



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report January 2015

Happy New Year

I hope you had a wonderful break, the weather has really played ball this summer and all associated activities have been on the cards.

The main project that kept me occupied this summer was the feeding of the Grey Faced Petrel chicks (Oi). I am happy to say, apart from one that disappeared early on, they all seem to have fledged successfully and flown to the great beyond to, hopefully, return in five to seven years.

My hat really goes off to the huge group of dedicated volunteers who helped out during this mammoth effort. FOMLI, DoC, the 'recce' and 'collection' crews, feeders, observers, volunteers who helped with the burrows and all the others who worked diligently in the background. I would list them all by name here but would use up all the space in this Report. I will therefore do a collage of pictures of the collectors, checkers, recorders, feeders, and some night-time Oi flapping practice.



Just a few of the petrel pesterers

More Petrel stuff

The arrival of the petrels coincided with the drenching of the site from over 130mm of rain. Upon inspection we found eight of the chicks were getting wet so they were moved to other drier burrows. More bedding was put in to raise the chicks above the wet. Finding the dry matter was a bit of a task during this damp period.

A huge bonus for me was the experience of monitoring and feeding the petrel chicks during their time here. Cathy and Tanya were running the show for the first couple of weeks with me and Derek taking over after they had shown us how to do it properly, magic. It's a pretty full on job looking after these little chicks with feeding every two days and checking every day.

Fauna and flora

- Weeds are popping up all over the place with the usual moth-plant areas necessitating a special hammering. Not only are the weeds growing well, but also some of the natives are flourishing; the *Hibiscus diversifolius* are doing especially well, it is too bad they are hidden behind the trees on the lower north face.



That's a pretty native in anyone's book

- The island is still dripping with babies, as seems to be the trend at this time of year. There is a new batch of Variable Oyster Catcher (VOC) chicks (three) on the front barge so heads up - or down - if you walk around in that area. Just give them a wide berth and let them settle down. They are cute when really small but then go through a bit of a gangly sub-adult stage, just like humans I suppose!
- Other baby birds seen around the island at the moment are tui, fantails, fernbirds, kingfishers, banded rail and even introduced sparrow and starlings. Speaking of which, there seems to be a young fantail hanging around my back door snapping up the flies around the rubbish - ? Pepe II. The Caspian Terns on Knight Island look to have had a bumper season with over 50 chicks hanging around waiting to be fed.



Could this be Pepe II?

Kiwi

- I have finally been signed off as a kiwi handler, with DOC Kiwi Ranger, Pete Graham, giving me the big tick.
- Todd and I went for a bit of a ramble around the island to snaffle some teenage kiwi for the upcoming Whangarei Heads kiwi release scheduled for **14 February**. We managed to grab four over a couple of nights so are well placed for the event. All these kiwi were less than three years old with the largest being 2.2 kg. This just shows how fast they can grow on Matakohē-Limestone Island now predators and competition have been removed.
- I received a chick from Todd at the end of last month. The arrival of this chick proved a bonus for the petrel observers and feeders just before Christmas. They all managed to catch a glimpse before taking it over to the island for release. Cameras were clicking and flashes popping, little celebrity.
- Glen's transmitter finally clicked over to non-incubating after a marathon effort of almost 100 days sitting on his egg. A new island chick was in residence and needed the insertion of a transponder chip. Unfortunately I was busy learning the ins and outs of petrel feeding while Rolf from DOC carried out this important job. Again another group of petrel pesterers were able to get a look in, a bonus.

Visitors

- Over the summer, the awesome weather and warm water attracted more folk than usual to the island and its surrounds. The number of people fishing in boats around the island seems to increase every year. This also extends to the visiting yachties with four big vessels anchored up just out from my office. The 'Waipapa' has also been running extra trips to the island with one group booking the boat trip three times now.

- Our regular Volunteer Wednesday rolled around with a bonus for these guys. They got the opportunity to not only help and observe the petrels being fed, but also to carry out more maintenance of the burrows. This intrepid group spent time putting sand into the entrance pipes with others cleaning corflute petrel boxes and they finished the day pulling wattles from above the Oak tree. Twenty six turned up and also one of our regular summer volunteers, David Fellows from the UK, it was great to see him.
- On a cracker summer day I had 22 scary pirates invade the island for a birthday party. They seemed to enjoy themselves down in pirate cove and around the scary pirate house - if the screams were anything to go by. This group of tiny terrors had a great time eating, swimming and going for boat rides.
- Ian Page has checked out the fire system and all the gear got the once over. Everything came up great with only a couple of things needing upgrading. He also revised the Island Fire Plan, adding a few new rules and a new website to check as well, cheers Pagey.

Predator control

- Bevan has been busy around the buffer with three stoats, two rats and two mice caught in one cycle. This may be the start of the expected run and I will be stepping up the checks and doing some maintenance and refurbishment.
- I have finished filling the bait-stations on the difficult South side with some improved wrapped baits - let's see if that will stop the insects eating them as rapidly. Filling the bait stations on the North side will be the main focus for the regular Wednesday volunteers next month, with a few stations needing drain coil replacement. My thanks to Brian Mclachlan and Valerie Green-Moss, who donated a whole roll of new drain coil, great timing.
- The bait-stations have had a spray as well with the weed growth in these open spaces on the old Maori gardens phenomenal. In the few months since I last sprayed some stations were almost disappearing under the growth: the weeds sure knew where the crops grew well.

General

- I have finally managed to get the seven huge sacks of rubbish off the island with a bit of help. We are always picking up rubbish on Limestone as well as on the surrounding islands and the mainland on the Portland side. We get what we can but there is a mountain of refuse in the mangroves in front of Hewlett Point. It does not surprise me that the Sea Cleaners group collected more than 40,000 litres from the upper harbour, great work guys.
- The grader blade is now back, thanks to my dad doing a bit of welding on it on the mainland. A few of the tracks may get a bit of slip proofing work as soon as we get a bit of rain to soften the soil up.
- I have carried out the regular monthly barge haul-out and check which is especially important at this time as she has been getting a fair amount of use lately. The barge is a wonderful asset to the island making many a happy memory possible.
- A bunch of flax from in front of the shelter by the ruins that was obstructing the view has been removed. Some of this flax will be translocated around the island as a free natural asset and some shorter native coastal grasses will be planted where the flax was.
- I had the privilege of attending the wedding of ex-committee members John (and now) Ilse Ballinger. It was a jovial affair as half of this union was Irish (very). It was held at Pagoda Lodge, Kerikeri a beautiful spot by the river and complete with unique cabins and camping facilities. All the best in Ireland you two and great to catch up. Ilse was also one of my tutors at tech and featured in one of my previous reports shining her Irish petrel smile.
- I can now start loading GPS data back into the island's filing system as the newly purchased one does this easily, unlike the old one which refused to do this any more. It's a weight off my mind but now I have to run around gathering data off paper and loading it on to the electronic format.

Upcoming

- **Another amazing kiwi release soon.** On **14 February** there will be a kiwi release from Matakohe-Limestone Island. The blessing for three birds will be on the Onerahi foreshore at 8.30am that Saturday. We usually have these blessings on weekdays so I am expecting a big crowd for this weekend one. The release will be later in the day at Whangarei Heads.
- Mowing, mowing and mowing, interspersed with a bit of spraying and a bit more mowing.
- Next volunteer Wednesday will be on **4 February** so see you there. We will be running a mouse bust on the North face and possibly doing some mulching of last year's plantings.
- Another reminder of the Fire Danger. I must sound a bit like a broken record. **Light no fires** on Matakohe Limestone Island and **please do not smoke when you come over here.** We have not had much rain lately and it does not take much for the Fire Watch Index to shoot up. The fire danger makes my job here busier, checking and removing risks. **Remember if you see smoke or anything suspicious ring 111.**

Hei konei ra
Bernie



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