



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report September 2016

Orca, seal, lamb, and weta. What a month!

Visitors and Volunteers

As the weather gets warmer, school and community groups are booking in their end of year trips and visitors are starting to return to the island after the wet and windy months.

- We were pleased to have a visit from the Year 11 Outdoor Education class from Whangarei Girls' High School. The girls collected up a pile of rubbish from Rat Island and then installed a dozen new weta hotels around the island. The existing weta hotels below the school site and near the first Edge house (near the sand spit) had always been a hit with school groups, but depending on tides and timing we would occasionally miss passing those hotels for a look-see. We asked the girls to build us some extras as part of the practical side of their course, and now we have hotels on all the tracks and hopefully No Vacancy signs will soon be hanging out the front!



WGHS Year 11 Outdoor Ed class.



Weta/Hotel.

- We also had visits from two more classes from Onerahi Primary School, Years 5 and 6. While visiting on separate days, both classes were lucky enough to have a brief kiwi experience, meeting adult male Tūporo as he left the island, and a new chick arriving two days later. We were delighted with a performance of their school song, and a rousing haka at the end of their time with us.
- We had a half day visit from Jonathan, a third-year geography student at the University of Auckland who wanted to visit the island and interview us about co-management of cultural and environmental values on biodiversity restoration projects. Jonathan was part of a 40-strong tour group from the University who were spending three days in Whangarei, allowing students to visit a number of projects and agencies working at the intersections of planning and the environment.
- This month we have also had visits a couple of times a week from Hayley, a third year Environmental Studies student from NorthTec. Hayley is updating the vegetation monitoring of the island, which has been ongoing under the direction of tutor Olly Ball for a number of years. We also continue to enjoy and appreciate visits from Anna, Tammy and Teri-Lisa. Along with continuing the re-clearing and re-marking of the southern bait lines, they have also experienced petrel and kiwi monitoring, and moving some tide-disturbed lizard monitoring stations. They were with us for a close-up orca experience and then a visit from a playful seal, described below.

- This month the Wednesday volunteers assisted with thistle grubbing and track maintenance/clearing, spraying down the boardwalks to remove mould and moss that had built up over the winter months, engraving replacement plastic markers for the bait lines, sweeping out the duff and muck from the Manager's House, and stripping the stockpile of old fencing material at the barge landing in advance of disposing of the unwanted and un-useful materials. They also relocated one end of the sand barge shore bird protection fence to the other side of barge landing steps, meaning this area can really be promoted as a no-go zone.
- We also had Jonathan out from Marine North to service Petrel Tua Toru and the dinghy. Both craft are still in excellent nick, although the barge needed a new battery and fuel tank attachment as the latter had started to leak. Marine North sorted the parts and Emma installed them and now everything should be hunky dory. Diane Wright from the BNZ came out for the BNZ Closed for Good programme and helped out with numerous tasks including the catching of Tuporo the Kiwi.
- In the last couple of weeks we have started to see more self-propelled visitors arriving, with kayakers returning to the island on calm days, water skiers in the fast lane, and NIWA scientists dropping by to use the facilities.

Predator Control

We continue to have no predators caught on the island and the buffer traps on Rat, Knight, Rabbit Island and Onemama Pt have also been empty. Last month Rentokil came to the party with the supply of six months of toxin and this month the NRC kindly supplied us a couple of buckets of First Strike (Difethialone) toxin for use on the buffer traps. Thanks so much guys, much appreciated!!

Flora and Fauna

Plants

The kowhai are out in full bloom around the island, and I was pleasantly surprised at how the kids from Onerahi Primary appreciated the blossoms in the Molly Stevens Grove on the Loop Track as we took them around the island. Up to six tui have been observed feasting in the same tree at once.

Weeds

We continue to keep an eye out for moth plant, wattle and pampas, and deal to these as they are encountered. Dwane spent some time spraying recently, hitting both some target weed sites and some tracks.

Kiwi

In the last report, Tuporo was sitting on a couple of eggs. Unfortunately Tuporo abandoned his nest and both eggs perished. On close inspection it was clear that one egg was very smelly and rotten, and this likely contributed to him leaving the nest.

Shortly thereafter, Tuporo was handed over to Rolf Fuchs from DOC Whangarei and transferred to Tanekaha, northwest of Hikurangi. Emma had been planning to remove him as soon as the eggs hatched in order to prevent any further breeding and because the transmitter battery on the bird was past battery life and close to failure. When Emma caught up with him after he abandoned the nest it became obvious that as well as the tired battery, the whole transmitter itself was hanging on by a thread and about to fall off, so it was very lucky the call came to move him just in time. Fortuitously the Onerahi primary school class were able to have a quick peek at him in the transfer box before he left.

Two days later a new chick arrived on the island with Todd Hamilton. The second Onerahi primary class was able to meet that little fellow as they left the island.



New chick being released

Petrels

Emma did the last check of the nest boxes for the season this month, assisted by Tammy and Anna, with nothing to report.

Orca

Emma, the boys and I, and volunteers Anna and Tammy were exceedingly lucky to have an orca encounter in the first week of September. I was at the house with the kids while Emma was up at the Pa with Anna and Tammy monitoring kiwi signals. From the top Emma saw what she initially thought was a very keen kayaker out on a very cold and blustery day, just outside Petrel Tua Toru's berth. After a few moments she realized she was instead looking at the dorsal fin of a huge male orca, so she jumped on the phone to let me know to grab the kids and the camera and get down there. Her next call was to 0800 SEE ORCA, to let orca researcher Ingrid Visser know. Ingrid was already well in the loop and with the pod, many of whom were familiar to her from years of research (<http://www.orcaresearch.org>).

The boys and I threw our boots on and sprinted down to the shore, where we could see three big dorsal fins within about 100m of us. Emma arrived with lifejackets, wet weather gear, the volunteers and camera five minutes later and took us out on Petrel Tua Toru.

Before too long it was apparent there weren't just three or four orca, there were more than a dozen, maybe 20 in three or four sub-groups between Matakahe, Rat Island, and the Onerahi jetty. While Ingrid and her crew followed one group over towards Rat Island, and then off towards Manganese Point, we were shadowed by a family with a calf. The volunteers got a quick lesson on the Marine Mammal Protection Act from Emma, I took some marginal photos, and we all got wet and cold. It was a fantastic experience, and yet another special memory for us and the boys that we couldn't get anywhere else but here, in the sometimes wild but always beautiful harbour.

In the Northern Advocate the next day Ingrid referred to the groups as a 'super pod' of about 25, and that they had been making their way up the Hauraki Gulf over the previous week. A week later they were at Matapouri as they continued their journey north. That same week, Emma and the boys had seen dolphins in Tutukaka during the kids' fishing competition so it has definitely been Marine Mammal Month for us!



Tammy and Anna Monitoring kiwi, then.....

Nek Minit, Thar she blows



Seal

Tammy is turning into a bit of sea mammal whisperer as the week after the orca visit while doing bait lines she saw something in the water under the old wharf at the ruins and it turned out to be a seal. Everyone went down to the pontoon and watched it playing for some time before it noticed them and looked a little sheepish about getting caught playing.

Species Translocation

Speaking of sheepish, our most recent translocation to the island was a two-day old female juvenile *Ovis aries*, currently known as Lambykins or Lambington.

Opportunities for the boys to have pets on the island are obviously limited, but with our flock of mobile lawn mowers at the ruins currently numbering only six, letting the boys have a lamb to look after and who could then go in with the other sheep seemed like a good way to kill two birds with one stone. Fortuitously, Lambington was found wandering on a forest road south west of Kaikohe and rescued by a logging truck driver known to Emma's dad Robin. She has quickly become very popular with the boys, volunteers and school groups and Emma gets to re-live her prize-winning calf-club days from not that many years ago.

Odd Stuff About Old Stuff

Jono turned 39.

Charlie Chat

We found a beautiful nest fallen out of a tree at the dam on Friday and I took it home to find out what kind of bird made it. It's brand new and hasn't been used. The nest is so soft in the middle and it is made of sticks and leaves, moss, cobwebs, wool taken from people's clothes, and heaps of kiwi feathers! I looked it up and it's definitely a grey warbler nest. Shining cuckoos lay their eggs in grey warblers nests, then the cuckoo chick pushes the warbler eggs and chicks out of nests. Pretty mean alright.

Quincy Quote

I have a mini mattock and it's the one with the yellow bit on the end, and Charlie's is white. I can do the little thistles but mum or dad has to do the big ones.

Coming Events

- Don't forget to mark the date of the next Volunteer Wednesday on 5 October, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 0900 as usual.
- Also mark in your diaries – Great Kiwi Morning Tea – Sunday, 16th October, more details closer to the time.



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