



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report January – February 2016

The cicadas are chirping, the water is almost tepid and it's a fabulous time to be on Matakohē-Limestone Island in Northland, the best place in the world.

The petrel chicks have gradually disappeared into the wild blue yonder with the last one hanging around until 17 January.

I was privileged to be involved in this amazing and satisfying long-term programme, the experience is unique and will no doubt help me in my future in conservation. In the two years I have been involved 74 additional chicks have fledged from here. This brings the number of chicks that have fledged from the island to a grand total of 226. Again we would like to thank the huge number of supporters who have made this possible. This amazing project would not have been possible without the committee who initialised the plan, other organisations involved, (Iwi and DOC), the burrow builders, track cutters, metal/shell carriers, finders, 'measurers', collectors, skippers, feeders, and all the helpers - wow!



**One of the beautiful Grey Faced Petrels.
Oi, what are you lookin' at?**

Visitors and Volunteers

- A cracker group of home-schooled kids bowled up to the boat ramp on a clear, hot Wednesday ready for a bit of education and day on the island. There were 41 in this group with a number of parents coming along to help out. These 'home-schoolers' had a bit of a treat with one of our resident island kiwi's (Sir Ed) six-monthly biometrics and transmitter switch due. Emma, an ex-DOC kiwi ranger changed his transmitter. I watched her and even though she said she was a bit rusty, she showed how it was done. We then went for a walk around the rest of the island



A bunch of home-schooled kids with a real live wild kiwi (Sir Ed)

- On a fine clear evening the island was inundated with a crazy group of keen running drinkers - or is that drinking runners - the notorious Hash House Harriers. Matakoho–Limestone did not know what hit it and the obligatory run/walk was finished with a swim and BBQ. This annual island event has proved to be great fun with a generous donation gratefully accepted.
- I had the pleasure of the company of a couple, Dakota (conservation student) and Travis from Florida on Matakoho for a day. They proved to be very useful placing cards in the tracking tunnels all around the island. Three nights later I retrieved these and was pleasantly surprised at the lack of mouse tracks. If you have been reading previous reports you will know I have had mice showing up in the last two rounds of tracking tunnels. Was this an incursion or explosion of a small island population? A bit of both I think, as there was a huge inundation of mice on nearby Rabbit Island at the time. A concerted poisoning effort seems to have knocked these pesky critters back; shows just how vigilant you have to be.
- More than 20 wonderful regular volunteers came over on our volunteer Wednesday. This mainly regular group of keen girls and guys carried out some fantastic work and we got heaps done. We ripped apart the old bags up at the petrel station and further weatherproofed the burrows. The gate was installed and a sign reinstalled in the area making it safer. Others bagged up the salted rabbit, trimmed flax from the tracks, arranged the pou palisade poles and, of course, there was the obligatory beach clean-up. The fisher folk from the west coast did not catch much but dealt to a good few thistles. One catch worth mentioning was before they came over to the island. While on the Onerahi wharf Peter was hauling in what he thought was a snag but turned out to be a 22 rifle attached to the end of his line. The police were quickly called and it was whisked away. Has to be one of the most unusual catches.



That's a funny looking fish.

- We have had a few Adopt a spotters over. Carol, Mike, Sharon, Steve, Dwane, the Girls group and Anne-Marie have all been over tending to their spots, legends! The main work is attacking the weeds and releasing the natives at their spots. Check out the adopt-a-spot stuff on the [Matakoho–Limestone website](#) under the 'News' heading. I took the opportunity to do a bit of weed spraying in one adjacent spot dealing to a few nasties. The periwinkle, moth plant, Taiwan cherry and ivy are rampant in this bird roosting area behind the ruins.
- Members of the Otaika Garden Club came over to the island on what was another hot sunny day. I grew up in Otaika so found some familiar faces among the crew. I had given an off-island talk to these guys at my old school hall at Otaika and at that time invited them over to the island. They also had a special treat as Kahui Whetu was due for her six-monthly biometrics and for a new transmitter to be attached. We strolled all over the island with some commenting they had never walked so far in their lives, he-he! They all seemed to enjoy the day and had some amazing memories to take home. Cheers fellow 'Otaikaians'.
- I had a visit from some distant family, my dad's cousin and his kids and partners from Switzerland. These guys not only had a fabulous island BBQ with salads made by mum but they also had the luck to see a kiwi chick that was about to be released on the island.
- Another couple of visitors to the island, were the local GIS Department of Conservation specialist, Gisleine and her mate, both from Brazil. I picked up these two just on dusk and we went for a walk around the island looking for some of our fabulous fauna. We spotted some kiwi from small chicks to one teenage one that could come off soon. The two girls had a great time even spotting a pacific gecko before they left.

- Poor old Murray from Northland ParkCare popped over all on his lonesome. Andrew who usually comes with him has damaged himself and is on light duties. This meant I had to pitch in giving the loop track a trim. Murray is a bit of a legend getting around the edge of whole island on a stinky hot day.

Kiwi

- We had another wonderful kiwi release on 3 February at McLeod Bay, Whangarei Heads. This necessitated another kiwi round-up with kiwi man, Todd Hamilton. We traipsed over the island and ended up splitting down two parallel tracks where I managed to nab an easy one. While I was processing this bird Todd caught another two nearby. It was an early day for me picking up Todd, Jack and Peter at 6:30 in the morning for the blessing of the kiwi at the Yacht Club on the Onerahi foreshore with Te Parawhau kaumātua, Fred Tito and a small intimate crowd. The Whangarei Heads evening release was attended by over 280 people with many opportunities to see a wild kiwi.



That's a lot of people, they love their kiwi at Whangarei Heads

- One bit of sad news, Glen has given up on an egg he was sitting on, not that it was viable when I checked; poor bugger, all those hours wasted. After 79 days his transmitter signal told me he was no longer incubating so I went in for a look and found the dud egg. He was still there with the egg, hopefully he realises it's a dud and spends some more time eating some of those plentiful island invertebrates.
- You probably remember me mentioning Paul O'Shea and his wife Selina from Kiwi for kiwis who paid the island a visit at the end of last year. Paul promised to send me some new K4K 'No Dog' signs as he noted during his visit ours were looking a bit shabby. Naturally he delivered on his promise and the island is now ringed with the brighter more noticeable signs, thanks Paul and K4K.



**One of our new Kiwis for kiwi No Dogs signs.
Note the Fire Ban sign too!**

Predator Control

- Ngaire Tyson from Kiwi Coast and Landcare Trust has been busy collating the trapping data from all the various Kiwi Coast projects, prepare to be amazed!!!

Totals of animal pests trapped

52,091 last year

36,040 caught in 2014

24,971 caught in 2013,

Total of 113,102 pests

Fantastic stuff!

From our project last year

3 rats and 4 mice on the island

1 ferret, 14 stoats, 11 rats, 15 mice and

4 hedgehogs on the buffer

126 rats, 74 mice and 18 hedgehogs from

Onerahi - Michelle and Ross, a great job thanks!

- Bevan has been over, trapping away and coming up with the results - a naughty old rat on the Onerahi end of the island. This pest must have been caught pretty quickly as I saw no other evidence on the beaches or the other sand tracking areas. He also got a rat on the Matakoho side of Rabbit Island (a first for me), next stop would have been here!
- The guys at Northland Seed and Supplies have been collecting rabbits for the island stoat traps again so I promptly picked and chopped them up, and salted them. Many people are more than generous with dead bunnies and they are always appreciated. This means one less job I have to do and that's good. Cheers guys.

Flora and Fauna

- Cathy Mitchell (Head 'Petrelhead') has put a few remarkable petrel stats together:

Year	Transfer Date	Number of chicks transferred	Number of chicks fledged	Percent fledged	Fledge weight (grams)	Fledge wing (mm)	Median fledge date	Median days on MLI
2004	Dec 1 st	40	28	70	531	312	Dec 26 th	26
2005	Dec 3 rd	31	26	84	498	311	Dec 31 st	28
2006	Dec 8 th	40	39	97	516	314	Dec 29 th	21
2007	Dec 15 th	22	21	95	538	317	Jan 4 th	24
2008	Dec 5 th	41	38	93	541	316	Dec 28 th	24
2014	Dec 11 th	28	27	96	522	311	Jan 6 th	25
2015	Dec 9 th	48	47	98	536	317	Jan 5 th	26

The table shows a summary of the data from the seven-year Matakoho–Limestone Island petrel programme

- As mentioned earlier, the cicadas over here are absolutely nuts, their incessant calling as soon as the temperature reaches the right degree is deafening. Their kamikaze flight (usually at your head) makes traversing the tracks around the island extremely hazardous. I will have to take to wearing goggles and a hard hat to keep OSH happy. Be aware of these little missiles when you come over and get ready to do the island cicada dance; left-duck-left-dodge-jump-right-left-right.
- Our white oystercatcher is hanging around the sand spit almost all the time. This would be a cool attraction at the birdwatching shelter we are looking at building out there. Hopefully Lucy will have some leucistic (the white colour) offspring and provide another unique Matakoho–Limestone Island attraction.
- I have been carrying out a bit of flax relocation taking it with the front-end loader from problem areas next to tracks and dumping it in hard rocky places. I have found that even if I dump it on almost rock it firstly almost dies back but then grows from the pile of roots/dirt and vegetative matter. This kills two birds with one stone, not that I think you should be killing birds with stones!

General

- We accumulate a huge amount of rubbish on the island and even though I recycle as much as possible the amount that washes up is unreal. We are constantly picking up stuff when walking around and even on neighbouring islands when there. What is disheartening to see is the years of rubbish collected in the mangroves over at Knight and Rat Island, a job for someone perhaps? I took a truck load into town and it came to six huge garden sacks, it was piled up pretty high.
- With the petrels gone and the feeding done the cabin is now back to its previous use - accommodation. I am really going to miss the mix of smells, the sardine smoothies and Milton's antibacterial tablets, most memorable. This required the packing up and storage of a huge amount of gear and a thorough cleaning. With the petrel station now empty we have been giving it a tidy up to make it as attractive as possible to any returning birds.
- We were able to pick up the totara poles that were generously donated to the island some time ago. A group of us grabbed them one Friday evening from Parua Bay. French visitor, Nico and I then dunked them in the tide (more biosecurity) the next day and transported them to the island. These poles will be attached to a fence radiating out from the pou, finishing the area off. Nico then went for a fish and managed to get half a dozen good snapper off the wharf.
- A huge amount of data to process this month, not only all the boat stuff, trap data, visitor data but kiwi data as well. I had to juggle around the eight kiwi I had to monitor this month as well. There were the three for the upcoming release, the three monitored island birds, one rehab bird and one island born bird. Fortunately they all proved not too difficult to find.
- Since Christmas the growing conditions have been phenomenal with massive patches of hot, warm weather and the occasional bit of rain. This has meant not only is my garden flourishing, but the island's plants are as well! Because of all this growth – and as you have heard before - mowing, mowing and yet more mowing! With a concentrated effort from me (tractor and weed-eater), Dave (tractor) and Muzza (weed-eater) we have been keeping the hay at bay.
- The lovely long evenings have enabled me to get out amongst the various fish whilst carrying out some buffer work. I have been netting for mullet and spearing for flounder without much luck. The snapper fishing has been better, but even this is patchy.
- It has been hot, hot, hot and with the fire season upon us I have given the fire gear a once over and cleaned and maintained anything that needed it. All this hot weather means obligatory swims at every possible opportunity, mmm island life.
- The Polaris has had its first 50-hour service with a couple of teething problems sorted before they could become a greater issue. I cut up the old tray liner from the old Suzuki making one for the Polaris and had enough left over to make some floor mats. This vehicle is a great asset to the island with its bigger wheels, higher ride height and ability to go most places in one wheel drive!
- I have been refurbishing the traps around the island and on the buffer, replacing anything dodgy and putting new netting on and re-nailing the boxes. This maintenance of the traps to a meticulous level is very important to overcome trap shyness. Like I tell the kids, we need to kill the pests the first time they encounter a trap and you can only do this with a well-functioning trap.

Upcoming

- I have the lizard monitoring coming up soon which is always one of the highlights of the year. I did not get any mouse tracks in the latest round of tracking tunnels but the lizard sign was outstanding. Hopefully this means a good breeding season for them which the monitoring should show. Some flash lizard photos and a summary next month, let's hope some of the new artificial cover objects (ACO's) for monitoring the geckos prove effective.

- The Kiwi for kiwis funding application is looming so will have to be sorted, no doubt with the help of some wonderful committee members.
- Volunteer Wednesday – 2nd March. Pick up at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. Rabbit Island is covered in the white flowers of our favourite friend, the moth plant, so tides depending, a few people may go over there.

Hei konei ra
Bernie



Proudly supported by; Environmental Northland, Forest Floor Nursery, Harbour Marine Ltd, Marine North Ltd, Northpower, Northland Port Corp, Northland Regional Council, North Tugz, Onerahi Lions, Phoenix Boats, Red Bull Powder Co., Tawapou Nursery.

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