



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report June 2016

### **Winter has arrived with icy blasts, rainy days, and an abundance of rats.**

The long run of warm weather appears to have finished, heralded by several weeks of howling westerlies followed by still, sunny but cold days and just a little rain. We have broken out our thermals and are spending more time in our gumboots than our jandals. The grass and weeds appear to be slowing down but the work doesn't, as the rat-friendly summer and autumn see an increase in rodent visitors to the island and new moth plants continue to be discovered.

### **Visitors and Volunteers**

- **Bush Buddies**

We had our first visit from a group of preschoolers, 20 tots and parents from the Bush Buddies home-based childcare provider. Being aware of wee ones' abilities we didn't try to drag them all over the island but let them have a good run around the Manager's House, followed by a talk about trap and bait station safety led by Charlie and Quincy, and an introduction to one of our dead ratty visitors. We then walked the kids (slowly!) up to the school site and talked about piwakaka and why they follow us around so closely, down to the weta hotel where again, Charlie took the lead on weta habits and anatomy (and their roommates, the cockroaches). The kids had a big play in the sun and Shipwreck Bay and then explored the cement works' ruins and met the sheep. The little legs and the bodies they were attached to all handled the day very well and we look forward to seeing Kia and her little crew again in the future.

- **Wednesday Volunteers**

Another solid day's work was put in by the Wednesday volunteers. A vast load of moth plant pods and seedlings was cleared from near the Singlemen's Quarters, and near the bottom of the "Ski Slope" track at the opposite end of the island. We are probably approaching having removed 1000-odd moth plant pods and several thousand seedlings over the last month and continue to discover or rediscover more problem areas. The drains behind the Ranger Station and along the walking tracks were cleared out in advance of the winter rains, and the increasing pile of rubbish from beach cleanups and other activities has been sorted by type in advance of removing it all from the island.

- We also had visits from two adoptaspot volunteer groups, Aye Aye Jay Jay and the Katie's Girls Group, and three teens from Whangarei Boys High School doing a service day as part of their business studies course. Andrew and Murray from Northland Parkcare came over to do the tracks and everything is looking very tidy at the moment

### **Predator Control**

- Predators continue to be caught in the buffer traps including rats, stoats, mice and hedgehogs, and rats continue to make their way over to the island (and straight into the trap next to our compost bin). Looking back through the trapping data collected over the years, the number of rats caught on the island this autumn seems to be unprecedented. Autopsies continue to suggest that no breeding age females are getting over and we continue to trap young males and a single young female which hadn't bred.



**Emma and the boys autopsy a stoat caught on Rat Island**

## **Flora and Fauna**

- **Petrels**

Petrel activity continues to be low. The birds are still visiting on the basis of feathers and droppings but there have been no encounters with birds this month.

- **Kiwi**

We were pleased with the result of the well-attended kiwi send off on 29 May, a coordinated effort by Kiwi Coast, DOC, Landcare and ourselves. Emma, Bernie and Todd Hamilton successfully uplifted two kiwi, Manu Waimarie and Huripara, with a third prospect for removal, Tuporo having been found on an egg and left to get on with it. Manu Waimarie and Tuporo were named by sponsors CHH Wood Products NZ Ltd, with their Ruakaka LVL team and Whangarei Sawmill team picking the respective names. Huripara was named by Kiwi Coast.

About 40 people attended the birds' arrival from the island at the old Onerahi boat ramp, including visitors from Japan and some indigenous Australian guests, and representatives of CHH Wood Products NZ. Freddy Tito continues to provide awesome support in sending the birds off in a tika fashion, while Emma and Todd tag-teamed the education and advocacy speechifying. Then the birds and their support staff moved up to Mt Tiger Road where approximately 60 people turned up to meet the birds and talk about pest control, before the kiwi were taken up to the release site at Tanekaha, north west of Hikurangi.



**Emma shows off Manu Waimarie the Kiwi, bound for Tanekaha.**

- We have been hearing and encountering kiwi close to the house most nights, particularly in the plantings behind the office and around the toilet. Having become somewhat inured to the excitement of seeing kiwi in the process moving around between the island, the Whangarei Kiwi Sanctuary sites and the Auckland Zoo over the last decade, seeing the birds wandering around the grass under red torchlight right behind our home is quite affecting.
- The spoonbills mentioned in an earlier report are still regularly encountered while feeding on the mudflats near the old sand barge at low tide, with two groups of five and four respectively most recently observed. We have also transferred and released a cormorant called Mr Paddlefoot on behalf of the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre. Paddlefoot had become imprinted on humans during his time at the Recovery Centre and required some encouragement to take up with his fellows, and is now a regular at the old sand barge too.
- **Plants**  
On 12 June we moved 1400 plants over to the island for this season's planting programme. Dwane and Angela Kokich, Jerry Pauli and Ken Massey helped with the loading and terrestrial transportation from Matapouri to Onerahi, with Pam and Grant Stevens, Derek Bettesworth, and Donna Stuthridge joining in to help get the plants on and off Petrel Tua Toru and up to the Manager's House lawn (if I have missed someone, apologies!). Guy and Sandra Bowden and the team at Tawapou Coastal Natives (<http://www.tawapou.co.nz>) nursery have done a fine job raising the plants for us in advance of this year's planting and the weather was exceedingly cooperative, unlike last year.



**Plants ahoy!**

- It is so great for our boys to see volunteering in action and we are looking forward to getting these plants in the ground. Two classes from Onerahi Primary School will get the ball rolling on 24 June and on Sunday 26 June we have our public planting day as part of the Whangarei community's roster of Matariki Festival events - see the events notice on the island Facebook page for more info or check out some other great events at <http://www.venuesandeventshangarei.co.nz/Whats-On/Pages/Matariki-Festival-Events.aspx>

### **Odd Bits about Old Bits**

- Papers past (<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>) is a wonderful resource for students of New Zealand history, and those just wanting to delve into local, personal or matters of historical interest. It is a product of the National Library of New Zealand and contains digitized copies of dozens of historic New Zealand newspapers, all searchable in the usual manner by key words and phrases.

There are hundreds of articles on Paperspast about Matakoho-Limestone Island, a resource not available to Tim Clark when he wrote the book "More than Just a Little Island". For that reason I will occasionally include stories that might be otherwise unknown to friends of the island, featuring perhaps a little more blood and guts, social history and commentary.

One story I have related several times to visitors recently involved an unpleasant incident which occurred in 1898. In February of that year, a passing boat with a Maori family stopped on the island to procure water. While the adults talked on the beach, a 13 year old Maori girl called Mary Hona Te Horo was sent to fetch the water, and in doing had a verbal altercation with several island children. On returning with her brimming billy, one of the island boys threw a filched detonator at her. It exploded, shattering her hand and causing other injuries to her chest and face. Her hand was amputated at the hospital in Whangarei, but apparently she survived. She was the daughter of Hona Te Horo, Chief of Mangapai and a Justice of the Peace (On further reading, Hona Te Horo was a great friend to the European settlers of the Mangapai River, including Ebenezer Carter, the Great Great Grandfather of long-serving MP and Far North Mayor John Carter). You can read the full story here, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=NA18980305.2.28&srpos=3&e=-1898-1898-10-1-0Limestone+island+accident->

Life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as through much of history, was dangerous. Drowning was so common it was known as "the New Zealand Death". Dis'eases treated with antibiotics today were a death sentence, and there was no OSH or Department of Labour to address safety issues on farms or factories. For children life was especially fraught, and living on an industrial island apparently brought its own unique risks to inhabitants and visitors.

### **Volunteer Wednesday**

6 July. 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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