That weather bomb - 35.5mm of rain in the first week of the month and I thought 'sweet, nice bit of moisture for our newly planted babies'. Then BANG, 284.5mm in four days, plus a vicious easterly wind to boot. The island held up pretty well and after four clearings the new track drainage performed flawlessly. Apart from some wet walks, indoor work was the plan - new signs designed and new navigation light soldered ready for installation. I went for several sorties, one picking up rubbish around the shoreline. Whilst doing this I found a tiny shearwater being battered by the big swells. I took this little guy home, put him in a cardboard box in a dry spot but unfortunately he died in the night. The amount of water sheeting off the island was amazing to see with a new waterfall every 5-10 meters.



**Some of the island's new features, a pretty waterfall and a new pond**

### Kiwi and Petrel

- The final report to our sponsor, Kiwis for Kiwi, was due this month and this was a good opportunity to reflect on some of the figures related specifically to kiwi, i.e., predators, visitors and media:

During the year there were -

- 21 stoats and six weasels caught and one dog owner trained!
- 10 kiwi events attended
- 11 groups of school pupils who visited the island
- 20 other groups who were given guided trips
- 12 articles or media events featuring kiwi on Matakohē-Limestone Island
- 14 off-island talks given to various groups and clubs.

A big thanks to Kiwis for Kiwi for this important funding.

- The monthly kiwi data was due again at the end of the month. Both Kahui Whetu and the mystery kiwi checked out but Glen was nowhere to be found. He was in good condition when last checked and not sitting on an egg (could be at this time of year). My guess is he has found a really hidden burrow under some steel or concrete and may now be sitting on an egg. I will keep looking and am sure to ping him somewhere, he cannot go too far, it is an island!

- The kiwi would surely have got a bit damp during the storm but, hopefully, are OK and have found some warm, dry burrows.
- Speaking of dry burrows, the petrel ones were getting a bit damp so a new design is on the cards. Mk I has already been modified with Mk II being completed. The petrel station has a new camera as the original \$650 one was malfunctioning. The new one cost \$150 showing just how fast this technology is advancing, cameras everywhere, I say.

### **Predator trapping**

- I am still slogging through the refilling of the island's bait-stations with a detected rat incursion giving me the hurry-up. In the space of a week the rest of the south-side was finished and also the front quarries, the ruins area, the lower north-side and the flax fields. I am also trialling baits in small resealable bags to discourage the snails and cockroaches. This, hopefully, will mean the bait lasts longer in the field yet the rodents can still access it and, as we have a new bait supply, it will be extra potent.
- Our good keen man, Bevan, has been carrying out his trapping rounds both on the island and on the buffer. The pest numbers seem to have slowed down, which is usual this time of year. He is doing two checks every three weeks rather than the weekly checks we do during the high time in summer. Our Onerahi trappers are also reporting a downturn in the number of pests - rats and hedgehogs making up most of the numbers.
- Rat tracks were found in the sandpit over by the Singlemen's Quarters showing just how useful this is for showing animal tracks. I may try to set up something similar at other spots on the island, like a continuous tracking tunnel. Unfortunately we also had a sheep down with a broken leg, poor thing - R.I.P. sheep No. 5.
- Bevan was also busy around the ring of fire (baits) that surrounds the island. Not only did he replace several bait-stations that had disappeared, but also filled them with wrapped baits. No rats were found and no more prints seen.
- I was happy to take part in another conservation project recently which involved pre-feeding on Mount Manaia. This is to control rats, possums and possibly remove a few mustelids. The Department of Conservation used to bait this area until a couple of years ago but had to prioritise after the cutbacks. This amazing and ecologically important spot was going downhill fast when a bunch of passionate conservationists decided to grab the reins. The good thing is the bait-lines are still there but required clearing and the bait-stations needed maintenance.

On 5 July a veritable army of tough volunteers descended on the mountain to distribute the non-toxic bait. This will be followed up by another pre-feed before they get hit with a controlled burst of toxin. I had a great day and met some amazing people, equally passionate about the environment. It was great to wander through some bigger trees as Matakohē-Limestone is a few years behind this in its regeneration.



**The A-team from G line, who was back home first, oh yeah!**

## Flora and fauna

- Moving plants around the island took up a fair bit of my time as we had over 6,000 to plant out this season. The sites were divided between open spots and covered in areas, with the tough old six pack quarry (too wet or too dry) the main target. Other spots were a grassed-over area behind the ranger's house, on the south side of the Pa down the bait-lines and off the access track. Above the North side of the Edge house ruins was another planting site as the densely planted manuka is suppressing the grass here and will protect second succession plants like puriri and kohekohe.
- Moth plants are still being found on the island with a couple located on the new access track. I have been meaning to go over to Rabbit Island to deal with these nasty weeds and spray their seed fairies with oil as I have been finding these 'fluffies' on Matakohe-Limestone and surmise they are drifting over from Rabbit Island. The recent easterly storm sent them the other way.
- It is pretty amazing the number of extra plants that arrive at this time of year which people have propagated at home. Just a reminder that should you want to plant your own trees on the island, **DON'T!** This is a pathway for the dreaded invasive Argentine ant and Rainbow skinks that are on the mainland but not on Matakohe-Limestone Island. We also need to know that the species is appropriate for the island.

## Volunteers and Visitors

- Our second Sunday planting was carried out without a hitch and over 1,000 plants went into the ground behind the Pa site. Many keen people have been pulling out the Mexican devil from this site. As well as finding young plants underneath these weeds there are many open spaces now. These are great, but if young natives do not fill these, more weeds will become dominant. We had a special incognito visitor for this planting day, long time Matakohe-Limestone Island Committee member and volunteer, Sheryl Mai. The 17 volunteers made short work of the plants allocated for this area, thanks gals and guys.
- The third Sunday of planting rolled around and the access track, together with the area under the manuka above the old Edge house ruins were the targets. We had a group of new kiwis (Chinese) with this group of 30+ and they had a bit of a tour before getting stuck in to the planting. The access track proved an entertaining site as it is not really formed and very muddy, with some big steps. A fun day was had and the hurriedly put together apple and rhubarb pie with fresh cream was appreciated by all. The next day was a wet one and I thought it would be great for the new seedlings, little did I know!
- The fourth and final Sunday of planting turned out to be an exquisite day and the six pack quarry and its surrounds was the target. This site was hit once again with the seedlings already placed around the area on the previous Wednesday. This is a challenging site and if we can get them to hang on through the tough summer they may just make it this year. This is committee member Gerry's 'Adopt-a-Spot' so it will no doubt look spectacular in no time. This group got to share the bribe on offer, a sticky date pudding with caramel sauce and whipped cream. I almost ran out as there was more than a boatload of people.
- On the first Volunteer Wednesday a group of regular volunteers was on the wharf, even though the weather was diabolical. I had a myriad of jobs ready but as there were only a few people I decided to attack the bait-stations on the north-face. This job was easy as many hands made light work of the 300+ bait-stations there. After a "chinwag", and some fresh chicken soup, more plants were placed around the six-pack quarry for the next Sunday's planting. Thanks you hardy few!
- The Friday walking group came over to the island and were here to plant some trees and have a bit of a walk around. Behind the ranger's house was the target and gloves were donned and spades holstered as we got into it. Several pioneer species were spread around the area in no time and, hopefully, the grass will be suppressed by these tough trees. We rounded the day off with a walk to the summit where I learnt about the area from these locals who then got to partake in the bribe, some fresh éclairs and a hot beverage.



**Lovely group of keen planters/walkers**

- I have had a couple of Northtec students over and it is possible they will both be doing their 90 hours of practicum here. Ben and Emma laid out the tracking cards for me as we need to be sure that the sneaky rat is no longer present on the island. These cards will then be removed and the prints analysed - it's amazing what shows up.

## **General**

- I took a bit of a drive north and paid the good folk at the Towai Gardening Club a visit at the historic Towai Hall. This lovely bunch of ladies listened intently to my Limestone Island presentation after which we had a chat and a very good lunch. They were not finished yet, as just as I was leaving one of the ladies handed me a big bag full of 'home-kill' beef and lamb, yummy!
- It was one year ago that the upgraded track was started. I am glad it took less than a year and was finished before the very wet and soggy season we have had lately.
- I finally scored a petrol water blaster to use on the island, a big old commercial thing with a Kawasaki engine. This should be a great asset but, as I have been dealing with water issues, I have not had a chance to use it. I also had a bit of trouble starting it as the pull cord is broken and it would not start. After many futile attempts I rang the seller and found out you have to wind a cord on backwards to start it, doh!
- Dad and I finally got round to removing some of the rubbish off the island with the first two ½ tonne sacks taken to the rubbish tip in town. I have now invested in a couple more sacks and have started my own recycling centre on the island. This will not only keep the costs down but also help Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.
- Stewart from the Whangarei District Council and Paul from Northland Parkcare paid the island a visit recently which proved very constructive. We spent the morning traversing the island's tracks and discussing possible safety improvements. More steps could be a possibility where continued foot traffic is eroding special sites.
- Now for some trials and tribulations of island life, this time involving the pond water supply. I had been clearing the grass behind the house, both spraying and brush-cutting and I accidentally nicked the hose. I fixed it partially but was in a hurry and subsequently all the water drained away. Fine - repaired and filled the tank which involved barging the weighty pump to the other side of the island (too slippery for vehicles), carting the pump up a hill and pumping water up to the header tanks - done. A couple of days later went to use my new water-blaster, no water! As you cannot check where the leaks are with empty tanks, off to the other side, up the hill, pumped the water, found leak at the bird bath, fixed, done. Couple of days later went to get water for sprayer, no water, b.....! So it was off around the other side again, up the hill again, found leak under a tree where I had removed a post, so now I wait, hope and check the level every day.



## Upcoming

- Volunteer Wednesday – 6th August. Pick-up at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. We may be digging some new and improving some old petrel burrows, releasing plants or cleaning up some storm damaged ones.

Hei konei ra

Bernie



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