



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report July 2016

Another busy month on the island, with lots of visitors, volunteers and planting. The rat incursions of recent months appear to have tailed off, and the westerlies are cutting up rough.

Visitors and Volunteers

- It has been a busy month for visitors as groups have come over to plant and/or take in an island visit before the weather really turns sour. As well as the regular Wednesday volunteers we have had another 180-odd visitors over the course of one public planting day, visits from Onerahi and Horahora Primary Schools, friends from Ngunguru, some tramping grannies and FOMLI Chair Pam Stevens' walking group touring the island and putting spades in the ground. More about that in the item on planting below. Kurt, Max and Max from Whangarei Boys' High also returned for a second visit to tackle some moth plant for us.
- Russell Watson has continued to assist us with issues with our solar power set up, along with Dave Liddington of Liddington Electrical, most recently replacing the fried solar charge controller which mediates charging the batteries from the solar panels when there is enough sun. Both have been quick to respond and attend to problems, including the provision of some temporary backup batteries as the main batteries were taken off for testing, and FOMLI's John Ward continues to support us from a distance while he is travelling.
- We are now also looking forward to weekly visits from NorthTec Environmental Studies students in term three to help us with the work on the island, and have had an application for a day's work from BNZ "Closed for Good" volunteer programme approved for next month.

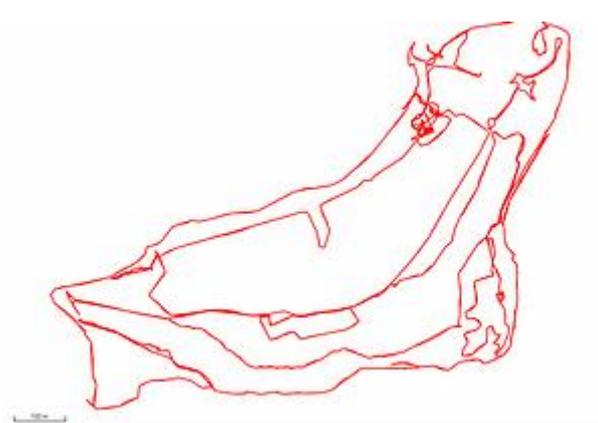
Predator Control

- The numbers of predators caught on the island and buffer traps are now decreasing as the weather has turned and the available food supply dries up. There have been no predators caught on the island in the last two weeks, and only two weasels in the buffer traps, on Knight Island. Emma has set up the tracking tunnels for indexing over the last couple of days which have been windy but helpfully dry (results in next month's report) and the bait stations on the southern half of the island have been refreshed (thanks to some help from Bevan and Bernie). We are running very low on bait supplies but are in contact with Rentokil Initial who will hopefully sort us out to get us through the next 12 months - much appreciated.
- We were very fortunate to have a day's assistance from DOC predator dog handler, Miriam Ritchie and her hairy, four-legged colleagues Moss and Will, to help assess the recent rat incursion on the island. Miriam's visit was kindly supported by DOC and its local Operations Manager, Geoff Woodhouse.

Miriam and the dogs, accompanied by Charlie, covered 13kms of ground as they walked the dogs around the island to search out rodent sign. The great news is that rat sign was only found in one area, the vege garden/compost bin (this is also where the majority of rats have been trapped). It obviously would have been better to have found no rat sign, but at least we know what we are dealing with. Apart from indicating some recent mouse activity on the ridge track, they found nothing else during their extended ramble around the island.



Miriam, dogs, boys



GPS track log of Miriam, Charlie and dogs on their 13km rat hunt around the island

Flora and Fauna

- Planting

This year the focus of planting has been consolidating some existing areas that are already under a canopy of older colonisers and adding some more sensitive species beneath, as well as a few exposed areas which are still a bit bare. This year, as well as fertilizer tablets we are trialing water crystals to see if that improves survivorship over the dry summers the island experiences. Fertiliser and water crystals were provided at a generous discount by the Whangarei Hortcentre on Porowini Ave.

Plants have been planted apace over the last month, kicking off with a hiss and a roar as almost seventy children, teachers and parents from Onerahi Primary School planted kohekohe, houpara and rewarewa on the slope above the hill track beneath the kanuka.

A public planting day attended by about thirty hardy volunteers attacked the area between Badham's Knob and the school site with a similar mix of species, with more plants added by Horahora School, which has an adopt-a-spot in the area. Some more hardy mountain flax were added to the rim of the northern quarries. A dozen friends from Ngunguru assisted with planting on a bare patch of the northern coastline near the Edge House ruins with kanuka, and Pam Stevens and her walking group visited twice to plant along the Loop Track and northern quarry, and since the last Ranger Report the Wednesday volunteers have also focused on getting trees in the ground.



Happy volunteers, happy trees

- Weeds

We are continuing to find moth plant in several areas and are dealing with them as we find them, and several large pampas have been dug out of the slopes above the ruins.

- Kiwi

Tuporo and Sir Ed are both sitting on nests at the moment with Tuporo on two eggs. The male kiwi incubate the eggs for a relatively long time (usually around 80 days), so we will have to wait a while to see any chicks, but we will keep you posted. Emma has also encountered a new young island-bred male kiwi at the Petrel Station. He has now had a microchip inserted and a transmitter attached and will be relocated to the mainland at a later date. He was re-found in a different petrel burrow about a week after the first time. It was good to have the opportunity to see that his transmitter band was looking good, his microchip insertion had healed, and the whole experience clearly hadn't put him off petrel burrows!

- Petrel

We are still getting positive signs of visits from petrels but have had no confirmed sightings this month and no eggs. The burrows are still being checked regularly, and even though the petrels aren't using them as much as we would like, they are still well used by copper skinks, ground weta, cockroaches, and heaps of giant centipedes.

- Other Wildlife

We continue to see Mr Paddlefoot the cormorant and his friends at the end of the old sand barge, and the dotterels are now displaying their breeding plumage. This seems early as egg laying doesn't usually start until mid-September for New Zealand dotterels, but it can be in August for Banded Dotterels. We have also seen the white oyster catcher a few times.



Cormorants on the breakwater, with Mr Paddlefoot on the left

A Load of Old Rubbish

- We continue to be amazed at the variety of rubbish that gets washed up on the coast and on Rat Island, which we also police every month or so. Along with the usual soft drink bottles, plastic bags and foam rubber we are often finding rubber gloves and wet wipes which, given their state, are probably from fishermen cleaning fish, along with takeaway sushi soy sauce "fish" which have swum down the harbour from town. Talking about the movement of this rubbish through the harbour and on to the island has become a regular part of the school group tours that we do, along with the kiwi/dog control message and the more general discussion about the island, its history and biodiversity restoration.
- Sometimes the rubbish we find around the coast is a source of delight rather than dismay (although still ultimately problematic). Recently and somewhat confoundingly, we retrieved a large yellow battery-powered sit-in children's car after it was noted by Bevan while trapping on Rat Island. The rear axle is missing but the electric motor and batteries, along with buttons and steering wheel were still present so this piece of harbour detritus now graces our deck and has been variously a car, plane, helicopter and hovercraft for our boys and various other visiting children.
- We also had the pleasure of retrieving a message in a bottle, a first for all of us and a childhood dream fulfilled for Emma (who was possibly more excited than the boys!). Charlie tells the story below.
- Luckily, FOMLI's Carla Janssen knew just who to talk to and put us in touch with Grant Alsop, the Whangarei District Council Waste and Drainage Field Office. Grant and Northland Waste's Ivan Botica paid a visit to the island to look at the amount and kinds of rubbish we are gathering and are going to supply us with wheelie bins for recycling, green waste and other rubbish which we can gather up and sort on the island and then bring over to be emptied by arrangement (which is a great help as the reactive nature of much of our life on the island makes it hard sometimes to fit in with mainland routines like regular rubbish collection days).

Old Bits and Odd Bits

- At the same time we retrieved the car from Rat Island, Jono found a fragment of pale green bottle glass with the partial name "UDOLPH" embossed on it. The bottle rang a bell as one had which had turned up in an excavation at the Masonic Tavern in Devonport which he was involved with a few years ago but he couldn't quite recall the full name. It turns out the bottle once contained Udolpho Wolfe's Aromatic Schnapps. As well as being deposited or washed up on Rat Island, local fragments have also come out of the Settlers Hotel excavation on the site of the new Whangarei Police Station building in 2007, which Jono also helped out on.

The “aromatic schnapps”, actually just that straight-up grain liquor flavoured with juniper berries and otherwise known as gin sold as a marvellous medicine by an enterprising Jewish-American of German ancestry, is one of the more easily identifiable products found in 19th century archaeological sites in New Zealand and around the world. Distilled in Scheidam, bottled in America and exported and marketed around the world, more than a million bottles of the stuff (along with numerous knock-offs) were produced from 1848, and available in New Zealand from the early 1860s. The very common nature of the bottle is what makes it so interesting, tying the various places in which it has been found into the global economy of the 19th century, including Matakohē-Limestone Island.

Underground Overground Archaeology of Christchurch has an interesting page on the schnapps here <http://blog.underoverarch.co.nz/tag/udolpho-wolfe/> for anyone who wants to know more, and a bevy of images of Udolpho Wolfe bottles, marketing and news stories may be found at <http://www.ricksbottleroom.com/tomdolgalecollection.htm>.

Charlie Chat and Quincy Quote

- From Charlie

We went to the beach one day after a really high tide and near the ruins mum saw something in the water and said “Charlie, what’s that?”, so I went down and it turned out to be a message in a bottle. The message said “Hello my fellow friend if this letter comes good to you good luck for the rest of the week” And on the back it said “Love” in big letters. It wasn’t much of a message, just a good luck note. It was a bit mouldy so it might have been in the sea for a while.

- From Quincy

My mum and my brother found a soccer ball on the beach and I love it. It washed over from Australia and I am going to play with it all day.



Message in a bottle.



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