



## **Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report December 2017**

### **Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings**

- It was our great pleasure to have Leon Candy and Room 14 from Onerahi Primary School over for a day in late November, in part because Leon is an old friend and workmate from DOC, and because it is the class Charlie has been in this term. Room 14 also brought their Deputy Principal, Danny Hamilton along for trip which ended with a well-deserved swim by the old sand barge. We look forward to continuing to nurture the relationship between the island and the school as time goes on.
- It was lovely to have Jan Thomas and her class from Hora Hora Primary back over to weed their adoptaspot. Some of the students have now been over four times since we arrived last year, and they have fully taken ownership of their part of the island. They spent several hours hand pulling weeds including thistles, before having a play at the ruins and it was great to see the ease with which they got stuck in, in the bush. We also used trimmings from the School Track to start creating a woven lattice of branches over relatively bare ground near their adoptaspot to work as a nutrient and seed trap, which will hopefully allow natural regeneration in the future. Their visit coincided with a stoat being caught in the trap at Shipwreck Bay, so they were able to see it close up and have an excellent Q&A session about predator control. Some future trappers were created that day we think!
- We had another great day out with a class from the Blomfield Special School. The continued absence of the pontoon at the ruins necessitated landing on the north side of the island, but it gave this group a chance to see a different area of the island from their visit last year. Some of the students and teachers headed over the hill to explore the ruins, while others opted for a coastal explore around to the Northern quarry.
- Ken Massey put us in contact with his daughter Tash who works for Work Ready and we ended up having two great days with their current crop of job seekers. Ken has kindly offered to take some of the old fencing material stockpiled by the barge landing off our hands to stockpile at his place and sell from there. Work Ready provided the labour to get it loaded on to the barge and off on the other side, as well as pulling staples and wire from the battens so we can re-use them.
- Parua Bay School sent two classes over two days for their inaugural adoptaspot visit at the western end of the island, where they efficiently weeded their area and installed two new weta hotels (one of which already has nine huge residents). As Jono was away solving a 170-year-old mystery of national significance at Ruapekapeka, Dwane Kokich and John Ward from the FOMLI committee supported Emma over the two days, including taking the group for the full visit one day as Emma was tied up with the Work Ready group. Pam also helped Emma out by taking on the role of school taxi. We couldn't have done it without the help that week, so really appreciate having a hands-on committee to call on during busy times.
- It was great to get Sue Hodge (the new Manager for Parks at Whangarei District Council over, along with Council's Parks Planner, Robin Rawson. We took a very quick, late afternoon run over the island accompanied by Pam and John Ward from the FOMLI committee to see some of the highlights and re-connect with the island's major sponsor.

- Northland Parkcare came over on two very hot days to trim the public tracks, which thus far are refusing to slow down from the spring growth; and Dave did another excellent job of keeping the northern access lines and fire breaks clear on the tractor.
- Freddy Tito returned for a second season of kumara gardening and with a small and committed group we planted 30-40 in the same spot as last year, albeit with pukeko-proofing taken care of at the outset. These kumara are in three circular plots, a little different from the two rows last year. Jono hand watered the plants for the first little while but with the occasional rain over the last couple of weeks they now appear to be taking care of themselves.



**Freddy and his kumara**

- The island saw a very well-attended volunteer Wednesday with 21 volunteers coming over for the day. The main tasks were re-cutting and marking the southern access track. This is not a public walking track but is used for management purposes to get to bait stations and adoptasots. It is now much easier to follow. The western end was weeded, with moth plants still popping up in the usual places. After lunch (including a delicious cake provided by Steve – thanks!) it was time to hit the periwinkle and wattles closer to home, and some traps and tools were sorted in the shed. Thanks to Robin Craig for gifting the island some new, well-oiled grubbers!
- We are starting to see more self-propelled visitors coming to the island to enjoy all it has to offer while the weather is so favourable. However, numbers are still well down compared to last year due to the absence of the pontoon. One group that we brought over was Emma's extended family for a pre-Christmas gathering. Despite the inclement weather we had a wonderful time feasting around the Manager's House under umbrellas and pergolas set up for the sun but equally useful in the rain. Santa even visited, which was a bonus because he must be busy this time of year, and the weather cleared enough for the kids to have a big swim later in the day. At the start of December we enjoyed the company of a fellow island Ranger family from Kaikoura Island as they took some time off and brought their yacht up to Whangarei for a break.
- The Jansen family utilised Petrel Tua Toru to come over to the island to celebrate a family birthday with a picnic at the ruins. They picked the weather well and had a lovely afternoon.
- Angela and Dallas were here once again this month to work on their adoptaspot. They are excellent examples of the difference that can be made when people commit to regular visits, with their spot thriving in the relative absence of weeds.
- Emma also managed to squeeze in a First Aid Course to keep her certificate current.

## **Flora and Fauna**

### **Plants**

We have been lucky enough to have had several decent drenchings since the start of December, although the island is starting to dry out now. The weeds have taken advantage of the rain but everything else is still growing too. Moth plants continue to be spotted, but luckily they are mostly small non-seeders.

We spotted a puriri tree that has been very well utilized by moths, so much so it may actually be a giraffe



**One is a puriri, the other is giraffes. Which is which??  
(Giraffe photo credit to the San Diego Zoo)**

### **Kiwi**

Four kiwi were taken back to the mainland in November, including the bucket nester. Three birds came off on 17 November with a whakawaatea next to the Onerahi Yacht Club, before heading out to Tawapou near Matapouri via Glenbervie Primary School. The release at Tawapou was well attended with more than 200 people turning up to meet kiwi Sheryl, Tumanko, and Henreeta.

Several weeks later we were pleased to hear from Robert Webb at the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre that the egg from the bucket nest had successfully hatched in the second week of December. We were able to visit the chick at the centre once it moved to a brooder box, and were pleased that Freddie Tito was able to be there too. Freddie named the chick 'Te Uira, He Arahi Te Whatitiri', which means the "lightning leads to thunder". This was in reference to the fierce but brief electrical storm that hit just as we were collecting the egg for incubation. Quincy was chuffed to be able to meet the chick and we look forward to moving her over to the island in a little while.

Emma also processed two new chicks from prolific island breeder Glen. After monitoring his transmitter activity closely Emma thought she had picked a good window to check the nest, as the chicks need to be old enough to put a transponder in, but not so old they have fledged. The window was a good one for the chicks, but not so good for Glen as he had already scarpereed! Usually the chicks will leave the nest first, but it is not unheard of for the male to decide enough is enough and head off in search of good food and a decent day's sleep leaving his babies to fend for themselves. The chicks were very well behaved and hung around long enough for Emma to find them. They have been named Matilda and Jemima, for the daughters of Rentokil Initial NZ Head of Operations, Jon Thompson. We have been hugely grateful for the support from Jon and Rentokil and their toxin supply in suppressing predators on the island for many years, but in particular this last year where we have been pulsing more regularly than usual to deal with the mice so have required extra toxin. The group from Work Ready were lucky to be here the same day so were able to see Jemima and Matilda close up and understand why pest and dog control is so important.

### **Other Fauna**

Ken Massey kindly came over to the island to do the shearing and drenching of the flock at the Cement Works ruins. We had a much easier time of it getting them into the pen in the Singlemen's Quarters the night before, in comparison to last year; having Lamby penned there as a Judas Sheep definitely helped. Ken and his kit had the job done in a couple of hours and we also had time to arrange the visits from his Work Ready crew noted above. The sheep appear much happier in their summer coats.



The shore birds have had a rough time of it as several nests were lost in the spring tides associated with the December super moon. With two more super moons coming in January (the second of which is also a blue and a blood moon/lunar eclipse), it may be a tough season for them. One pair of terea/variable oystercatchers, obviously googled the summer tides and acted accordingly, building their nest in an unusual spot between the Rangers' shed and water tanks. One of the pair acts as a sentry atop the Manager's house ruins to alert the other of incoming danger (e.g. one of us needing to get something from the shed). They have two eggs, and are at least half way through the ~28-day incubation period. We are hoping they will hatch before the ridge water tanks run dry and we need to pump, and they have located their nest exactly where we need to place to pump to send water up the hill (don't worry, with only 5000-6000 of these endemic birds left we won't do anything to jeopardise the nest).

While visiting Te Uira, He Arahi Te Whatitiri at the Bird Recovery Centre, Robert Webb handed over a little surprise, two orphaned little blue penguins/korora. Supplied with a bag of frozen shrimp for their first few days feeding, we brought them over to the island where they were settled into a penguin box and bestowed the nicknames Garfunkle and Mr Penguino. Garfunkle, with only the meereest tonsure of downy feathers left around the back and sides of his head, fledged on the first night and we haven't seen him since. Mr Penguino still has a little way to grow before he leaves the nest but has been given hints by being taken for short visits to the beach with the family in between the hand feedings of shrimp and locally sourced fishy delights.



**Mr Penguino and Garfunkle**

### **Pest Control**

- New island trapper Margaret is getting into the swing of things. We had one stoat caught on the island this month, in the trap at Shipwreck Bay. This is the first pest on the island since the start of winter and while we have appreciated the lack of nasties in the traps, we are always aware that the price of pest freedom is eternal vigilance. We now have a small stockpile of fully cleaned and refurbished traps and boxes, which Margaret is rolling out as required.
- Thanks to the efforts of Emma, the Wednesday vollies and various other volunteers and students rolling rodent baiting effort we have got the mouse numbers right down again (to undetectable levels using stand indexing practice, and 4% using an elongated indexing window) and are in touch with other sanctuaries facing their own battles with these pests.

### Other Events

- We have heard that the island pontoon will be re-established some time before the end of the financial year. We expect a somewhat quieter summer without the regular Sunday visits from the Waipapa but are planning on running some weekend barge trips for visitors by donation, on the weekends in January.
- As the real heat and dry of the summer approaches we are gearing up to be fire ready. Pagey is working with Deputy Principal rural Fire Officer, Rory Renwick to have an on-site visit to ensure we are doing all we can to avoid this threat.

### Finally

- Don't forget Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday 3rd January, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.
- Also, for more photos of life and work on the island, don't forget to visit our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Matakohelimestoneisland/>

### Finally, Finally

Big thanks to Emma for holding the fort on the island and with the boys while I was off finding the lost British grave at Ruapekapeka. Couldn't have done it without your ongoing support. Arohanui e hoa!

### Finally, Finally, Finally

#### SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL OUR READERS



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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