



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report October 2015

### What a month, what a month!

Just as in last year's October Report, I have just got back from the fantastic Taranga (Hen Island) from where we are again doing an Oi, or grey-faced petrel, translocation. These trips to Taranga Island have definitely been one of the highlights of my job working on Matakohē-Limestone Island. Details of this trip will have to wait until next month as there are photos to be developed and there is already quite a lot in this month's Report.

### Flora and fauna

- A couple of NZ dotterel chicks have arrived down at the old sand-barge. These little guys popped up just after I finished the last Report and are now already three quarters the size of their parents. This seems really early but previous rangers tell me this is not the first time.



**As you can see these little guys are extremely vulnerable, only about 70mm tall at this stage, bumblebees with legs.  
photo Sue Davy**

- The Caspian terns are slowly arriving back, hopefully our largest species of tern is going to have a successful breeding season. Just a reminder to maybe avoid the colony on Knight Island as the Black Backed Gulls will seize any disturbance opportunity to scoop up a chick.
- I had a chance visit from one of those crazy few, a herpetologist (lizard nutter) Phil Melgren, the senior Ranger for the Murihiku District. Ex-Matakohē-Limestone Ranger and fellow herpetologist, Ben Barr, asked if I would show Phil our island's lizards and I was more than happy to oblige. We found *Oligosoma suteri* (egg laying suters), *O. smithi* (shore) and *O. aeneum* (copper) skinks and a *Hoplodactylus pacificus* (pacific) gecko. Phil was particularly happy to find an *O. suteri* as he had not seen one for over 10 years, and what a specimen!



**Some of the beautiful lizards on Matakohe–Limestone Island:  
whereabouts are a secret  
photos by Phil**

- Driving back from Rabbit Island the other day I just happened to have the camera handy. The starlings out there are a spectacle, if you want to have a look just drive around the island in a boat just before dark. The noise from the boat is enough to scare them off their roosts. Just watch out for the rocks.

### **Kiwi and Petrel**

- Our two island kiwi dads are still sitting on their eggs with Glen now at 64 days and Sir Ed at 87. Sir Ed and Kahui Whetu's chick(s) are probably not too far from hatching. Kiwi sit on their eggs for an incredible amount of time for a bird, apparently comparable to the amount of time similar sized mammals gestate their young.
- I went for a couple of night wanderings to see if I could catch kiwi to attach transmitters to for the upcoming release. What a contrast! On the first night I only glimpsed a couple and they ran into the scrub so I had no show of catching them. Next night I saw over twelve kiwi and caught four for the upcoming release (now releases). I missed a couple of opportunities as I would come across two together and not know which one to follow (flocking kiwis)?

***So now we not only have a blessing on 11 November, as reported last month, but also another on 19 November. Both events will take place at the Onerahi Yacht Club at 9 a.m. with Te Parawhau island kaumātua Fred Tito. See you there.*** The kiwi coming off on 11 November will be going to Whangarei Heads and the ones on 19 November will go to Tutukaka.

- As the petrels are coming soon, and continuing the theme from the last few Ranger Reports, the petrel station has continued to get a huge make-over. Marc, and many volunteers have helped me and put in a huge effort to get this up to spec. The last couple of weeks have been extremely dry making the area very hard to dig; it will only take a small shower to sloppy it up again. The whole petrel station is now 99% ready with only a bit of shell for the tracks still required and the water system to be hooked up again.

### **Volunteers**

- Dwane is waging a personal vendetta against the grass growing under the trees in the adopt-a-spot areas - it's easier to clear broad leaf weeds. He has sprayed over 1200lt of Haloxypop around the place which is great, saves me doing it. The destruction of the grass will also promote the natural growth of native seedlings and this will mean we won't have to buy them.
- Twenty-two keen volunteers/visitors from Emerge Aotearoa arrived in a timely fashion coinciding with a delivery of a square metre of gravel. Dad bought the gravel to the Onerahi boat ramp where we proceeded to unload it into 20lt buckets (40+) - destination the new petrel burrows. Emerge is a new community based group for me and always welcome. They are all about giving hope, transforming the lives of the distressed, poor or discriminated against and reconnecting them with their communities. Not only did they volunteer a bit of their time, they supplied lunch, a donation and we even had time for a walk, cheers guys.
- Our regular Wednesday volunteer day was one of those legendary ones with a fine day and the holidays providing record numbers. Thirty-six keen people turned up and I quickly set them to work doing various jobs all over the island. The tasks completed included the benching tracks and grass spraying by the Edge house and the Flax Fields, plant releasing behind the house, leaf collecting for the petrel burrows and the all-important beach clean-up. We had a late lunch and a gas-bag followed up with a slice of raspberry and chocolate cheesecake. Before heading off at 2 p.m. we pulled out wattle and periwinkle seedlings from behind the oak tree.

- Anne Marie Dekker and family were over to work on their adopt-a-spot (AAS). Other AAS folk over were Mike and Carol, Ron was over a couple of times and, not forgetting the fabulous Angela and Delice. This programme is really starting to take off with people enquiring and adopting areas. Check out the AAS page on the website – [Adopt A Spot](#)

## Visitors

- The environmental team from GBC Winstone booked in a visit to check out the changing of a transmitter on one of our kiwi. The female Kahui Whetu took me a long time to find - the visitors even had time for lunch while I was looking, but I did find her and changed her transmitter. Not only did they get to see the adult K.W. but also a chick released into one of the petrel burrows! You may wonder about our major sponsor's name change - Golden Bay Cement and Winstone Aggregates now operate as one business unit within the Fletcher organisation and became GBC Winstone in November 2014.



**Ellie Callard (GBC Winstone Environmental Graduate) with Kahui Whetu.**

- Theresa Vujeich and the other hardy volunteers from the Kerikeri Shadehouse paid the island a visit: they were extra welcome having donated plants to the island in the past. We had a lovely walk around looking at the growth and variety of species followed by a delicious lunch they had brought with them. This group was started in 2000 by Rod Brown and they meet every Thursday. Over 24,000 plants have been grown and passed on to various organisations since then. Many of their plants go to the islands in the Bay of Islands where they have recently translocated some special endangered birds. Food seems to be a theme this month, which is not helping my waistline, more work needed!
- Birthday parties have again featured highly in the last month with three bookings for the barge (two in one day). Two of these had to be cancelled unfortunately due to the weather, typical on the weekend. The Dutch Dekker family were repeat customers as their kids seem to really enjoy the island for their birthdays.
- Dai and his ultra-keen second year environmental management students have been over checking out vegetation and habitats. They are using Matakoho–Limestone Island as a recipient of possible species translocations. The firm favourite is the tuatara but some of my suggestions are also being checked out; these include spotless crake and wetapunga (giant weta). I am interested to see what the students come up with as we are due for more translocations.
- I again had the pleasure of hosting the kids (and adults) holiday programme, 'My Movement', on a glorious day as you can see. These groups are great fun and I enjoy imparting some of my conservation knowledge to them. Amanda organises this group and hats off to her for getting this great bunch out and about. Matakoho Limestone Island is a great outdoor classroom and Whangarei is so lucky to have such an asset right on its doorstep.



- A holiday trip organised by Shirley Peterson from Kiwi North to Matakoho–Limestone Island came to two boatloads! Judging by the squeals of joy coming from the kids at the end of the day, a great time was had. I was too busy to take this group around the island so committee member and long-time island friend, Gerry Brackenbury, had the honour.
- I also had the great little guys from Bush Buddies home-based childcare over to the island and we undertook the mountainous climb to the summit. This is where we visited the petrel station and listened to the grey-faced petrel caller (kids reckon it sounds a bit like a donkey). My weta handling skills again proved popular. With a bit of prompting it's amazing who will hold one of these beasties.

## Pest trapping, baiting and chasing

- A massive word of thanks must go out to all our trappers who are real assets and critical to keeping Matakoho–Limestone Island pest free. Onerahi volunteer trappers, Michelle and Ross, have noticed a lack of rats - unusual. Bevan has been over diligently trapping for me, this month even bringing his mum, Paula, along for a ride and a look-about. He has only been getting a few rats on the buffer, we will be stepping up the trapping soon expecting a spring rush.
- At the time of writing this Report Bevan found the only good rat (dead) on the sand-spit in a trap. Good to get it as a couple of dotterels have started nesting there: **please remember**, stay below the high-tide mark if you are in the area. I have been extra vigilant keeping an eye on the sandy areas around the island for pest tracks as we had some huge tides which reduce the swimming distance to the island to about 50 metres, fortunately no tracks!
- I have been filling the bait stations on both Knight and Rabbit Islands and finally the signs there seems to be getting fewer.

## General

- As it was kiwi month we had a fabulous Great Kiwi Morning Tea on the island. More than 50 people turned out for this event - let's just say it was worth turning up just for the food! In addition to the feast (including a famous island cheesecake) there was the opportunity to go for a walk around the island (for a small donation). We also auctioned off another cheesecake and a chance to name a kiwi. This event is also promoted by the guys at Kiwis for kiwi who have supported the island for many years.



**Check out the food, the table is literally groaning**

- I had the pleasure of attending the Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum meeting this month which proved to be a pleasurable learning experience. This was a meeting of like-minded folk and the passion in this group of volunteers was noticeable. I am always amazed at the number of landcare groups beavering away protecting the flora and fauna. These groups always need the support of neighbours and locals, so get out there and help them.
- This fine, hot, dry weather interspersed with rain means the grass is growing at an exceptional rate which equals mowing. Hopefully I can get my mate Dave to do a few runs in the tractor and take the pressure off me.
- I was doing the monthly service on the barge a couple of weeks ago when I noticed one of the wheels had a slight lean. Upon checking I found the axle on the trailer we use to pull the barge out of the water was just about rusted through. A big thank you to Yovich Engineering who supplied free labour to fix this; amazing who is happy to help the island out in times of need.
- I paid an overnight visit to the previous rangers, Ben and Jo and their kids, Penny and Tim. They have just built a house and Jo made good use of the new kitchen and cooked a delicious lasagne. It was great to catch up with these guys again and I should do it more often.
- I happily gave a day to help the guys doing a fantastic job out at Mt Manaia lay out some rat poison to bring down numbers. Martin Hunt and co are doing a fantastic job out there with a huge amount of bait taken. They have trail camera pictures of not only rats but some possums also eating bait. The number of conservation projects running locally and around the country is amazing, go and support your local one.

- I gave a talk to the guys and girls at the University of the Third Age, a group of retirees who share intellectual, cultural, creative, physical and leisure interests. The number of projects this group is involved in is mind boggling, something for everyone. One of our adopt-a-spotter, Mike chairing this meeting, was amongst some of the faces I recognised. I had the U3A's on the island before, when I first started here

### Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 4th November.** Pick-up at 9 a.m. at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2 p.m. We are going to be filling the baitstations on the North face as I have started with the south-side for an island wide mouse bust plus more.
- As mentioned earlier in this Report, the **kiwi releases coming up on 11 and 19 November.** If you want to see a real Matakohe-Limestone Island kiwi, come along.
- A bit more long term, the Oi will probably be coming on to the island on 9 December so we will be running observer trips to watch the feeding (every two days), watch this space.

Hei konei ra  
Bernie



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