



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report June 2015

Welcome to the wet season! It has been a pretty full on month with not only the water tanks and ponds overflowing, but visitors, new growth, amazing wildlife and new plants positively dripping off (or on) the island, lovely! June also heralded the arrival of our plants for the coming planting season, the lawn in front of the Manager's house has been turned into a miniature forest - an amazing collection from Tawapou Nurseries, from the humble kanuka to the dynamic king fern. They look absolutely glorious and a credit to the guys out at Matapouri. This is the season to go and plant some natives or come and help us with ours.

### Flora and fauna

- My biggest job this month has been continuing the upgrades at the petrel station as well as weeding and spraying. This was a huge undertaking as it required the construction of new boxes and insulated lids, digging up the old burrows then the installation of the new ones. These have extra pipes and material for drainage topped up with dry leaves from the surrounding area. In total I have now built ten new burrows under the trees and refurbished another seventeen of the original ones that were getting wet during rain events.



**Sarah, Chris, Noah and little Jasper from Hewlett Point checking out one of the new petrel burrows (Mk 6).**

- Checking of the petrel station is still in progress with the infra-red motion cameras picking up a few on video. I may try to upload these on to You Tube or Facebook so we can all watch them scabbling around,. There is even some kiwi video. I have not found these birds during my daytime checks and the videos reveal they do not always go into the burrows.
- As mentioned, we picked up the 5000+ plants from Tawapou Nursery this month for the upcoming island planting. As the tide was high at about 8:30 a.m. on the day of the pick-up, an early start was required. Four vehicles (three utes) with trailers and a truck were required to transport all the plants to the boat ramp. The weather was similar to that we experienced last year with rain (some almost torrential) and strong north-westerlies. We managed somehow to squeeze the plants into the vehicles and get them transferred to the island just before the tide got too low to enable the barge access to the beach. It was a great effort from a staunch group of volunteers who carried on despite the weather and finished the job. Thanks to you all (especially Dad for the pies at lunchtime).

- I attended a great event at McLeod's Bay Hall organised by ex-Limestone Island Ranger, Ben Barr and the folk working out at Whangarei Heads. The well attended (90+) occasion was titled "Bring back Birds" with guest speaker, the legendary Dr Kevin Parker, whose company has been involved in over 40 translocations to date. He gave a wonderful talk about some of the species they will/could translocate to the Bream Head Reserve area in the future. As usual this was a great opportunity to catch up with some like-minded folk and discuss a bit of conservation as well.
- There have been a few Tui spotted about the island with one particular individual singing very loudly in a macrocarpa near the house. As well as the noisy one, I have spotted a few playing chase up near the ridge line, making for interesting viewing. I hope more and more of these gregarious birds make their home here as they are very territorial, which may mean they will chase the exotic roosting birds away.

## Visitors

- On a lovely sunny, crisp day pupils from Raurimu Avenue School, which is just up the road in Onerahi, walked to the boat ramp for a Matakoho-Limestone Island history and conservation lesson. We had a great day with a stroll around the island, the kids checking out the weta, skinks and ruins. They were great fun and I take my hat off to them, the teachers and parent helpers. These kids not only did a lot of walking on the day but the day before they had walked up to the soccer fields where they had a sports day, legends.
- I had a couple of friends from way back come over to the island, two for a walkabout on Queen's Birthday weekend. Leslie and her friend Julie had a great time on the island exploring and I will probably get another group over as a result. An old 'cheffing' mate and his family came over as well to catch up with stuff on the island, Chris and whanau live at Hewlett point right across the water so is one of the island's closest neighbours.
- I seem to remember when I started this job they said the winter can be a bit quiet! I'm not sure about this as I seem to be as busy as ever. Otamatea High School are bringing four lots of kids over (two boat loads at a time) this month, upping numbers and keeping me on my toes. These kids from further down south are coming as a result of the NRC community based social marketing workshop we attended a few months back. It is great fun imparting a bit of knowledge to these young folk, sparking more interest in New Zealand's native wildlife and its conservation.
- A group of young ladies from Whangarei Girls' High School visited the island with teacher Luke and caregivers. We walked around the island visiting the Pa site and the petrel station. A well behaved bunch and they seemed to absorb all I had to teach them about the geology, ecology and conservation of the area. The island is perfect for teaching such topics as there is nothing like being able to physically show people what you are talking about.



Whangarei Girls High School students  
Enjoying the newly painted Trig Station at the Pa Site

- Two boatloads of kids and adults from the Shackleton Sea Scouts also spent the day on the island picking my brains for information. A previous talk to these guys a few years ago got them enthused for a trip to the island to see it in person. These kids (and adults) had a great time running around the ruins, even spotting an imaginary weasel under the old Manager's house (I got the torch and double checked). The kids also loved the 'giant' weta with quite a few posing for photographs with these stunning invertebrates.
- One cold and windy Sunday afternoon some of the Island Committee members came over to have a walkabout, checking out progress and this season's plants as well as getting ideas for future planning. We had a brisk walk up to the petrel station, down the hill track and over to the ruins, then scooted back to the house to indulge in some crumble and custard. The trip back to the mainland was much more pleasant..

## Volunteers

- Pompallier Catholic College students visited for, what is turning into an annual event, their service day. These students always arrive with enthusiasm and get heaps done. This year we managed to get a lot of translocated flax planted along the shore, cleared and improved the access track and cleared the drains and sumps on the school track.
- Another group who visited the island for their service day was from Fonterra. These guys did not even make it to the island before they were put to work shovelling PAP 7 (gravel) off Dad's truck into buckets for the petrel station. They also got a load of work done up at the petrel station, digging in burrows and planting out an area by the house.

**The awesome dudes and 'dudesses' from Fonterra, what a nice day**



- Our regular volunteer Wednesday turned out to be a bit of a wild ride to the island with rain predicted for later on in the day. We carried out a myriad of tasks including digging in the new petrel burrows (very muddy), building barriers for the incoming plants, spreading some native seed around the island, the obligatory beach clean-up and our fisher folk nailing some thistles around the ruins. Rusty even brought me some lovely wild venison. The volunteers got to enjoy some fresh soups, home-baked bread and fruit cake which helped them to warm up during lunchtime.
- The Adopt-a-spotters have been over dealing to the mexican devil, blackberry and other nasties. An especially invasive weed, the ground covering selaginella, has been spotted and sprayed by ever vigilant Dwane. Angela and Delice not only managed to make the front page of the Leader promoting the programme, but Delice also managed to rope in her son's partner, Constance from PNG. Dwane spotted our friendly Matakoho-Limestone Island ruru (morepork) in the manuka on the hill track and, if the pile of poo is anything to go by, he has been there a while.
- Committee members Gerry and Dwane have been over sizing up the new Lizard sign that is going into the shelter by the ruins, completing the line up. It's looking absolutely fantastic with some great photos from Landcare Research and some interesting facts.
- Forest and Bird Society members spent a cold but clear day on the island planting trees then taking a walk, checking out the changes. They were impressed with the progress that has been made on the island and couldn't believe the growth of the trees since they were last over. It was great to catch up with this group who were instrumental in making the start to protect this denuded little island in the Whangarei Harbour. They also gave me a quick hand moving the last of the petrel burrow lids up to the petrel station.

**A happy bunch of planters on a glorious Saturday morning, thanks Forest and Bird**



## Predator control

- As mentioned in the last Ranger Report, I was running another round of tracking tunnels and unfortunately discovered a couple of hits of mice around the house. I immediately went into action mode distributing more poison and mouse traps and am about to run another round of tracking tunnels in the area, to make sure they are gone. I am also going to carry out the island wide 'mouse bust' to clean up any other pockets that the tunnels may not have picked up. The last Rangers, Ben and Jo Barr, were looking into increasing the tunnel network and, after doing more work on the South-side access track, I think this may be a good spot to run it. This is the first time I have noted mammal tracks since starting work on Matakaohe-Limestone Island. On perusing previous records it looks as though I have been spoilt as the little predators have been tracked regularly in the past. A good thing about the tracking tunnels was the absence of any other rodents or marsupials on the island only invertebrates, birds and lizards,.
- While the Raurimu Avenue kids were on the Island we walked along the sandspit where they were excited to find a rat in one of our traps. The ship's rat was pretty fresh and is my second in two months; it was very skinny and had no trace of poison (or animals) in its gut so hopefully was nailed before it left the sandspit.
- Bevan, trapper extraordinaire, has been busy finishing his Applied Science/Conservation Management degree at NorthTec so missed one week's trapping but has been busy when he has come over. He has been finding mice on both Rabbit and Rat Islands where we have not had any pests for some time. I am about to put more bait stations over in these two areas as I suspect the ones I am finding over here may be coming from there. Bevan has caught a couple of stoats, four rats and those pesky mice on the buffer. We have not had any other incursions on Matakaohe-Limestone Island apart from the rat the kids from Raurimu Avenue School found.

## Kiwi

- Not much happening with the kiwi this month, apart from the usual 'hands off' monitoring, although I am keeping a close eye on Glen. Glen is one of our resident males with the territory over by the ruins. I have been seeing loads of footprints in the mud as well as the smelly kiwi poo all over the tracks which should mean that they are thriving on the island. I have been hearing some calling along the north face (male and female), as well as one by the house (male). I should be out trying to catch these so we can translocate them before they start breeding among themselves.

## General

- I gave a talk at the Merrivale Residential Centre to a lovely bunch of elderly folk who were full of local knowledge. I have been coming to the aged care section of the centre for a couple of years now and was happy to talk to this other section of Merrivale. I also had lunch with these lovely folk, perks of the job.
- I had the privilege of again attending the Whangaruru 'Camp Kiwi' planting day where forty passionate individuals showed up on a showery windy day. We got over a thousand plants in the ground and then tucked into the delicious wild pork and lamb boil-up. There were a whole bunch of regular conservation faces there and I had a great catch-up with them. Thanks to Greg and Heather Stump for the ride there, their endless enthusiasm for conservation volunteering is inspirational. Check out their Facebook page for photos and the great plan for the Puriri Bay site.
- The friendly crew from Northland ParkCare Services have been over to maintain the island's walking tracks. Murray and Andrew did a great job and I even managed to set the net and rustle them up a few fish. Andrew brought me some lovely kumara but I am still waiting for one of Murray's legendary apple pies I have heard about.
- The driveway up to the Ranger's residence got a hammering during the plant transfer so I spent a couple of days grading and applying limestone. It looks a million bucks now and the recent heavy rains - over 150mm - have shown the crowning is working well.



- Building the petrel burrows has been consuming heaps of my time but, hopefully, now that I am mostly finished this work I can focus my energy elsewhere. I have made numerous trips to town to pick up supplies, which is rather costly in time and money but it has also meant I am now on first name terms with the guys at Scooters Plywood, EDL Fasteners and Carters. I would just like to thank these guys for their help, discounts and freebies, cheers guys. Another company I would like to thank is Ballance Agri-Nutrients who I went to and hit up for a couple of fertiliser bags and they happily gave me a pack of 100 new ones, choice.
- A disturbing occurrence on the island is the discovery of moth plant 'fluffies', especially when it is windy. I am going to have to keep my eyes open for any adult plants whilst I am running the bait lines on the South-side. The other place where they could be coming from might be Motutaua or Rabbit Island and I am going to hit this spot shortly with Bevan, using Vigilant and Glyphosate.

### Upcoming

- **Planting days:** Starting Sunday 21st then **28 June, 5, 12 and 19 July**, until all the plants are in the ground. Pick up is from the **public boat ramp at Onerahi, 9am returning** at approximately **1.30 pm** after lunch. As always bring your lunch, good footwear, a shower proof jacket and gloves if you have them. You are more than welcome to bring your own favourite clean spade if you have one. Contact me if you have any queries or to check if it's on in case of nasty weather (09 436 0923).
- Volunteer Week coming up: the Matakohē–Limestone Island first official planting day on 21 June will be used to kick off volunteer week again this year. I will also be manning a stall in Cameron Street for a couple of hours on Wednesday, 24 June from 11:00 to 13:00 so feel free to come and ask any questions.
- Volunteer Wednesday **1 July, 9am** at the jetty. Loads of work to do, finishing up the petrel station, a weed hunt, possibly a moth plant trip to Rabbit Island and a hot treat to finish up - sound good? come join us.

Hei konei ra

Bernie



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