



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report September 2015

Wow, feels like just yesterday I finished the August Ranger Report. This month even more birds are going crazy, trees are busting out all over the place and Spring is definitely in the air.

On to the Island news starting with - sound the trumpets - a fancy new side by side Polaris Ranger Crew for the island. This 900cc diesel beast is a great asset and well overdue as the poor old Suzuki has been 'off the road' for some time now. The Polaris arrived on a calm, damp day on the barge with committee member Dwane and me having to build some ramps pronto to get it on board.



What do you get when you cross a barge with an off-road vehicle - a "behicle"! Dwane thinks it's pretty sweet.

I would like to thank all those involved in getting this asset to the island, especially Foundation North for coming up with the funds and Shane and Michael at Rouse Motorcycles in Hikurangi for the great deal. Also a big shout out to committee member Dwane for organising the funding. While I am still in the testing phase, it definitely seems fit for purpose and quite capable of getting about the island.

Kiwi and Petrel

- Interesting petrel news this month with one of our petrels turning up out at Tawharanui Open Sanctuary. Ex Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger and 'queen petrel-pesterer', Cathy Mitchell informed me of this. Apparently the petrels can move between the colonies quite happily, hopefully we get a few in return, or a couple of their Takahe will do! It has been pretty quiet up at the petrel station with no petrels showing up on the cameras, only the odd kiwi and a heap of other birds, and the sheep. Check out our [Facebook](#) page for recent video of some kiwi and petrels.

- I thought I had constructed and dug in my last petrel box but turns out I was wrong. I am installing another ten plus burrows and replacing five or six more of the originals that were getting wet during the last couple of rain events. The petrel area is getting pretty big with local populations of invertebrates and skinks taking advantage of the new habitat, kiwis too! To write this report I make a list of the stories out of my daily diary and this month I put an exclamation mark every time I worked on some petrel matter, I gave up after ten !!!!!!!!
- I went for a night kiwi walk with Marc and we got a really good view of two scurrying away. These hairy birds look quite comical when they run, sometimes stretching out and getting a good speed up. Whilst up at the petrel station we disturbed one and camera footage shows quite a few hits up there.



**A kiwi butt at the petrel station.
You can see band on this one so it must be
Glen's mate, Baldrick**

Flora and fauna

- The rain has been extraordinary, up to 50mm on one night. Wish I could store some to slowly release through the island during the expected drought this summer. The island has been constantly wet all winter making it almost impossible to get a vehicle around without cutting the place up. The grass on the tractor mown tracks is getting a bit long and if it does not dry up soon I could get a good crop of hay.
- The kowhai trees have finished flowering but not before a bumper crop of Tui were counted in the trees. I managed to see nine in one area and since then they have been making their presence known everywhere on the island. I am sure they will be nesting all over the island this Spring, with even more turning up next year.
- This section is a bit small this month but I have been noticing a whole bunch of flowers opening around the island. I promise next month's Ranger Report will be full of fantastic shapes and colours, only wish we had 'smell-o-vision'.

Volunteers and Visitors

- This month I have had the pleasure of the company of another volunteer from France, from the champagne region this time. Marc-Antoine is studying agriculture in his homeland with his parents owning a huge sheep farm (150). Marc has also spent some time at the Boundary Stream project near Napier, and is a willing volunteer. He has been busy helping me around the island, carrying out a myriad of tasks. I have also been able to get him working on a couple of farms to see how we do things in good old NZ.
- A great turnout by our regular Wednesday volunteers with almost a full boat load waiting at the pontoon. I had a busy day planned with - that's right - petrel burrows! We spent the morning putting the boxes, entrances and drainage into the holes that had been dug previously by the brilliant NorthTec students. The volunteers carried this out with gusto, having time to do a bit of track benching and even starting to dig up some of the old wet burrows. After lunch, and the fortifying mango and chocolate cheesecake, we also did a bit of flax translocation. Thanks as always vol's!

- The good fellas from Northland Parkcare Services have been over to maintain our walking tracks. A few visitors who came over later were amazed at how close a shave these professionals can get with the weed-whackers. Murray and Andrew are great fun to have over and always arrive with smiles and jokes. Andrew bought some fresh milk from his house cow this month, I am still waiting for Muzza's legendary apple pie! The grass on the tracks has not been growing very fast until now, but with the days getting longer and warmer it will shoot off.
- Our adopt-a-spotters have been over regularly: feel free to check this invaluable programme out on the [website](#). This plan is slowly cranking up with some fun, unique personalities coming through. Some of the names for the spots are a crack up – Aye Aye Jay Jay, Hilltop Hilton, Our Part of the Universe, to name just a few. While I was on holiday I have to thank Dwane and Marc for looking after the island, great when you come back from holiday and the place is better than when you left it! Dwane had had a lot of visitors over who got lots done, pulling and treating weeds, painting petrel boxes, fixing the gecko covers, sheep fence strengthening, plant staking/tying and a whole heap more, cheers guys.
- One thing I am noticing is the increase in the number of people coming over for birthday parties, both on their own and through me. This is great, especially if I have time to show them around and introduce them to some NZ conservation. I had a friend of previous Ranger, Ben Barr, over with her boy and a few others. It was a quadruple birthday party with heaps of fun had by all the kids and a Top Secret treasure hunt. Not only a great place to hold a birthday party but also a great way to save some time and money - made for an interesting birthday song though. Paula gave a generous donation for the island and with three more birthdays booked next month, bring it on.



**Birthday party on Matakohe-Limestone Island,
great fun**

Pest trapping, baiting and chasing:

- Bevan is still cracking along doing the trapping, with the island remaining quiet. With the extra baits on the buffer, hopefully more rats are getting nailed before they reach the island. One of his interesting catches this month was a very small weasel, less than 100mm. If we are getting them this small it's definitely a good thing. He is still nailing a few rats on the buffer showing how relentless they are and how we must always be vigilant with the buffer.
- We occasionally have mammalian incursions on the island and this month there were a couple of interior woolly pests. Just before I went on holiday the whole flock of 7 sheep managed to escape the ruins. They proved hard to catch and it took a couple of days to round them up. Later trail camera footage showed them relaxing at the petrel station. Who can really blame the woolly beggars for wanting a holiday around the island.



**This is what sheep get up to when nobody is watching.
By the look on its face I think the one on the left has just told a good joke,
“ did ya hear the one about the Ozzie sheep”...**

- I have run another round of tracking tunnels to see if I am getting on top of the mouse problem. Even though there were definitely fewer than before, I was disappointed to see tracks in a couple of the stations. I have been replacing the bait regularly in these spots and with the lack of other food around think, hopefully, I will be on top of them soon. At the SONZI workshop mice kept popping up in discussions as a big problem with some projects giving up on them to concentrate on the bigger picture.
- When I was in Auckland I was lucky enough to be able to top up our bait supply from the great team and long-time island supporters, Rentokil Initial. Maihi Cooper is our contact at the company and again came through with just the product I required. Not only did he stock up our standard island bait supply, but he also gave me some super baits to nail any mice that may be left after the current blitz.. Frank Visser from Key Industries supplies Rentokil Initial with the bait and this continued support is crucial in our programme to keep rodents from invading Matakoho–Limestone Island. If you have any pest problems contact the team at [Rentokil Initial](#), they are always happy to help and one step ahead of the pests!



**The man with more than another year's supply of bait,
holding a super bait.
Thanks Maihi, and the team at Rentokil**

General

- My week off was filled with moments of relaxation interspersed with a bit of maintenance. My own little launch required the replacement of its gearbox and fizz boat some new cables and trailer. I also did a bit of fishing, played golf and went hiking through some darker more mature forest than can be found at home (the island).
- I gave a talk to the Maunu Garden Club up at the Vintage Car Club this month. They were an attentive audience and, as with most groups, were surprised by all the projects happening on the island. I am amazed at the number of garden clubs around town, most having quite high patronage. I always try to push for our native plants in these talks but it is a hard uphill battle.
- Another couple of talks I gave were, one to the Ornithological Society and one to the gardening section of the Kamo Club. These I particularly enjoyed as there were a few familiar faces in the groups. At the Kamo Club I caught up with my old head chef, Bob who now runs the kitchen at the Club. I got a nice koha from both these places and it is always great to be able to promote Matakoho–Limestone Island.
- The Pou palisade fence, soon to be constructed, is a step closer with a few keen individuals selecting and trimming some of the totara stakes. Rachel and Neville Wilson kindly donated these materials to the island, having a handy stand of totara that required thinning. They were hoping to use this as a production forest in the future but are now moving to greener pastures.
- The annual Sanctuaries of New Zealand Incorporated Workshop was held this month and the first one I have been able to attend since starting on Matakoho-Limestone. This conference was great with a whole heap of like-minded people from all around the country. I was also able to catch up with a number of familiar faces from other projects. It constantly amazes me the passion of conservation people, with reports and new technology featuring high on the list of discussions. The SONZI workshop was held near the beautiful spot that is the Waitakere Ranges. These conferences are usually accompanied by field trips and this one was no exception with a jaunt into the fabulous Ark in the Park, magic.

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 7th October.** Pick-up at 9.00 am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2.00 pm. Hopefully the petrel burrows are all finished so we can move on to something else!
- We have a kiwi release coming up on 11 November so will have to get cracking and scoop up a couple of teenagers for that. If you want to see a real Matakohē-Limestone Island kiwi come along. The event will be held on the grass area next to the Onerahi Yacht Club.

Hei konei ra
Bernie



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