



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report August 2014

Brrr, its been cold and chilly with a nasty biting wind. Winter has finally decided it would show itself with vengeance. The thermometer has been hovering around the lower levels necessitating the use of the heater to defrost when coming in at night. Wet, wet and wet has been the story this month. The island has never had a chance to really dry out and this has caused more than one big tree to topple with the slightest gust of wind.

The Pou are in and look fabulous – some of you probably saw the fantastic photo in the “Leader”. The pre-dawn blessing was held on the last day of Matariki. It was decided to keep this a simple affair with a larger ceremony planned for the spring when it will be a bit drier, the ti tree palisades will be up and it will not be quite so early in the morning. The blessing was attended by a small crowd of good keen folk with the young and kaumātua leading the way. The names of the Pou were asked for three times by master carver, Te Warihi Hetaraka and by the third time everyone was chiming in, Ko te tī and Ko te tā. These are two of the stars in the Matariki cluster.



**Matakohē-Limestone Island's latest attraction,
the magnificent Pou (and the happy dawn “blessers”)**

Oi kiwi and other birds

- Funny kiwi story this month, last month I “lost” Glen the kiwi and had to send the data in to DOC excluding him. A week later whilst working on the petrel burrows we found a huge kiwi in a burrow. After a phone-call to DOC kiwi man Rolf, a new text was attached to - surprise, surprise – Glen. His old transmitter had failed and he had been on the run, not a good hiding place old fella, only a couple of weeks of freedom.
- I have been checking up on the kiwi every couple of weeks as usual but went to do it the other day, no kiwi? I ran all over the island getting more and more worried. This carried on for several days but they can sometimes disappear into metal pipes or reinforced concrete. Finally the problem was solved, I found my kiwi transmitter pick-up device machine (TR4) had a broken wire, again.

- Spring must be just around the corner as the days are getting longer and the bird displays are phenomenal. The tui have been flitting around and warbling up the place. The NZ dotterel are in fine breeding plumage and the piwakawaka (fantail) and grey warblers are chasing each other around.
- Pepe the piwakawaka, has been absent more and more lately and like all good parents I must let him go and explore the world/island.



- The waterlogged petrel burrows have been a bit of an issue and the improvements to ten new ones will hopefully solve the problem. These have a false floor allowing the water to run freely underneath, are extra strong and have super wide insulated lids. Ex-rangers Cathy and Pete gave these the OK the last time they were off the paradise that is Hauturu (Little Barrier). They came to the island and could not believe how wet the burrows were this winter and agreed modifications were needed.
- I have downloaded some more Oi camera pictures and for the first time this year have identified two individuals in the same photo. This is both good and bad as both parents contribute to nesting when the egg is laid. Unfortunately their visit coincided with the big rain and the burrows were a bit damp at the time. No eggs at time of going to press.



A couple of speedy petrels on Matakoho – Limestone Island

Predator Control

- The island and buffers predator trapping has been picking up with three rats caught on Knight Island alone last week. We will be increasing the checks back to weekly as predator numbers are expected to boom. This is after several species of trees seem to be masting this year making food for the rodents plentiful. The stoats and weasels quickly mirror this increase as well, dining out on the plentiful rodent offerings.
- I am pleased to report that the tracking tunnels had no nasty old rodent prints so I can breathe a sigh of relief. Interestingly, I found the carcass of a large Norway rat on the beach on the Onerahi side of the island. This could well have been my suspect of late but may also have washed up from the surrounding mainland.

Visitors

- Visitor numbers are definitely down but the cold and windy weather has probably caused this, as well as the lack of an easy feed of schnapper. The muddy tracks are possibly another reason but the up side is kiwi prints are everywhere at the moment.
- NorthTec has a new lecturer in their Environment/Applied Science programme, ex Whangarei local and Matakoho-Limestone Island planter, Dai Morgan. Dai brought the second-year students over for a day of species translocation science. I enjoyed teaching these students and provided answers for most of their questions. The island is perfect for this type of study and a real jewel in Whangarei's conservation education crown.
- An old mate, Nick Bamford, came over for a night and we managed to carry out some freshwater monitoring. This was done with G-minnow traps and although, unfortunately, Nick did not discover a rare species of limestone mudfish, we did see a decent eel. Other catches were water boatmen and beetles and mosquito larvae, nothing too exciting.

- Another friend from my hospitality past life, Dale and his son visited for a fish (0) and a walk. I later accompanied his family to the circus, my first in many a year, it was choice.
- A group of good keen walkers have been my only "paying" visitors this month. This was a group from out Riponui. Their good trapping efforts help protect the kiwi there. I met these great conservationists while accompanying kiwi man, Todd Hamilton, on a kiwi check trip there earlier in the year. Not only did these good folk give the island a generous donation, the organiser baked me a delicious fruit cake, mmm.
- We had a primary schoolteacher over to the island with her mentor and long time island friend, Gerry Brackenbury. Julianne was awarded a Fellowship by the Royal Society of New Zealand and may be getting involved with a flax snail translocation for the island. She has also been spending some time with the boys from the Bream Head project and is learning heaps. Julianne teaches at Whangarei Heads Primary School which has kiwi living right next door.

Volunteers

- I have been fortunate to score a volunteer gold with the whole of the BNZ "Closed for Good" programme scheduled to come to Matakohe–Limestone Island. More than thirty-six of these good folk should be turning up later in the month and we will get heaps done. I'm not sure if they know what they are in for as one of the enquiries was "could put the coffee truck in the barge", pizza delivery is possible!
- We had a great volunteer to the island this month, Conner Wagner from the University of West Florida in Pensacola, Florida. Conner is an honours student doing a science degree and he has to complete so many hours volunteering at environmental projects. Conner chose to come to New Zealand and not only did we benefit, but the Bream Head project did as well. He saw couple of kiwi during night walks and watched Glen get an unexpected transmitter change. The main project that Conner helped with was the petrel burrows which are consuming much of my waking time at the moment (dreams too).
- Of course I had the pleasure of the regular Wednesday Volunteers to the island and they got a big chunk of the petrel burrows dug. They also managed to fill the old damp ones with a layer of bracken and lacebark leaves, as well as weeding some of the Hibiscus richardsonii. On this day a group of NorthTec volunteers came to give a bit of their time and managed to get the final plants into the ground. Most of these guys had a ball and hopefully will return. Without these volunteers the island would not look as spectacular as it does.
- Ben from NorthTec is still doing his practicum on the island and should finish the gecko cover upgrades soon. His other main project is the petrel burrows and the makeover of these will be five star which no petrel will be able to resist. It is really great that NorthTec students can come and experience working in this magic place. Whilst improving the gecko covers Ben keeps finding the islands GIANT centipedes which are becoming a bit of an obsession for him. We also managed to see five individual kiwi in an hour and a half whilst going for a night wander.



Who's that hiding in the flax? why it's a little kiwi doing the classical freeze manoeuvre.



- More volunteers in the form of Dallas, Angela and Dwane, working in their "adopt a spot" (three times even), on II to JJ line on the south side. They have nearly cleared the site of big Mexican devil and the transformation is unbelievable. Remember these "adopt a spots" are available to all and spot sizes can match group/fitness size. All we ask is that the maintenance of these places be a constant and regular thing. Contact me if you have any questions (09)4303373 or 0211322261 or email limestonerangers@gmail.com and I will pass you on to organiser Dwane to finalise details. Maybe we need to have an open day to showcase their amazing site.
- The guys from OTC have been over almost weekly and have got a great amount done. They have been busy planting, digging and building and are going to clean up the steps for the barge in the little harbour. These young fellows are always friendly and their supervisors, Jason and Alex, always make sure they get the job done, thanks guys.
- We have had a number of people helping to construct and build petrel burrows and digging the holes in the ground. There is a lot of plywood, piping and piles of dirt and a wet and slippery track, so the site is best avoided for a while.

General

- Last month you may remember there was a sheep down with a broken leg on the island and I had given it notice. I tried to catch it for a check but even with three legs it was getting away from me and jumping up blocks up to four feet off the ground. I thought "right you little devil, if you have that much spirit I will give you two weeks grace to get better". Two weeks later and sure enough he started to use his bung leg, lucky sheep that one. Check him out next time you are over, Sandy is his new name.



- Soon we will be carrying out a solar system upgrade. Committee member, John Ward contacted Northpower who installed it the first time so, hopefully they will come on board again and help with the upgrade. Sponsors like this are doing a great job helping small projects around New Zealand.
- I have planted a whole heap of plants at the petrel station and hopefully this area will get more cover to make it a bit shadier. Started a personal war with the fennel and you will start to see the results.
- I did get a few relatively nice days this month and have managed to carry out some weed spraying. The entire north-face baitstations are now clear of grass. The newly planted area above the oak tree left and right of the new track should soon be free of grass. The release spraying under and around the trees around the fire break is really looking good and should encourage some new growth.
- Installing the pou after all the rain delay proved interesting; at least the holes had been dug the week previously by the guys from OTC (Otangarei Training Centre). The pou arrived one cold dark evening and, with the help of a bunch of hard workers, were duly shipped over to the island without much fuss. The next day Te Warihi and a couple of his workers, Hohepa and Clinton, as well as committee member Dwane and I propped them up on their concrete pedestals after dragging them across the island. This involved getting the tractor to the other side and anyone who knows the hill track in winter will guess what fun I had getting it there and back (bit muddy now).

- I will take this opportunity to thank all the great local businesses that have helped out over the last month by giving the island some special deals. Martin-Wallace Fabricators, Scooters Plywood, Auto North, BNT Automotive just to name a few.

Upcoming

- In the not too distant future, Spring
- Volunteer Wednesday will be as usual on the first Wednesday of the month – 3rd September. Pick up at 9.00 a.m. at the Onerahi pontoon. As usual we will be returning after lunch at approximately 2.00 p.m. The plan is to catch the tide and get most of us clearing and spraying the Caspian tern nesting area on Knight Island.
- Lastly, but not least, holiday! I think I'm always on holiday but apparently when you start talking to the sheep, it's time. Some great island sitters are there at the moment, hopefully making the most of the fabulous place.

Hei konei ra

Bernie



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