



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report December 2015

Happy New Year to all, even if it's a bit late! So much going on again, school trips, volunteers, kiwis, new shorebirds and of course the Grey Faced Petrel (GFP) pick-up trip to Taranga - Hen Island.

I have been so busy, Christmas has slipped off the calendar - no just kidding. I had a great day with my family, eating too much and having a laugh.

The most obvious consumer of my time and the reason for my being so busy was the delivery of 48 Oi (GFP) and the feeding/checking routine that followed. The arrival of the fluffy chicks to the island was the culmination of a long, time-consuming process involving many people and organisations. An enormous amount of preparation is required for these trips and the whole island team was kept busy getting food and gear ready and cleaning it all for quarantine.

The pick-up trip was a marathon effort, working hard all day putting arms up burrows, getting pooped or vomited on, measuring birds and then putting them back. The second to last day was the hardest physically as we had to run all over the island picking up grey fluff-balls. Some of us had to run from the bottom of the island (camp site) to the top four times! We then had to get the little guys off in marginal conditions and back to Matakohē-Limestone Island for the welcome. After the welcome ceremony they were rehydrated and placed in their burrows.



**The collection crew,
"Petrel Heads"**



**Pick-up day, look at those ominous conditions
and all the boxes**

I would like to thank all those involved in helping to bring this amazing project to fruition including FOMLI, Te Parawhau, Ngati Wai, Department of Conservation, the recce and pick-up teams, all the volunteers who helped with the burrows, the skippers of the boats, island minders, bakers, sardine donors and collectors. The arrival of the birds even made the News on Maori TV that night, my TV debut.

As at 4 January we had fed the birds 15 times, every two days and 15 birds had flown. The feeding would not be possible without the willing helpers who make the job fun, arriving with new enthusiasm every feeding day. The petrels are great fun, with different personalities showing through. Some of the birds have been adopted by the volunteers, Blackadder, Twisty, Angry Bird and Fluffy, just to name a few. Last year the birds hung around until 17 January and I envisage these will be similar.

We feed these guys a mix of sardines/water/fish-oil and vitamins (a sardine smoothie). We give them a specific amount after weighing and measuring them. Regulars Cathy and Tanya were in charge until Christmas when I took over Cathy's role. We have had a whole heap of keen volunteers (four a day) as well as a few observer trips. This in itself is a major undertaking with three return boat trips a day, food prep, feeding, measuring and recording.

Visitors

- Long-time island supporter and Committee member, Jane Winton spent a day on the island walking friends and family around and having a picnic. I had some other V.I.P's over that day and as their trip was going so well Bevan had to run Jane and crew back to the mainland in the dingy, cheers Bevan.
- My brother and his wife who are living in South Sudan were here for a break getting some time on the island. They saw the GFP's, a kiwi and even some of our awesome lizards. We also made a day trip to Tawharanui Open Sanctuary spotting some fabulous natives that now call the area home. I even had time to go for a fish with the bro and we caught a few snapper, one even being legal. We finished their visit with a trip to Sukjai Thai in Kensington, well recommended, mmm.
- A group from Mangakahia Area School spent a great day on the island, traipsing about and checking out all the island has to offer. As usual the kids loved the weta, the old cement works ruins and manager's house. There was a whole bunch of tired kids for the boat ride back and I hope some of the conservation education sunk in, a great day!



Mangakahia Area School kids at the trig

- We are encouraging other organisations to visit the island for educational purposes, using Whangarei Harbour Cruises and their own guides. Kiwi North and the Whangarei Harbour Cruises carried out a couple of these trips in November. This frees the ranger up for other work and the bigger boat can carry more people. During the trip the entire river history from the Town Basin is explained. This is a great way to inform a larger group and get people enthused about conservation.
- I had a group from the Whangarei District Council, Infrastructure Projects and Support team here on an end of year team-building trip. I enjoyed showing them around the island, after all it is owned by them. We were able to check out the petrel chicks (good having them there) and meander over the rest of the island. The day finished up with a big lunch (provided) and an impromptu game of cricket on the manager's house lawn.
- A great bunch of well-deserving kids who visited within the first few days of the petrels arrival were the kids from the Environmental group at Onerahi Primary School. These kids and their teacher, Issie, collected over 220 cans of sardines this year. Some of the same group collected most of last year's supply as well, we even had some left, should be plenty. Thanks heaps guys.
- I had an interesting visit from some tramping club folk who were lucky enough to be able to check out some petrel chicks during the routine check I do on the non-feeding days. I walked around the island with the group explaining many species along the way. They were really knowledgeable and I learnt heaps from them - hopefully I taught them a bit as well
- The Friends of Matakohē–Limestone Island Committee had a BBQ and a pre-dinner walkabout on the island. This was, of course, a like-minded dinner group and the good feeling level was at an all-time high. After dinner it was down to the barge for the ride home and the sound of high spirits and laughter hung around for ages.

- Three boat-loads of Whangarei Intermediate kids kept me on my toes, leading them on an ecological journey around the island and fielding endless questions. Judging by the chatter this enthusiastic group had a great day away from school and will hopefully be back. Teaching kids about conservation is one of the most enjoyable parts of my job. These kids are the future of conservation and places like Matakoho-Limestone Island and its flora and fauna are important for showing them some native species. The kids also arrived bearing gifts of sardines in soya oil! A very generous donation that is being appreciated by our fluffy babies.



The big group from Whangarei Intermediate School, look at all those hats.

Volunteers/Supporters

- Some very special visitors, Colette and Nick, were over for lunch and a catch up. I have known these two 'scousers' for quite a while and they have come to know the island well over the years. I gave them them a run-down as well as they had volunteered to "island sit" again while I was away getting the petrel chicks.
- Another couple of volunteers who came over to enjoy the island and give me a bit of a hand were Chris and Lisa from Germany. They have been enjoying all New Zealand has to offer for the last year. They helped with the refurbishment of the petrel station tracks, spreading shell about making it extra 'grippy'.
- We ran the regular Wednesday volunteer day at the beginning of the month. This hardy bunch of volunteers got a lot done, mainly giving the petrel station a spruce-up as well as mulching some trees. My hat again goes off to this enthusiastic group for taking time out of their busy lives to help out this little island.
- French volunteers Claire and Jérémie who have been here before came for a quick visit to check out the petrels. They did a bit of work and helped out with the petrels. These passionate environmentalists travel the world recording stories, photos and sound and post it on their fabulous web page soundwaveontheroad, check it out! Claire always takes the best photos and one where I am holding a kiwi has been my screen-saver for yonks.



Another fabulous shot of a fluffy chick – hard to believe they looked like this not so long ago.

**Thanks for the photo
Claire**

- A couple of special folk I had over were Maihi and Colin from Rentokil Initial and Frank from Key Industries. Both companies play a major role in keeping our island pest free. The guys spent the day on the island viewing its attractions. We started the day with a bit of lunch provided by Maihi. The Christmas ham sandwiches, and then the rest of the food he continued to ply us with for the rest of the day was much appreciated. Marino the kiwi was the next highlight as I timed her check with the visit. We even got to see a couple of young pacific geckos on the way! This was a surprise even for me as I had not seen two on one day before. We then went and checked out the petrels and wandered down to the cement works ruins. This all took us into the late afternoon but we just had time to check out the Moko skinks which I had set some traps for. The guys had a great day as did I and will have to come again to put those fishing rods they bought (but had no time to use) to good use.

Kiwi

- We had another kiwi release at Tutukaka involving Todd from Backyard Kiwi, Tutukaka Landcare Trust, Ngunguru Primary School, Kiwi Coast and Tawapou Coastal Natives. It all started with the catching that morning of the two 'graduates' followed by the blessing on the Onerahi foreshore. The kiwi in the photo was a bit special to me as it was island born so we got to name it. A little girl got this honour, won in a silent auction at the Kiwis for kiwi morning tea. All went as planned and after a long day of advocacy both "stars" were finally released in a well-protected area.



Fred Tito, me and Bernie the kiwi

- Good old Sir Ed was sitting on his eggs for a marathon number of days and I was getting worried but he managed to increase the island kiwi population by two. We were lucky to get these chicks and I am glad I was so vigilant keeping the nest under observation. The chicks were well over 10 days old and had dirty bills and feet. Sir Ed is a legendary dad and can just about be guaranteed to have two chicks at a time.
- Our long term resident kiwi pair, Glen and Baldrick, have managed it again, Glen is currently sitting on an egg, up to 28 days at last count. Let's hope I get this one, as he was extra sneaky with the last chick and it got away before we could get a transponder in it. Go Glenny!
- You will remember the rehabilitating kiwi from Maranui that came here last month in a dishevelled state, I have been tracking this kiwi, making sure she is not getting into any trouble since she arrived. I finally thought I better have a look and see how she was getting on. I caught her up by the pa site and was amazed at how quickly she has improved, covered in feathers and not skinny at all. I will report back to DOC and the guys at Maranui on her progress and am sure they will be pleased.
- Another funny kiwi story, I was at the top of the island taking a night walk with Kiwis for kiwi administrator Paul O'Shea and his wife Selina who were up from Auckland for the weekend when a strange 'thing' was spotted. Now Marino the Maranui bird had always been tracked around the house where I released her, until now. What we had spotted looked like a half white, strange walking/hopping bird, possibly a kiwi at the opposite end of the island. I whipped out the tracker and sure enough it was good old Marino which proves she must be doing OK if she can walk the whole length of the island in a couple of days! The white was her bald patch.

Other fauna and flora

- There are still heaps of oystercatcher, dotterel and Caspian tern chicks on or around the island. The sand-barge pair below the house had a second clutch and there is one chick left there. I had to do a dotterel chick rescue on the wharf on the other side where a pair had hatched a chick. There will be minimal food on the wharf and the chick was very exposed so I moved it to the island. This was met with protest from the parents but they were quick to reclaim it and now it has heaps of hiding places and a good source of food. There are oystercatcher chicks all around the island in various states of maturity.
- I spent a pleasant day out at Bream Head at the site of the infamous flax snail or (Placostylus hongii). Surprisingly despite their name, flax snails do not eat flax or live near flax. We were carrying out a survey of numbers to see how many were in the area with a view to making an application to do another translocation to Matakohē–Limestone Island. Gerry Brackenbury is leading this project .



Predator control/weeds

- Bevan has been over regularly in the last month and a half nailing a few stoats and rats on the buffer, with all quiet on the island. He even got a hedgehog in one of our DOC 200 traps at Onemama. Just noticed the other day that he has been with us for almost two and a half years, just about as long as me, legend!
- I finished filling the bait-stations on the South side with another north face hit happening the next volunteer Wednesday. I have also been refilling the quarry bait-stations and found a heap more nasty weeds. I have been spraying the ones I GPS'ed whilst replacing baits on the South side. Unfortunately the weeds will never stop coming with many being airborne and birds bringing others. If you could do me a favour and destroy the ones on the mainland it would make the job a bit easier, cheers !!

General

- Bit of a funny story - I went to a native bee talk at Whangarei Heads only to find out I was a day early! On the plus side I got to have dessert at ex rangers and good friends, Ben and Jo Barr's new place and read the kids, Penny and Tim, a bed-time story. I was really spoilt when I went round the next day for dinner and the bee talk. This talk by Ngaire Hart was very interesting and I learnt heaps about this inconspicuous native.
- Murray and Andrew from Northland Parkcare were over twice in November as I would be away at the beginning of December and wanted the tracks looking spick and span for the incoming petrel visitors and the boys were happy to oblige. The place is looking really good but no doubt I will need to get them back soon as the recent rain will get things growing.
- Both Dave and I were busy with the mowing of the tracks and the fire breaks, well until it got really dry. The lack of rain over Christmas slowed down the grass growth but increased the fire risk; it can change so much even over a day! The recent New Year's rain will get things growing again and mean more mowing is coming up.
- The last piece of wall-space in the shelter has been filled with a poster all about the fabulous lizards on the island. The sign is very informative and you should definitely check it out when you are here next. Many thanks to Gerry and Dwane for their work getting this completed. We put it up a couple of weeks ago and it looks great, you can't miss it.
- With Cathy and Tanya working at the petrel station there was not a lot that I could do so snuck away to catch up on some other work. The bait-stations on the north face have got a spraying and the manager's house and shelter's lawns have got a mowing. The weeds on the south face have also been targeted.
- Finally getting on top of the vege garden, rotary hoeing, pulling weeds and planting heaps of summer veg.

Upcoming

- Volunteer Wednesday – 3rd February. Pick-up at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. What will the cheesecake flavour be this month, will it be cheesecake or something else? You will have to come and find out. I will find something to do, the jobs are never ending, but we always have a great time doing them, See you there.
- Another kiwi release on 13th February - always a great opportunity to see a wild kiwi up close so put the date on your calendar. The blessing will be beside the Onerahi Yacht Club at 9am and there will be a public showing that evening at Whangarei Heads.

Hei konei ra
Bernie



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