



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report November 2015

I was having a look at last year's November report and comparing my highlight of the month for both years. Off-shore island sanctuaries with their amazing diversity of native flora and fauna are just indescribable.

Highlight of the month – again - Grey Faced Petrel 'recce' trip to Taranga (Hen) Island. As I said in last month's Report, we again this year carried out a petrel recce trip to Taranga Island to measure and weigh chicks for the upcoming translocation. This was the third time I had been over to this special island and the changes we noticed were pretty phenomenal. This year not only did we have the glorious bellbird, kaka, kakariki, tui and saddleback morning chorus, the penguin evening chorus and invasion and the early night-time petrel chorus, but we now have a pre-dawn sea bird chorus as well!



**The petrel A-Team, Michelle, Theda, Laurie, Cathy and Grant**

We had the same team as last year and my well-worn hat goes off to this absolutely crazy enthusiastic group of volunteers. The trip went like clockwork, due to all the prior planning and skill of all involved. A massive amount of background work goes on for these trips and, to quote petrel guru, Helen Gummer "Managing these artificial colonies to maximise the breeding success is an ongoing thing. It's good you have the commitment at your end with FOMLI. They are such long-term projects".

Last year we only collected 28 of the 143 chicks we had found. This year we found 191 chicks. Cathy, our petrel expert, has done some calculating and estimates one chick found per ten burrows. If this is the case then 1910 burrows were searched this year – a lot of burrows for our arms.



I just had to put the photo shot above in it's like like a postcard! These little dinosaurs (tuatara) were everywhere, as was the seemingly increased bird life. It's a bit of a surprise when one of these latches on in a burrow instead of a petrel chick. This shot comes thanks to Michelle's fantastic camera skills.

## Visitors and Volunteers

- Bay Of Islands College science and technology teacher, Mark Hubbard, brought a great group of kids to the island for some conservation education. These guys were on a camp at the Whangarei Heads and decided to spend a day enjoying the sights and sounds here. The three boatloads were over quick smart on a gorgeous day with a walk to the top planned. These little "sponges" were great and full of questions, with even the littlest legs making it to the top of the island to enjoy the view, the weta and the tour.
- The first Wednesday of the month heralded in our regular volunteer day which was windy and rainy early in the morning. Despite the weather we had almost a full boatload of keen volunteers. First up was the running of the North-face bait-lines, the old baits being replaced with fresh ones. We then split into groups, some putting drainage and steps in over at the old Edge house, some removing gravel and leaves from the petrel burrows and others mulching some of the new plants around the house with grass. I tested a beetroot chocolate cake recipe out on the guys and 'gals' - seemed to go down OK.
- The kids from Whangarei Heads Primary School's Adopt-A-Spot programme arrived on a lovely day with weeds at their site on the radar. Barry Winterton is the keen teacher who is encouraging the kids in this very worthwhile endeavour. Their site is looking all the better for a bit of attention with the group already booking another day in December. Horahora School has also booked in for another day on their site. This programme is really starting to roll. Steve, Angela and Delice have also been over attending to their spots. Committee member, Theda, has now also adopted a spot on the island with a group of friends: better hurry before we run out of spots.
- I had the pleasure of the company of Mailee, the new DOC fairy tern Ranger at Mangawhai Heads who is up from Christchurch. Mailee has worked with black robins and a whole bunch of other fantastic birds and has seen and done a huge amount in her conservation life. She arrived under her own steam by kayak for a fun overnigher on Matakoho–Limestone Island. Even better, she bought pizza and beer which were heartily enjoyed. Mailee got to see a few of the island's resident kiwi during a night walk. Welcome back any time Mailee, or I may just pay Mangawhai a visit.
- I had a surprise visit from the District Health Board and a very special visitor, Te Parawhau kaumātua, Te Ihi Tito. This group arrived via the Whangarei Harbour Cruises boat, the 'Waipapa', for an educational trip to Matakoho–Limestone Island. I was able to impart some knowledge about the fabulous conservation story and it was great to hear some more of the island's Maori history. Te Ihi gave a fantastic interpretation of the early history of the island and its surrounds and it was awesome to finally meet this great man.
- In July we had a visit from a couple of VIP's, the National Manufacturing Manager, Paul Thorne and long-time supporter, Danny Bourke from our sponsors, GBC Winstone. I have just got some photos of the amazing day and would especially like to thank Danny who was a member of the team instrumental in securing this invaluable sponsorship for the island several years ago.

**Danny, Paul, me and the star, Kahui Whetu.**



- I had the pleasure of a visit from a personal and island friend, Nick Bamford with son Quin and I finally got a bit of fishing in. We had a bit of luck catching a few snapper and kahawai from around the island, first for the season.

## Fauna and flora

- Fantastic news! There is a tui nesting right outside my house, apparently the female tui makes a few nests and then picks one. What are the chances of it choosing the one that will provide hours of (what I call, Limestone Island TV) right outside the window. There seem to be quite a few tui nests dispersed around the island this year, more than ever. Amazing, just shows when habitat is provided, the birds slowly come back. I cannot wait for the first kaka or bellbird to show up.

- All the other island birds are active as well with some becoming very protective. The fern birds like to compete with the chirps of the kiwi finder and the sand-barge dotterel chicks have flown the coop, showing up on Rat Island with their parents: came back today! I was checking out the barge mooring chain near a variable oyster catcher (VOC) nest, and took the opportunity to have a peek. What good timing, one of the eggs just happened to be hatching. I had to extract myself from the area quickly though, as I was being dive bombed.



**Two VOC eggs, can you see the one hatching?**

- As seen above, eggs = chicks and there is now a proliferation of VOC chicks running all around the island. At last count there are four on the beach in front of the house and at least another three nesting in the area, one right above the sign as usual!. There were a good few scrapes on the sand-spit last time I was there, as well as a whole heap on Knight Island. The Caspian Terns have got a huge amount of scrapes and eggs and I expect some chicks to have hatched by now. There is one pair of VOC's on the shore near the pontoon and even a pair nesting on the old wharf where the chicks may require VOC - rescue.
- I have been putting up a bunch of videos on the island's Facebook page as well as the month's Ranger Report. Some of the video clips include kiwi and some petrels, pretty cool to see what they get up to when there is nobody around.

## **Kiwi**

- There has been a whole heap of kiwi news this month with more captures, releases and even a recuperating kiwi. Firstly, the long term island couples are doing well with Sir Ed on a marathon sitting period, 111 days and counting. Partner Kahui Whetu has been roaming around the island no doubt enjoying her unencumbered days, although she still seems to occasionally check up on her partner. Glen was up to 76 days sitting on his nest when he moved off and subsequent checks failed to find burrow, chick or egg! This is a shame but not the end of the world as the Matakohē–Limestone Island kiwi crèche is a pretty safe place to be.
- The teenage kiwi have transmitters, the signs are up, the school and release events are organised, all is go for the Thursday, 19 November release party. By the time this report comes out it will already have happened. I will cover this a bit more next month.
- Also in kiwi news this month we have a short term visitor to Matakohē-Limestone Island, a poor old damaged kiwi who was mauled by a small terrier. This bird came via Robert Webb and the local DOC office to recover here until she is well enough to go back to her home on the mainland. Another use for this island, rehab centre for damaged kiwi, any help we can give. Remember to keep your dog on a lead at all times in kiwi areas, and report any owners you see flaunting the rules.

- Even more kiwi news was the departure of two teenage recruits to Whangarei Heads starting with an event at the Onerahi Yacht Club. These guys then headed off to Hunt's shed where they got to star in an event featuring kiwi conservation sponsors, the Tindall Foundation folk. The later release at two pre-dug burrows was attended by almost 200 people showing how popular these hairy birds can be, simply magic! Before the release we heard from fund recipients, the Warawara Forest project near the Herekino Harbour and the good work they are carrying out up there. It was a great event and I caught up with a number of people including a couple of conservation pillars, Ngati Hine kaumātua, Kevin Prime and the legendary John Craig.



**Tindall the kiwi, Todd Hamilton (the kiwi man)  
and Kevin Prime (legend)**

**Photo courtesy of Mike O'Connor from the WWF.**

### **Predator control/weeds**

- Bevan has been busy on the buffer and the island and, as the season for breeding is upon us, we have stepped up the control measures. He managed to get a rat on the island in a trap on the sand-spit. The incursions seem to coincide with the larger tides, a point I will be passing on to my successor, valuable information! Bevan also managed to get a really fresh stoat in a DOC 200 on the buffer, I will try to get this one freeze dried for demo purposes. He has also been getting the odd rat and mouse on the buffer with a myna found in one of the island traps as well.
- I have been filling the baits on the south-side, taking the opportunity to look for invasive plants whilst I am at it. I found a whole heap of weeds that are now GPS'ed and destroyed. I found pampas, moth-plant, Cape gooseberry, woolly nightshade, Taiwan cherry (to 6m) and a whole heap of other nasties. By the time this goes to air I should be almost finished and ready to run a round of tracking tunnels again,.....mice.
- I had the privilege of attending a training course organised by the lovely Clea from Kiwis for kiwi for a new trapping app. This looks like a great tool and I hope to implement it on the island when it goes live in a couple of months. The app works with your smart-phone systems enabling all data to be downloaded to one site at DOC. This helps everyone work together and makes trapping more reliable and consistent: another tool in the toolbox.

### **General**

- I have also been busy carrying out a whole pile of maintenance, replacing corroded taps for the water system and chain holding the barge in place in the harbour. I have finally fixed the door on the Ruins toilet completely replacing the hinges and making the door stronger. Not sure how many little fixes I did on this door before biting the bullet. I reinstalled the axle on the barge, it works a treat. The bird-baths at the top of the hill are now manually operated, replacing the old unreliable 'automatic' system.

- The grass has decided it is time for maximum growth thanks to the occasional rain and hot sunny conditions. Both Dave and I have been attacking it systemically managing to keep most of it under control. Murray and Andrew from Northland Parkcare also knocked the top off the new growth on the walking tracks. Andrew brought a gorgeous bottle of fresh milk over from his house cow. This is a real treat and would go well with one of Murray's legendary apple pies which I am still awaiting, hint-hint Murray !
- I have been getting my garden ready for summer with cucumbers, tomatoes and other staples growing well in the rich soil. Hopefully I have time to set up the watermelons for the summer.
- As the Oi are arriving soon the organising of the sardines and readying of the cabin for food prep is necessary. I gave the once over and sanitised the whole thing so when Cathy arrived for an inspection she did not have to do as much as last year. Cathy also gave her general approval of the new burrows which we have been busy getting ready.
- Although Cathy may have given her seal of approval the work at the site goes on with a new watering system, drainage for the shed and more shell on the tracks required. The new trees we planted there are great for providing shade but require regular trimming to keep them off the track.

### Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 2nd December. Pick-up at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm.** I will have to top the chocolate/beetroot cake from last month. If we are feeling keen we may even get some work done. I think the final touches to the petrel station and maybe some more mulching are the priority.

Hei konei ra  
Bernie



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