



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report November 2017

School groups are out in force, kiwi are on the move, summer is on the way!

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- We have had a busy month for visits to the island by school groups. The month began with a visit from the Drains to Harbour School Holiday programme, facilitated by Whitebait Connection and Experiencing Marine Reserves. The group had a hands-on introduction to the effects improper rubbish disposal and stormwater discharge of mainland rubbish on the island, collecting six 20 litre buckets full of waste from around the coast in about half an hour. The group then turned this waste into amazing art, which then went on display in the central Library in Whangarei for the rest of the month.



Drains to Harbour prepare to turn waste into works of art

- We also had some year 1 and 2 pupils from Kamo Primary, the group that got stranded at Onerahi due to the failure of Petrel's trim last month. They were followed by the Year 3 and 4s from Ngunguru Primary who kicked off their school camp with a visit to the island. Four barge loads of some very excited students, teachers and parents became acquainted with the island and reacquainted with Charlie and Quincy who they know from school and preschool. It was great to see so many familiar faces, young and not so young, and we were especially pleased that the kids were able to witness a nest check and transmitter change on Sir Ed, which required a great deal of patient waiting and quiet to accomplish.
- We had a visit from Engage Home-Based Childcare, which saw the full range of children from infants in front-packs to one year olds getting used to walking on the rocky shore, and capable and delightful four year olds visit the island with their parents and care givers.



Pre-schoolers from Engage Home-based childcare meet Lamby

- We had a barge load of high school science technicians visit the island on a field trip for their annual Science Technicians Association of NZ (STANZ) conference. They arrived somewhere in the range from damp to soaking from the crossing but soon dried out and enjoyed a tour around the island. It's always fun to have a group of grownups to take on tour as the questions and comments are always a little bit different from those we get from children.



STANZ sits at the Visitors Shelter

- We were very sad to say goodbye to our amazing Northtec Environmental Studies practicum students, Margaret and Surbhi, at the end of their 90 hours. They were amazing, did a huge amount of work and pulled some big days on the island, showing great commitment and initiative, particularly on the often thankless but important tasks of maintaining baitlines and stations and weeding. We hope they will continue their association with the island as their help has been invaluable over the last two months, and we are also grateful to Ben Barr, former Ranger and current Northtec tutor, for arranging such awesome students.
- As usual we had a great volunteer Wednesday with most of the regulars able to make it over. Tasks achieved included bait stations refilled, weeding at the Petrel Station and the installation of track markers from Badham's Knob down to the coast via Pam and Jane's adopt-a-spot. Dave came over once again to do an excellent job with the mowing. He also showed Emma a different way to sharpen the slasher blades which has resulted in a tidier finish. Thanks so much to Murray and Paul from Northland Parkcare who came over to do track maintenance: the spring growth is patchy and some areas were getting a little out of hand!

- It was great to get the FOMLI Committee over to the island for last month's meeting, to do some general MBWA (Management by Walking About) and have a look at some concepts for renewing the interpretational signage on the island, prepared by Matt and Jess Mitchell, former Rangers Pete and Cathy Mitchell's son and daughter-in-law.
- We are starting to see a few more self-propelled visitors to the island as the weather warms up and the winds ease, although not as many as last year as the absence of the pontoon prevents the Waipapa from her weekly landings and is also presumably keeping others away who would rather not anchor off the beach and wade onto the island.
- We spent a few days on Tiritiri Matangi. Although we were there on our own time it was something of a busman's holiday as we enjoyed the chance to visit another sanctuary, to see the differences and similarities with Matakohē-Limestone Island and to see how things have changed since we last visited more than eight years ago. We were lucky enough to see their school group talk at the Visitors' Centre which has given us some ideas on how to extend our talks, and it was good to see their interpretive signage as FOMLI redevelops the island signs.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

Last season's plantings are surviving as the dry comes on and we wait, fingers crossed, to see how those on the coastal strip and rocky ground hold up over the summer. Full disclosure: some disappeared early on, pukeko being the likely culprit. Cheeky birds! There is an abundance of flax flowers and happy, hungry tui making the most of them at the moment, and a carpet of kanuka/manuka blossoms. We have noticed the first of the pohutukawa flowers appearing. It seems too early and is a sure sign that Christmas and the end of the year will be here before we know it. We are currently in discussions and planning ahead for next year's planting. We are going to focus on quality not quantity of plants in the ground, and free up a bit more time to look after the plants and abundant seeds we have here now.

The native hibiscus and kaka beak planted at the rear of the Manager's House ruins have really taken off in that warm and sheltered spot and the hibiscus in particular look quite stunning in flower. Nearby the orchard trees are making use of the abundant cut grass as mulch, and the stone fruit have set and are growing nicely. This year we will try to be one step ahead of the aforementioned cheeky pukeko and we might even get to sample some - fruit that is, not pukeko

On the other side of the coin, not only is the grass growing very quickly but the persistent mothplant seedlings are starting to pop up in areas where we are aware of a seed bank, but the plants have been absent for quite a few months. We also have plenty of thistles, Mexican devil weed, and blackberry that we are tackling; and a few more pampas have been taken out also.

Kiwi

Emma caught and transmittered three young kiwi for relocation back to the mainland on 17 November, heading to the Tutukaka Coast via Glenbervie School. One of the birds was from Glen's nest that Emma monitored through to hatching last year and she was very pleased to renew the relationship. All three kiwi were in good condition and showing excellent growth. This is great to see as it confirms there is ample food for them to forage, even as we come into the dry season. During the summer kiwi feast on the cicada nymphs as they come to the surface and there should be no shortage of them out here! Another seven chicks have been brought over to the island via Todd Hamilton for release, including six in one go.



Kiwi who now?

Sir Ed successfully hatched two healthy little chicks in a burrow deep within a flax bush. It was pretty tricky to get in there to retrieve the chicks, but luckily Surbhi and Margaret were present and able to lend a very willing couple of pairs of hands. Glen is still incubating, very close to his nest from last year. The bucket kiwi is also still incubating. He was sitting on two eggs, but one has been pushed aside, presumed failed. It is not unusual for male kiwi to cast aside one egg during incubation, but I'm not sure how they are able to ascertain the viability of the deserted egg.

Petrels

This month, the Wednesday volunteers weeded at the petrel station and we have started taking visiting groups there to talk about the project again, now that the birds are finished for the year. We were surprised to spot an Oi chick beside the Kawerau Track on Tiritiri Matangi at four in the afternoon during our visit there. In the absence of chicks on Matakoho to date it was nice to get a good look at one although we are sure that it must have been as confused about why it was out and about at that age and at that time of day as we were!



Oi chick by day on the Kawerau Track, Tiritiri Matangi

Other Fauna

We noticed a swan heaving itself into the sky in the face of a brisk sou'-wester like a Hercules leaving the runway - the first time we have noticed one that close around the island since we have been here. Some of the dotterel and oyster catchers are nesting, including in the strip between Petrel's berth and the beach, so we can keep a close eye on these ones. Emma has seen a leopard seal around the island again. She has now seen all three different leopard seals known to be around the Whangarei Harbour at present. During a school visit a parent spotted something unusual in the water and enthusiastically declared it was an orca. After a stampede of children made it to the beach we were able to announce it was a fur seal waving a flipper about. Still cool to see, but there were a few disappointed expressions none the less. There are lots of shining cuckoos around singing that summer is on the way, and the corresponding worried looking grey warblers.

Pest Control

- It has been great having Bernie over to keep an eye on the traps since Bevan left to take up his full time ranger position at Pukenui. Thankfully, the good run of empty traps on the island continues. While we are sad to see him leave Taitokerau once again, we are stoked that Bernie has scored a job with DOC down at Pureora Forest Park and know that the whio and Archie's frogs will greatly appreciate his pest-killing prowess down there. We are very pleased that our practicum student, Margaret, is able to continue with the trapping as Bernie heads south.
- As Bernie has been undertaking the trapping round, the stoat traps have been brought in to the ranger station for cleaning, servicing, and repainting all ready to be really attractive for any passing mustelids. We have also repaired a bunch of broken rat traps, as buying replacement parts and fixing the traps is much cheaper than buying whole new traps.
- Over the last three months we and a bunch of willing and capable volunteers have expended a huge amount of effort re-baiting to target mice. This may be paying off finally as the bait take is slowing down in the bait stations. We are very grateful to have Rentokil Initial supply the bait for us at no charge, especially as they are supplying more bait than usual as we are trying hard to target the mice. Indexing will happen this week with results to come in the next report.

Other Events

- Emma has booked a day with Ken Massey to shear and drench the sheep, which we are sure they will appreciate as the warm weather approaches.
- Freddie Tito and friends will be coming over shortly to replant some of the ancient kumara varieties on the island. We will be all ready with the nets for covering the kumara straight away this time around!

Finally

- Don't forget **Volunteer Wednesday**, Wednesday 6 December, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.
- Also, for more photos of life and work on the island including orca videos, don't forget to visit our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MatakoheLimestoneIsland/>



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