



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report August 2016

**July saw the completion of this year's planting programme and the start of planning for next year, the arrival of NorthTec students for a semester of weekly volunteering, and some big yellow wheelie bins.**

### Visitors and Volunteers

- Former Ranger, Ben Barr has kindly arranged for two of his students from NorthTec to help us out over the coming semester as part of their studies for their Practicum paper. Each student commits 90 hours of volunteer time, so this is a significant contribution to the island work. We are delighted to have students Tammy and Terilisa join us every week on the island to assist with tasks including re-finding, re-marking, replacing and re-cutting the bait stations/lines over the 25 metre grid throughout the island. This work will make the upcoming 'Mouse Busts' much easier and more efficient. Thanks also to fellow NorthTec student Jerry for coming out with Tammy and Terilisa on the first visit, when his own volunteer day elsewhere fell through. We have also been joined by Anna, a recent Forest Ecology graduate of the University of Auckland. Anna has recently returned to Whangarei and is volunteering while she looks for work in the conservation field, and assisted with the last of the tree planting and re-baiting the lines on the north side of the island.

- Dwane from FOMLI has also been a regular visitor since getting back from his trip overseas, greatly assisting with the planning and preparation for where the 2016 plants were to be planted, liaising with Tawapou Nurseries, and single-handedly getting many of the last of the plants in the ground. Dwane also snagged some free equipment courtesy of Nicole at Bunnings Warehouse, \$85 worth of mini-mattocks, gloves and secateurs. Former Ranger Bernie also came over for a couple of days to tackle moth plant around the island buffer zone.



**Swag from Bunnings**

- We are very grateful to Theda at GBC Winstones for arranging for us to come over to visit the cement works and load up on wet-weather gear/PPE as part of GBC's ongoing support for the island. We were impressed with the attention to safety, even for those making just a short visit to the Company store, and the amount and quality of what was provided. We don't want to encourage the rain at the moment, but it is good to know we are prepared for when it strikes!

- The focus this month for our regular Wednesday volunteers was getting the last of the 2016 plants in the ground (yay!). There was also a mass Mexican devil weed cull near Dwane's adopt-a-spot. This will allow the many planted and self-seeded native seedlings an opportunity to flourish. Canopy closure is not far off so hopefully the mex will cease to be a problem in this particular area. It was great to see how many native seedlings are about, and the rich variety that is starting to be seen. The day was rounded off with a wattle pull-a-thon around the 6-pack quarry.



**Volunteers and Mexican Devil Weed**

- We picked up four big wheelie bins from Ivan at Northland Waste, which were filled the same day with the accumulated and mostly pre-sorted rubbish. We look forward to getting rid of this first batch of rubbish and then getting into a regular routine of rubbish removal off the island, and it's great that this comes at no cost to FOMLI. We are looking at the possibility of doing a rubbish audit to see just exactly what is turning up on the coast and then doing some more media advocacy around what ends up in the harbour and then on the island.



**Bins and misc. coastal collected rubbish**

- Emma was quite surprised on her most recent visit to Rat Island to the east of Matakoho when, having spent some time over the last few months policing rubbish on the coastal strip, she dived into the central area of mangroves and discovered an enormous mass (or mess) of rubbish, some of which clearly dates back to the 1980s (remember when fizzy bottles had separate black plastic bases, phone numbers had five digits and were printed on pens for every business, and judging from all the lighters, everyone smoked?). The shape of the island and the position of the mangroves means that once rubbish gets in, the mangroves work as a big net and stop it floating away again. It is good that it's been kept in one place, but it will definitely be better to get it out of the ocean ecosystem all together.
- Otherwise the month has been pretty quiet in terms of visitors. Judging from previous years, schools tends to want to get out and about again later in Term 3 when the weather makes visiting the island much more predictable and attractive.

### **Predator Control**

- We haven't had any predators trapped on the island this month, and the tracking tunnels laid out in the middle of July only showed up mice, indexing at 12%. The lack of rat sign in the indexing is good news and we will be working hard over the next few Mouse Busts to aim for no presence of any rodents on the island once again.
- We have been very lucky to receive further support from Rentokil Initial, who have sponsored five buckets of Maki Block bromadiolone wax bats (about six months-worth). We were down to the bottom of the last bucket and needed to re-bait the north side of the island when the news came through that the bait was on its way. Thanks a bunch to Maihi Cooper and Jon Thompson at Rentokil for the ongoing support, much appreciated!

### **Flora and Fauna**

- **Planting**  
Planting has finished for this season and planning has begun for next year. FOMLI committee members Pam Stevens, Jerry Pauli and Jane Winton visited for an afternoon, together with former Matakoho-Limestone Island resident, Wendy Holland who just happens to be a plant and biodiversity restoration specialist so well qualified to provide advice on future plantings, particularly in problematic areas around the north-eastern end of the island.  
The kowhai are laden with flower buds at the moment. They are just starting to peek open so a tiny hint of yellow can be seen if you look closely. The tui have clearly also noticed this and they can be observed checking the trees out to see when they are going to be able to get the all-important winter nectar. It will be interesting to see how our tui numbers swell once the trees really start to bloom.
- **Weeds**  
Moth plant continues to be a major problem with seedlings and vines popping up all over the island, although we are hoping we have most of the pod-bearing adult vines sorted (for now....). Our boys are still pulling plenty of wattle seedlings from around the Ranger Station and northern quarries, and there are still lots of flat weeds about the place. The beginning of August was dry enough for volunteer Dave to come over and mow most of the tracks/firebreaks and bait lines, except for the boggiest bits. Grass growth has definitely slowed, but it doesn't seem to have stopped altogether.

- **Kiwi**

Tuporo and Sir Ed are still sitting tight on their nests and we expect hatching within the next month. Todd Hamilton also has numerous nests that are hatching or due to hatch around the Whangarei Kiwi Sanctuary, so we expect that over the next week or so new chicks will begin arriving on the island. It was the end of the year for Kiwis for Kiwi funding, so Emma submitted the end of year report, and Pam signed and returned the letter on behalf of FOMLI accepting the generous offer of funding for predator control for the 2016/17 year.

- **Petrels**

Very little petrel sign has been found in the last month, and no eggs have been found. Grey-faced petrels are not known to lay past the end of July so unfortunately it seems there will be no breeding this season. Fingers crossed that those that visited regularly this season will manage to get one step further next year. Grey-faced petrels don't breed until they are about seven years old, but then generally have at least a decade of breeding so there is ample opportunity to replace themselves and grow the colony. One of the main hurdles is for inexperienced breeders to co-ordinate with their mates well enough to ensure the egg isn't left un-incubated for too long between the male and female shifts, and that the resulting chick is fed at sufficient intervals to encourage growth and discourage starvation. The whole process takes about 6 months to complete so it is a big ask for young birds. The good news is that most of the burrows have held up well over winter, and we have time now to replace or repair those that are getting water-logged.

### **Old Bits and Odd Bits**

As they pass by between the Singlemen's Quarters and the Shelter visitors often ask about the remains of the building with the brick walls and concrete foundations.



**Recreation Hall ruins**

**1940's (NRC/Koordinates)  
(Hall ruins in centre of photo)**

This was the island's recreation hall, built in 1910. About 100 people attended the opening of the venue that year, accompanied by the dulcet tones of the Misses Beresford and the Whangarei Savage Club Orchestra. There was singing and dancing, sailors hornpipe, recitations and a haka, with food provided nearby at Mr Brady's Boarding House from 11pm. The takings from the night, amounting to £7, were to go towards the balance owed on the new piano which had been purchased by subscription for £50, and the excellence of the suspended floor for dancing was noted.

The hall went on to become a key institution in the last years of the cement works, hosting numerous dances, concerts and meetings. One such meeting was for the Limestone Island Medical Society, which at the end of 1910 had funds of £129 and the support of a Dr Hall, who was the society's Medical Advisor. Dr Hall was continuing to provide medical services to the island during World War 1, including during a dreadful "ptomaine poisoning" outbreak in early 1915. Forty of sixty residents of the boarding house became ill blamed variously on the fruit, milk, or fish served to the men at breakfast. The idea that poor hygiene/hand washing and close quarters living might be the cause seems not to have been on the radar at all.

We are not sure when the recreation hall was reduced to its current state with remnants of the walls three to five courses high. The walls were still standing, with three large windows on the north and south elevations but minus the roof, in the earliest aerial photo runs of the harbour in the early 1940's. The concrete lintels of the windows, three per side, along with the large brick fireplace and chimney are still visible amongst the pushed in brick walls.

### Charlie Chat

- I have found a few frogs around the island. They have been Australian bell frogs, some male and some female. One was really dry from all the wind so Mum moved it a little way to a puddle and I watched it sit in the water for ages. I haven't seen it again but I hope it survived.

### Quincy Quote

- I liked helping to plant the trees. I liked putting the goo (crystal rain) in the holes best. I hope the baby trees all grow big and tall.

### Reminder

**Volunteer Wednesday** – 7 September. Pick up 0900 at the jetty returning after lunch at 2.00 p.m. approx.



- 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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