



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report February-March 2015

What a couple of months! Just to let everyone know that I am still living even though last month's Report failed to eventuate. The reason for this is I was hit by a virus that was finally diagnosed as probably glandular fever. This took me out for almost a month but thanks to mothering by my lovely parents, rest, great support from our Committee members and other friends I am now back to full strength and catching up on things that had to be put on the back burner.

Kiwi

- Just before this Report was finalised two young kiwi came off the island and went to Te Whara, or Bream Head. The good folk of the Bream Head Trust are doing a great job of restoring this area, getting rid of pests, planting trees and restoring the whole area. The kiwi had a Saturday morning blessing on the island from our Te Parawhau kaumātua, Fred Tito, followed by a viewing at the Onerahi Yacht Club two days later. They then went out to Whangarei Heads School for a show and tell. This was followed later that evening by the release at Bream Head which, hopefully, the birds will call home for the next sixty years or so.



Todd and the awesome little sprogs from Whangarei Heads Primary School

- On 14 February three chicks were released at McLeod Bay by Todd Hamilton and the folk from the Whangarei Heads Landcare Group. I was still not 100 percent at this stage so, unfortunately, had to miss out on all the fun and my only part in this event was taking the chicks off the island over to the mainland. Thanks to Todd and other keen kiwi catchers the three 'teenage' kiwi were snaffled up and dispatched into boxes. The transmitters were then chopped off and a blessing conducted over at the Onerahi Yacht Club attended by over 40 people who had the opportunity to see a live kiwi in the flesh. These little guys then went to a property behind McLeod Bay and were paraded around a record crowd of more than 400 people. These events are a great time to talk about kiwi conservation and, although a bit stressful for the kiwi, will hopefully be the last time they are touched by a human hand.

- Some great kiwi news is the hatching of two beautiful new kiwi chicks on the island. Sir Ed's transmitter showed that his activity had increased, meaning he was no longer incubating. He had been on the job for over 80 days! I contacted our happy DOC Kiwi Ranger, Rolf who came over and put a transponder (TP) into one of the chicks, the other one being too small. About a week later he came over again and put a TP into the other chick who was now big enough. If you remember, I caught Sir Ed just before he started incubating after he had been on the run for two years. I also received a couple of chicks from Todd to add to the island population which should bring it to between 40 and 50 birds. Here is one of the new chicks – what a cutie.



Flora and Fauna

- In addition to his predator control work, Bevan, our trapper, made a start on setting up the annual measuring of the island's lizard population and I finished the task. The preliminary finding, even though the process was a bit later this year, suggests similar results to last year. Surprisingly, there seemed to be more ornate skinks this year and fewer shore skinks were located. Whether this is because of the later monitoring or some other reason will prove interesting when compared again in future years. I tried to catch some of the new Suter's skinks in the g-minnow traps baited with sardines, with the grand total of zero, have to find another trapping method for these guys I think. They are there though, as I found one under the first rock I picked up the other day; the moko skinks are also prolific but because the gecko covers have only been refurbished for less than a year monitoring these will start next year.



A beautiful Matakohe-Limestone Island Moko skink and Bevan marking it just in case of recapture.

- Mowing and more spraying for me as well as Murray and the crew from Northland Parkcare as the grass seems to never stop growing, funny that! I find keeping on top of it and not letting it get too long makes the job not only easier but also stops the seed spreading.
- Yea, it's moth plant season with thousands of seedlings popping up in the marked problem areas and a few adults with pods found as well. The only way to deal to these is to Vigilant the stalks, removing the pods and repetitively spraying the juveniles. If you have any of these nasties at your place it's best to get them early as, when they develop pod, the 600+ seeds each one contains can be carried miles by the wind. These guys are a real problem in regenerating bush as they can grow in the shade and smother even large trees. I have been finding a huge number of other weeds while on moth plant patrol including Taiwan cherry, palm trees, Ivy species and pampas, to name just a few.

- Speaking of spraying, I have been doing this around the encroaching grass on trees as well as on fence-lines, and also pulling the latter down where they are no longer required. You will also notice that the hill track is getting a bit of attention with the grader being put to good use, crowning and levelling both this track and the one behind the ruins. This should make these areas a bit more accessible year round, as well as allowing the rain to drain away more easily.
- Ken Massey came over to the island for another attempt at shearing the sheep, on his own this time as in December I grabbed a bunch of young guys who were swimming on the wharf to help but the sheep freaked out. This time went much easier with the sheep not running all over the place. We had them penned up in the singlemen's quarters in no time and super shearer Ken whipped the wool off lickity split.

Predator Control

- Bevan has been over quite a few times doing the all-important job of trapping, both on the island and around the buffer: he even managed to talk his brother, Kiwa, into coming once. It has been steady but not too crazy around the buffer with notable catches being two stoats in one trap and even a ferret in one of our DOC 200's. Good news is the grand total of only one mouse caught on the island in the last year - the fewer the better.
- A worrying find on the beach in front of the house when I got back after being ill was a container of dog food? I hope this was used as bait for fishing and not somebody feeding a dog there. As the vulnerable kiwi are everywhere, there are "No Dog" signs all around the island as well as no less than 850 poisonous mammal baits every 25 metres! *If you do see any predators - especially dogs - on the island please do not hesitate to ring me on (09) 436 0923 or 021 132 2261.*



The evidence, not what I want to find on the island!

Visitors and Volunteers

- An interesting and exciting event last month was the afternoon/evening spent with the winner of the "Kiwis for kiwi" Trade Me auction, Sebastian van der Zwan, his family and friends. This was auctioned as a kiwi walk about with 'kiwi man' Todd Hamilton, and a touch of class (wine and cheese). It took a bit of setting up as I wanted to involve some local businesses and use my own chef skills. Longview Wine Estate and The Cheese Truck both came on board. On a glorious day Sebastian, who is the sub-editor for the Women's Weekly arrived with, not only his semi-local parents but also some other Auckland celebrity guests. The first event was watching Todd swap our resident kiwi, Kahui Whetu's transmitter from one leg to the other. From the photo you can see the audience was enthralled to see a live kiwi close up.
- After this we went back to the house and enjoyed the amazing spread that I had laid out. The Aucklanders were impressed with the food and beverages on offer and surprised a single guy living on an island could lay on such a feast. We then went for a walk over to the ruins and on the way I showed them some of our other amazing inhabitants such as the lizards and all the other special native birds. Much later, and after more refreshments, we went for a night-time kiwi walk and managed to spot a few of the hairy birds. All in all, a successful bit of Matakohē-Limestone Island and general NZ conservation advocacy and an enjoyable day.



Sebastian with a kiwi selfie and a cheezy Zelda

- I only hosted a couple of other groups to the Island during the last couple of months, one being a group who came for a party to celebrate the 16th birthday of Grace Stuthridge whose parents, Donna and Riaan, have looked after the island on many occasions when the ranger has had to be away for a few days. They had a great time with a treasure hunt around the ruins then a swim and relax around the beach in front of the Manager's house ruins.
- Our ever cheerful 'adopt-a-spotters' have also been over a few times going about their work. If anybody out there would like to adopt-a-spot on the island (can be as big or as small as you like) please contact Committee member, Dwane Kokich, on (09) 437 6712 or email him at dwane@macrocom.net.nz for further information. He will be happy to answer any questions you have and guide you through the process.
- The Hash House Harriers paid their annual visit to the island (my third time) and this bunch of eccentric folk had a ball running and walking around the island then partaking of a fabulous BBQ and many refreshments. This is a 'group of drinkers with a running problem' and there are participants all around the world. There seem to be more and more every year.
- A spot of rough weather at the beginning of February caused the cancellation of a local family group who regularly visit the island, sorry guys.
- I was able to run our regular volunteer days on both the first Wednesdays of February and March. Both days were almost a repeat of each other. Jobs completed were translocation of flax and hibiscus plants, beach clean-ups, putting netting on steps around the house and over at the pontoon, digging postholes for a fence, clearing rocks at a landing area on the Onerahi foreshore plus other small jobs. The volunteers got to indulge in cheesecake last month and chocolate éclairs the next time.
- I gave my regular talk at Merrivale Rest Home which always proves a bit of a laugh for me. I enjoy entertaining the lovely folk there and telling about the island's updates. There are a couple of cheeky elderly fellows there who have heard my spiel a couple of time now and not only help me out, but also give me a bit of good natured harassment. They always put on a great lunch which I am more than happy to partake in whilst trying to answer all their great questions and learning about the local and even some island history.
- Once back on my feet I was able to get back to the island and resume some light duties, mainly catching up on paperwork and mowing the ever-growing lawns. However, there were several jobs at this stage that were getting desperately in need of completing so the fabulous Committee allowed me to employ the services of a couple of people to help. Bevan and another Northtec student came over and did some work for me. The ant monitoring was completed as well as the tracking tunnels (all clear) and some more spraying was carried out.
- Other special visitors I had to the island were ex-Ranger and Northtec Conservation tutor, Ben with my ex-old tutor, Ollie Ball and their class of keen first year students.

General

- The fire extinguishers have had their annual checks which makes this a good time to send out a reminder to keep fires off the island. We have been fortunate this summer so far in that the fire risk has not gone too high. Nevertheless the risk is always there so **remember**, if you see any smoke or anything suspicious coming from the island immediately call 111 and they will respond appropriately.
- Our poor old and trusty ute is looking pretty sad at the moment and to fix all its problems would cost more than it is worth. Therefore I went over to the Dargaville Field Days with Ian Page, our Treasurer's husband, to check out possible replacements. I had a wonderful day off the island with lots of interesting discussions and got to check out a lot of new farming technology. I had my eye on a helicopter as a replacement - think this may be stretching it a little though!!!
- Just before I got sick Margaret Abraham, who owns and is fixing up a house on the Onerahi foreshore, donated the old solar hot water system off her roof to the island. The builders gave me a hand pulling it down and I wheeled it down the hill, put it on to the barge and whipped it over to the island. This unit is a little aged and needs a bit of repair, but may prove useful in the future and another asset to the island's self-sustaining set-up. Once Margaret moves in to her house this will be another bonus as she will be in a position to keep a close eye on the island and its doings, possibly our closest neighbour.
- I attended a Department of Conservation media workshop where I learnt about media thought processes and how to deal with them. This should prove helpful to me, both now and in the future
- I scored a sweet little rotary-hoe to make digging in my 'ginormous' garden easier.

Upcoming

- At the end of this month the Northland Regional Council is running workshops first on the island and then on the mainland for teachers and other educators. This is to promote conservation and show them what the community and dedicated volunteers can achieve. A big tick for Matakohe–Limestone Island and Whangarei for all the hard work that has been carried out so far. I will update you all about these events in next month's Report.
- The 'Kiwis for kiwi' funding application is due next month so this had to be sorted, with the help of some wonderful Committee members.
- The regular volunteer day which usually occurs on the first Wednesday of the month will be happening on the **SECOND WEDNESDAY** of April. This is because I am attending the conservation workshop run by the NRC mentioned above. Please do not turn up on the first Wednesday (1st April) as I will not be there. It would be great to see you on the second one though - 8 April, 9.00 am at the jetty.

Hei konei ra

Bernie



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