



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report March 2016

**Well, as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end and so it must be as my time on Matakohē-Limestone Island is up.**

I have enjoyed my time here immensely and, hopefully, have given as much to the island as it has given me. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with all the volunteers, visitors, committee members and all the great folk from other projects. My hat goes off to all of you. I will miss living on this island paradise and the transition back to the mainland will take a bit of getting used to.

I have no concrete plans at this stage, a big holiday followed by an exploratory/research trip around the country in a small bus, sounds good to me! I will be hanging around Whangarei for a while and will eventually end up working for conservation one way or the other, applying what I have learnt here (now if I could just buy an island).

Not to worry though, we have already started transitioning the new ranger into her role and she is currently undertaking a month-long boat course in Warkworth. I guess I could break the news that Emma, Jono, Charlie and Quincy Carpenter-Craig will be taking over as the new crew. Emma has worked for DOC in the past and Jono is a passionate archaeologist, so the island will be in their capable, experienced hands. Emma will be main ranger and Jono will be backing her up with junior rangers Charlie (7) and Quincy (3.7) helping out.

### Visitors and Volunteers

- I had the pleasure of visitors from the two ends of the spectrum this month. At the beginning of the month the Jensen 60+ group came for a walk around this beautiful island. They paid great attention during my conservation teachings and most of us even made it up to the Pa site. Then closing the month some little "tackers" in their fluorescent vests from NorthKidz paid the island a visit. Any complex conservation concepts would have gone over their heads, although the plentiful parents seemed to take it all in. You never know. Anyway, they had a great time checking out the skinks, weta and running around screaming.
- I had many other visitors with ex-ranger Ben Barr travelling over to show off the island to the first year students. They had a great lesson in this open air classroom, seeing weta, geckos and even a kiwi who was having his transmitter changed. Good old Glen showed his stuff for the excited students and I even had the pleasure of meeting the new member of the Northtec environmental team, tutor Emma Murphy.
- Most of the Adopt-a-Spot folk have been over this month with the Aye Aye Jay Jay, Steve's Patch, Carol & Mike's and The Girls Group all visiting and their spots getting some attention. I have halfway decided to adopt nearby Motutaua and have been destroying a heap of moth plants and other nasties there. I have not been alone in trying to put a dent in the weeds as haste was necessary with the white flowers quickly turning into seed pods. The moth plants there are crazy with wrist-thick adult vines and the forest floor carpets of seedlings in places. The result of these plants is a bunch of seed blowing to land over here.
- Volunteer day on the first Wednesday of the month was great with a full boat-load ready to tackle the various jobs I had lined up. Holes for the pou fence were dug and poles inserted. Even at this early stage they are looking great and really taking shape.

Our effervescent Onerahi trapper, Ross Mackenzie, had donated some refurbished school benches he rescued and we picked these up. Others collected seed from around Matakohe–Limestone which I will distribute on nearby Motutaua (out-compete those nasty moth-plants). Speaking of which, a small group of volunteers went and attacked the aforementioned weeds there. Janet and David Fellows, our fabulous regular summer UK visitors did a great job spraying the signs with moss and mould. Heather and Mailee did a great job picking up rubbish on one side of the island and Barry and Marie-Anne the other.

- Rooms seven and eleven from Waipu Primary visited the island on a couple of glorious days and we spent the day checking out some of the fabulous flora and fauna. The four boat-loads of students were fresh from school camp, lucky kids! I don't remember having a school camp at the beginning of the year.



**The little guys from rooms seven and eleven had a great time on Matakohe-Limestone Island!**

- Again this month the alternating hot fine periods followed by some good soaking rain has allowed for some phenomenal plant growth. This is great when it is one of our precious natives but when it is grass and weeds not so good! Murray and Andrew from Northland Parkcare were required over twice in quick succession. Legendary volunteer Dave has been over a couple of times to mow the forest of grass that was growing.
- Mailee, the DOC fairy tern ranger, kayaked over and spent the night on the island as the contract has finished for the year. She has been over a few times and seen much of the flora and fauna and proved pleasant company. The constant flow of volunteers and visitors is definitely one of the highlights of island life.
- A group from NorthTec will be coming over to the island with super environmental tutor, Dai. These keen guys and gals will be learning how to use the kiwi locating gear. As there are too many students and not enough gear, half will be giving me a hand. It has been almost three months since I carried out the last mouse bust and succeeded in getting a 0% tracking rate again. I will get the students to help me fill all the bait-stations on the north face.
- One of the highlights of the year is my annual talk at Merrivale Retirement Village. This great bunch of elderly folk love to hear all about the island and its progress. The real reason I like to go here is the fantastic hot lunch I get shouted. The old fellas who recognise me are great as well, always giving me a bit of stick.
- I was happy to show Janine Burns from Tauraroa Area School together with Gabby, a German student recruitment agent, around the island pointing out various volunteer opportunities. This may be a way to get some work done on the island and make use of some young German students during their gap year in New Zealand.

### **Flora and Fauna**

- As promised last month, I carried out most of the annual lizard monitoring over three sweltering days, with relatively predictable results. This is a big bonus to the job on Matakohe-Limestone Island, getting to handle and watch these amazing natives in their natural environment. The monitoring showed that the shore skinks are there in good numbers and the Moco skinks seem to be moving out from their release site with good numbers caught near the shoreline. The Ornate skinks are there but seem still to be in small numbers, or there may be another reason.



**One of our gorgeous Ornate Skinks (top) and a lovely Oligosoma moco**

- I have been seeing a lot of Banded rail around the island and even managing to get a close up look at a half grown chick that got stuck in my garden fence. Funnily enough I was checking out Ben and Jo's last Ranger Report and noted they had seen heaps around at this time of the year. They suspect that they were 'this year's young who haven't yet honed their sneaking ability to the impressive levels of their elusive parents'.
- The petrel station still is a never-ending project with ongoing work improving and developing the site. I have put more steps in and re-numbered the burrows so they are more user friendly and make sense. They have to be ready for the upcoming multitude of birds that will return and raise young this winter. The gate at the entrance is finally a bit more permanent keeping the public out during sensitive times.

## **Kiwi**

- As usual at this time of the year we have to apply for funding from Kiwis for Kiwi, who graciously fund some of the stoat trapping side of the programme. K4K is a long time sponsor of the island and we need all the help we can get dealing with the little killers. This funding helps us maintain the stoat traps to a great condition, keeping on top of any incursions and nailing heaps on the buffer.
- We have another kiwi release coming up after kiwi-man, Todd Hamilton and I spent the early part of one night catching a couple for this. Todd and I have really got this system sussed with the last couple of catches involving me catching the first one and then Todd bringing me others he has caught for processing. One of the kiwi we caught was already named wiggle (Ngairē), and the other, Steve.



**One of our great kiwi blessings**



## Predator Control

- Bevan has been busy trapping on the island and the buffer with action heating up as well as some unusual catches. He has been checking the buffer traps twice as often as usual with results proving this to be a worthwhile activity. We trapped another rat on Matakoho-Limestone at the Portland end of the island this month, showing that they can arrive easily from either side of the island.
- Interestingly we have been getting a few rats on Rabbit Island as well, which we never have before. We annihilated that mouse population last year and it seems more attractive for rats now as we have caught four there now! The two rats we caught on Matakoho-Limestone over the last two months seem to have arrived at peak tides continuing that trend. Other unusual finds of late included some "twofers" over at Onemama, a rat and a stoat and a stoat and a weasel in the double set DOC 200's.
- I have finally finished refurbishing all the DOC 200 traps we have on or around the island. There are 50 of these and 99% of them were in pretty good condition with most only needing the wire mesh to be replaced. These are all now in optimal catching condition so, hopefully, Emma will not need to do much maintenance to these for some time. The salt is very corrosive on these traps and we probably have to maintain them more often than most, but as the island is a kiwi crèche it is extra important that we keep the traps at 100%.

## General

As I am about to hand the island over to new rangers I want to leave everything in tip top condition.

- The barge has been getting a lot of attention this month, I pulled it out and gave it a thorough spring clean. I replaced the flares, fixed the lights, re-attached the battery box and got the life-rings some new name stickers. Not only did I have Steve Mabbet over for a two-yearly SSM inspection, but also Paul Buisson from Maritime NZ carried out a thorough audit of our systems. Emma also came over to do some training with me and on her own, getting familiar with the barge.
- The cabin and house-toilet roof have had urgent maintenance done, replacing the rotten wood and iron and filling holes. The island's tracks have had the once over as well with the hill track graded again and some limestone to be laid down soon. The hill track is starting to look really good so should just require regular maintenance. I have also created an improved herb garden as the old boxes had completely fallen apart.
- I took advantage of the "terrible drought conditions" to fill the water tanks so Emma and family will not run out of water.
- I have been doing a bit of flax translocation with some of the problematic stuff around the toilets getting "re-homed" at the top of the hill on the Onerahi side. This area is pure rock and I will be surprised if even this tough native survives there.
- Colin from Wormalds has been checking and replacing the island's fire extinguishers, a very important procedure. I take this opportunity to remind everyone again of the **complete fire ban on the island**. It would only take a fire 12 minutes to get from the bottom to the top of the island and not much anyone could do!
- On a lovely Sunday I managed to get in something I have been trying to do since I started working here, a fish with Todd. I was especially privileged here as Todd has recently purchased a newer, bigger boat and had already had some luck attracting some marlin into the lures. Unfortunately we did not hook up on a marlin-type fish but were content with some kahawai and a skipjack tuna. I had a great time meandering about the open ocean and we finished up with a swim at Smugglers.
- The island's dinghy has had a make-over, with holes welded up and the entire rear end strengthened. We were looking at getting a new dinghy but decided on saving a bit of money by welding up the old one and getting a couple of new trailers. Dave from Martin Wallace did a great job and it is now even dry for Emma and family.

- As I am soon to leave the island this requires one of the not so pleasurable activities, packing and cleaning. The dynamics of moving off an island are little more complicated than in most home moves - house – trailer – barge – truck – house, and the weather plays more of a part than normal as well.

### Upcoming

- The kiwi blessing at the Onerahi Waterfront may have already happened by the time this goes to press, it's on the 22nd March 9am at the Onerahi Yacht Club Pohutakawa tree, keep an eye on the island facebook page for more upcoming events.
- The regular Volunteer Wednesday will be held on 6 April, Emma and family will be well established by then and no doubt have a heap of jobs lined up. Make sure you write this date in your calendar and come and meet this great family.
- And with the onset of winter the cicadas have gone quiet, the days are getting shorter and so as I bid you all adieu, be reminded of the lyrics of a great song...you can check out of Matakohe-Limestone Island any time you like but you can never leave it... something like that anyway!

Cheers and thanks for all the fish.

Over and out



Ranger Bernie



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