



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report December 2016

**Masses of visitors, giant new cement carrier, animal rescues, historic kumara and Season's Greetings to the Friends of Matakohē-Limestone Island. The last month has been pretty busy on and off the island as Christmas approaches. We have been graced by a period of calm weather and warm water, but could do with some rain as we come into the dry season on the island.**

### Visitors and Volunteers

- Last month was a huge one for tours of the island. We had classes from Onerahi Primary, Glenbervie Primary, Horahora Primary, Tikipunga High and Blomfield Special School. The Horahora students from Room 20 came out to do some weeding and releasing of trees they planted in their adoptaspot in June. It was great to see the kids reconnect with their special part of the island and get stuck in to the weeding. Last month we reported that Glenbervie Primary had donated their fundraising from their Save the Kiwi Month to the island so we were pleased to be able to bring them out and say thanks in person. During one of the Glenbervie trip days another 40 people came over to plant kumara on the island - more than 300 children and adults visiting the island via Petrel Tua Toru so far this month.



Onerahi students at lunch



Tiki students in da (Manager's) house



Hora Hora students Adoptaspot weeding



Blomfield students explore Shipwreck Bay

- We really enjoyed our day with the Blomfield students, although it was not without challenges. We take our hats off to the staff/carers for attempting a difficult outing and to the students for making it over and enjoying the island so enthusiastically. We look forward to seeing you again next year.
- We also had a huge last Volunteer Wednesday for 2016; two boatloads came over including the Usual Suspects and a number of tourists from overseas keen to enjoy a unique local experience. Volunteers undertook an array of tasks, including getting the Hill track trimmed and ready to be driven over now that it has dried out; re-creating the view points and light wells for the bird water feeders on the Loop track that had been overtaken by vegetation growth; a few important fix-it jobs around the ruins; moving the remains of the limestone mound from near the top of the hill track; weeding mex from the Petrel Station, and sorting and storing the fencing posts and battens under the macrocarpas (Ken Massey came to organise this and with the help of a couple of young French volunteers did a great job – thanks guys.)
- Ken Massey was here another day with his mate Tim and our regular volunteer Anna to do the shearing of our woolly lawnmowers at the ruins and kindly took care of de-fleecing Lambykins at the same time. It was interesting getting the sheep into their temporary shearing room at the Singlemen's Quarters. They certainly weren't keen at first, but with Ken running the show, Emma, Anna, Charlie and Quincy doing the leg work and Tim waiting with the gate to trap them, it all came together in the end. They all look a lot more comfortable in this heat without their thick winter coats. Dave also came over to mow the north side tracks and baitlines before a well-earned summer cruise – have fun Dave!
- We also enjoyed watching the passing of the "Aotearoa Chief", GBC Winstone's new cement carrier, coming into the Portland wharf (for which there was a seemingly endless supply of barges to dredge the channel over the last few months). The ship made a spectacular exit last Sunday, enlivened by the presence of a small boat anchored in the channel to fish, and which appeared to be unaware of the rules of the sea pertaining to responding to repeated requests by ship's horn to indicate intent.



## Predator Control

- Numbers of trapped pests on the buffer islands continue to increase, with rats and stoats in the main and the island itself remaining pest free.
- They are not exactly predators but we have had a semi-regular issue since we arrived with two of the sheep getting out (or sometimes all the sheep getting out when people leave the gate open at the pontoon.... this gate is now locked!). We have had sorting the fence on our radar for months but it had to be moved up the priority list when we found the fully weaned, half-grown lamb that was supposed to be serving the island by joining the flock and eating grass, was more intent on getting out through the fence, eating the vege garden, and pooing on the deck. We have cleared the vegetation off the fence where it had popped quite a few staples, re-attached the loose battens, added extra battens in places, and added extra wires to a section of fence that only had six wires. So far, so good, and no sign of woolly visitors to the Rangers' house.

## Flora and Fauna

### Plants

The planting of heritage kumara on the island led by Freddie Tito, took place on 22 November. As noted above, Emma and Jono were busy with a school group for most of the day so Dwane Kokich and Pam Stevens took over management of the logistics for the event (thanks guys).

This is the first time local Maori have cultivated kumara on the island for a long time, certainly more than a hundred years and there has been a huge amount of subsequent interest thanks to spots on Maori TV, National Radio and the Northern Advocate/NZ Herald and Stuff. You can read more below:

<http://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/article.cfm>

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/northland/87010625/Kumara-return-to-Matakohe-Limestone-Island>



We continue to give them a little drink of water from time to time and despite the dry and an initial pukeko onslaught, new shoots are popping up and they appear to be thriving in the island's warm soil.

The island has some stunning examples of pohutukawa in flower at present, with the one near Petrel's berth a notable example. It is wonderful to see the patches of red popping up on the island from the water, and good to know there will be more and more of this over time as the forest matures.

The grass keeps on growing and needs regular mowing. It is now completely dry so no need to worry about muddy patches and sliding the tractor around the hills, but now we are limited by the dry conditions and need to pick our days for mowing and scrubber work when the risk of fire is low. We are appreciating Pagey's regular updates and explanations as we get to grips with the Fire Weather System software which provides guidance on fire risk.

Our regular volunteer Anna had previously taken some *Hibiscus richardsonii* seeds with her to try to grow some in her shadehouse at home. She had great success, and after the necessary quarantine brought 60 big seedlings back to the island. We planted them along the School Track with mixed success. Some are looking very happy with their new home, but a combination of the dry, some curious pukeko, and a naughty (ex) escapee lamb have meant some did not fare so well.

In the interests of keeping the island free of *Pinus* pests we elected to make use of a local specimen as a Christmas tree. A small karo, foolishly and inconveniently growing out from under the deck at the backdoor was gently excavated and re-potted to serve as our festive floral piece. It will be released back into the wild in January.



### **Kiwi**

Glen's latest egg hatched without incident, despite nesting within the area of the Visitors' Shelter during a time of heavy use. The single chick has been checked and 'transpondered'. A kiwi that Todd Hamilton brought to the island in September 2012 as a young chick from Riponui is due to be transferred off the island as we go to press. This is the same kiwi Emma encountered a few months back having a bit of biff with another kiwi near Badham's Knob. He was subsequently found on a nest so unable to be included in the last release. His nest was found late last week to have one dud egg, but there were also signs of positive hatch so it is likely there was a second egg that was successful. He has been named 'Kicker' by Todd and Ngaire Tyson from Landcare, and will be released at Tawapou on the Tutukaka Coast on 20 December. Sir Ed is on a new nest so we can expect even more chicks in the next few months.

### **Other Fauna**

We still have dotterel chicks at the sand barge, and now have a number of clutches of oyster catcher chicks of varying ages as well, and Caspian Tern chicks on Knight Island and the old wharf. There are also little black fluff-balls of young Banded rail and pukeko, super-friendly just-fledged piwakawaka and ever-hungry tui chicks.

We had to undertake a minor animal rescue at one point when a big spring tide and lots of flotsam trapped two oyster catcher chicks under the overhanging bank beside the sand barge. Emma was off the island but advised over the phone, Jono did the chick-spotting and deflected the angry parents, and quick-fingered and gentle-handed Charlie scooped the chicks out of the water and delivered them on to the bank. The parents were most ungrateful.

Coming up over the next month – spraying for next year's plants that are already being grown at Tawapou, and former Ranger Ben Barr is coming over for a visit with the kids so we will pick his brains about lizard monitoring and do some planning for a conference field trip in January for The Society for Research on Amphibians and Reptiles of New Zealand (SRARNZ). Bring on the Herpetologists!

### Charlie Chat

Two baby oyster catcher chicks were down at the beach and it was a very high tide. One of the chicks and two adults were at the top of the bank but two of the chicks were down at the bottom of the bank. We had checked out them earlier but there was still a bit of land, then we came back up to the house. Half an hour later we went to check them again and they were all soaked and in the water. We had to go right into the nesting area to rescue them. The adults were dive bombing us; dad's job was to keep them away while I got the chicks. I got hit a few times. The chicks were so fluffy and cute and they were doing little cheeps. They were all wet. It took a while to find them because they had gone under the overhang of the bank. One was in shallow water and the other had found a little rock to use as an island. I felt so happy after I rescued them and I wish I could do it a thousand million more times.

### Quincy Quote

Lamby got out of the ruins, which is a place on the island. We were fixing the fence one day and a little bird named Piwi the Piwakawaka came along and he liked us. And he landed on Charlies shoe, which is my brother.

### Finally

Don't forget to mark the date of the next **Volunteer Wednesday** on **11 January** (second Wednesday of January, this one), pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 0900 as usual.

...And

## Merry Christmas



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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