



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report May 2016

It has been a busy month as your new Rangers, having got to grips with the boats, vehicles and house, start to get to grips with the island routine.

The unseasonably warm weather continues to be both a blessing and curse for life on the island. The sunny days continue to make for a pleasant working environment, provide power for the ranger station, and dry washing, but the vegetation growth continues apace. Grass growth around the Manager's House has meant almost weekly mowing and the weeds continue to flourish. On the plus side, the plantings are also flourishing and the cut grass is providing plenty of mulch for the orchard.

Visitors and Volunteers

- We had a fun but busy day at the end of April with forty kids from the Hopscotch School Holiday programme visiting during the recent break. Hopscotch usually programme a number of outings which typically include the Aquatic Centre, cinema and Kiwi North but this was the first time they had visited the island. Despite the windy conditions the kids had a great run around the island. The weta hotels, rounding up loose sheep at the ruins, and a quick game of Go-Home Stay-Home at the Manager's House while waiting for the Petrel-ride back to Onerahi proved to be trip highlights.



Fierce Go Home Stay Home

- We also had a fun and productive visit from 15 senior students from Matarau School north west of Kamo. The senior classes were participating in a volunteer day and we were lucky enough to get one group, while other students worked at the Whangarei Quarry Gardens and in the Pukenui Western Hills forest.

The kids cheerfully and enthusiastically applied themselves to the tasks of freeing up plantings behind the managers house and along the track to Shipwreck Bay, weeding around and cleaning out duff and muck from the Managers House and Singlemen's Quarters, and doing a beach cleanup of the entire coastline of the island.



We were actually surprised how little rubbish there was to collect! Former Ranger, Pete Mitchell made a real effort to collect rubbish from around the coastline during his tenure and following his initial efforts, surmised that a lot of what was once washed up on the island, being at the confluence of the major rivers (Hatea, Otaika, Mangapai) and major streams (Limeburners, Waimahanga, Waikaraka) used to regularly wash off again and circulate around the inner harbour. Once a concerted effort to remove rubbish from the island began, there was less in the local "rubbish ecosystem" and the island consequently sees much less flotsam and jetsam than it once apparently did

- We have had two very productive volunteer Wednesdays since the last monthly report, with the usual work of weeding and freeing up plants continuing and several one off projects finished or almost complete.
- Dwane has been managing the construction of a timber palisade running from the pou whenua into the Visitors' Shelter enclosure. Palings have been shaped up by hand and stapled with excellent results. Three bench seats have been installed above the beach in front of the visitors shelter, with views down the harbour, over the ruins, and towards the southern slope. The benches were retrieved by Ross McKenzie from a school when they were replaced. He did the necessary repairs, painted them and very kindly donated them to FOMLI to provide another pleasant spot to sit and enjoy the island.



Palisade fence and bench installation plus thistle grubbing by some small helpers

Predator Control

- The rat incursion mentioned last month seems to have been successfully dealt with. Bevan is still picking up a few mice on the island but other predators like rats and stoats are getting picked up in the buffer trapping. Emma has cured the pelt of the rat caught last month next to the ranger station to use as a teaching aid; it has come up quite nicely.

Kiwi

- Emma spent mother's day weekend helping with the kiwi round up at our fellow kiwi crèche Motuora near Kawau. A very tired Emma working on about one hour's sleep over two days returned at about 6.30 Sunday night, having helped Rolf Fuchs and other DOC staff and volunteers including Bernie Buhler move 12 kiwi from the island to bush managed by the Tanekaha Community Trust Pest Control Area north west of Hikurangi. Apart from the success of the kiwi transfer Emma was thrilled to manage a swim with a pod of dolphins who turned up off the beach and the arrival of a huge flock of fluttering shearwaters also added to the experience.
- The release of the kiwi was well-attended and emotionally charged and the success of the project speaks to the great effort and coordination across multiple stakeholders to get the job done.
- In related news, two island-bred kiwi and one Operation Nest Egg bird will be leaving the island soon. At this stage the birds will be coming off on Sunday, 29 May but check out the Matakohē Limestone Island Facebook page for details, as they are confirmed.

Flora and Fauna

- Late April saw the return of our wandering Oi, the grey-faced petrel. Three different individuals have returned to their burrows, and each bird has been found multiple times this season, and has been recorded in previous years too. The return of the birds this year has been earlier than in previous years, which is a positive sign for breeding.



Oi marked with Twink for identification

- We have observed a flock of up to 17 royal spoonbills making the most of low tide to feed on the mudflats on the northern side of the island. Likewise we have observed a banded rail making the most of our absence to explore the underside of our dining table, and suspect it of leaving presents for us on the kitchen floor.
- Dwane had noted an infestation of moth plant on the south west side of the island and having pointed it out to Emma, got stuck in along with Angela, Delice and Constance of the Aye Aye Jay Jay adoptaspot crew, Emma and the boys. After a first days crack at the massive vine, Emma, Jono and the boys returned to finish the job.

On the first visit Dwane and Emma could only see 2 pods but the final tally of a day and half's weeding was 183 seed pods retrieved, and a large number of young plants pulled. With up to 1000 seeds per pod, we have hopefully saved a huge amount of work down the line. The experience also provides an alternative career path as avocado pickers should the island ranger role not work out!



Counting coup in the war against moth plant

Other Activity

- We have taken delivery of a new trailer for the 13 foot dinghy, kindly arranged by Ken Massey and delivered and set up by Dwane Kokich. A second new trailer is now available on the mainland for when we leave the island for more than a few hours and tying up in the jetty is not a secure option.
- We have also received three licences for Arcgis Geographic Information Systems software from ESRI of Redlands California and their local distributor Eagle Technology in Auckland. Arcgis is the industry-standard software for map making and analysis and individual licences usually run to \$3000 each. Through ESRI's Conservation Grant Programme we have received perpetual licences for less than a 20th of that amount and with the assistance of Arwen Page are starting to move over our existing Google Earth kml files and unlinked spreadsheets of flora, fauna and trapping data into a geodatabase. Our thanks go to Nick Duke of Eagle Technology (www.eagle.co.nz) and Bonita Gaestro of GIS in Conservation (www.gicnz.org.nz) for their local support of our application and shepherding us through the process with ESRI.
- Emma and Charlie had an interesting couple of hours on the Petrel Tua Toru with engineers from Richardson Stevens doing some surveying of the sediments in the channel by the Portland cement wharf.
- We would also like to say a special thankyou to John Ward, Russell Watson of Northpower and Dave Liddington of Dave Liddington Electrical for the speedy assistance when the ranger station inverter cooked itself last month. John coordinated the effort, Russell provided a loaner inverter and Dave replaced the faulty equipment for us. John and Russell are continuing to assess our solar/battery set up in order to avoid future issues.

Odd Bits about Old Bits

- We had a positive island visit with Pam Bain and James Robinson from Heritage New Zealand. Along with raising the issue of the northern face of the island, we also talked about the management of the ruins and other sites of archaeological and historical significance on the island and balancing the competing interests.
- Continuing with the work started tidying up around the Manager's House by the Matarau School group, Jono assisted by Charlie and Quincy cleaned out two wheel barrow loads of duff, dirt, and droppings from the floor of the building over several days. The unseasonably warm and dry weather has been a boon to drying out the muck on the floors, particularly of the three bedrooms on the western side of the house (colloquially known to the boys as the "mud rooms" and previously utilised by them for the purposes of off-road toy car driving). Occasional sweeping of the house while it remains dry will hopefully avoid the build-up that accrued during the busy island handover period, and assist with the preservation of the building.

- Not so Thick as a Brick

There are a plethora of different bricks around the cement work ruins, some are fire bricks for kilns and some are building bricks but all have a story tell about the history of the island (although some more so than others). Check out the full article on the website www.limestoneisland.org.nz

Charlie Chat

- Charlie did some maths as part of his schoolwork, based on the number of moth plant pods removed recently, and the number of seeds within each pod (250-1000). The maximum number of seeds removed in the recent moth plant bust was 183,000. He calculated it only takes 2 seconds to pull a weed but if all those seeds had germinated we would be looking at 366,000 seconds or 101.6 hours to just pull that many baby moth plants, excluding the time taken to find them, bag them and move on to the next one.

Quincy Quote

- We checked on the petrel burrows and the petrel was scared and it bit mumma and she said "Owwwww" really loud. The boy petrel will find a girl petrel and go into their burrows and make a snuggly home and have a baby petrel.

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday, 1 June.** Pickup 9 a.m. At the jetty and return 2 p.m.



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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