



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report March 2017

The rain is falling and so are the feijoas at the Manager's House orchard. The Big Dry is well and truly over as autumn arrives and the island is looking green again. A few of the trees planted last season have died but most have survived the draught. This month we have had environmental studies students over, repairs to the Petrel Tua Toru, and a big Lizard weekend.

Visitors and Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- We had a great volunteer Wednesday with a big crew all working hard at the Petrel Station to get the facilities ship shape before the Oi start returning from next month. Shingle was added to the pathways in advance of the ground getting soggy over the winter and overhanging shrubbery was trimmed to add accessibility; handles were added to the burrow lids for ease of removal and handling in the damp and dirty conditions that prevail when we are monitoring the burrows; new plywood lids were made for those which had become unserviceable and dry leaf litter was collected and the burrow internals made snug and appealing for the birds that make it back.
- Ollie Ball and Tanya Cook from NorthTec came over for a day with a first year environmental studies class.
- A year 13 environmental studies group from Whangarei Girls' High School came out for a day and received a largely conservation focussed tour from Emma, with Charlie assisting.
- Volunteers Dwane, Angela, Delice and Allan came over to work on their adoptaspots and do some weed spraying about the place. Theda and co. also came over to spend a few hours on their adoptaspot near the ruins. Dave Webster came out to mow the grass and as usual, entertained Quincy by showing him all the fine provender in his lunch box. Thanks for the tomatoes and plums too, Dave. Andrew and Murray from Northland Parkcare came out for a day to undertake maintenance on the public/Council tracks around the island, the first time they had needed to come out since early December. Thanks heaps to Andrew for the fresh milk.
- Plenty of visitors are still arriving under their own steam via kayak, yacht, fizz boat and the Waipapa, with more than 50 people encountered touring the island in the last month, not including those arriving on a Sunday via the Waipapa.
- We had a lovely and full visit from former Rangers, Ben and Jo Barr, Penny and Tim, Greg and Heather Stump, and Anna for a weekend of lizard monitoring. The house, office, caravan and lizard release sites were a hive of activity for two days as the funnel and pitfall traps were positioned and opened, baited and checked. More on the lizard monitoring below.
- Former Rangers Pete and Cathy Mitchell, almost fresh off the boat from their term on Little Barrier also came over to discuss the Petrel project and provide much appreciated advice on various island matters.

Predator Control

We did pest indexing this month, the results of which suggest a mouse problem that is not being adequately addressed by the current baiting regime. We are in discussion with former Rangers, FOMLI members and eradication experts about dealing with the mouse population as it appears bait shyness may be an issue and a revised approach is necessary.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

The bush (and the weeds, and the grass) have been grateful for the bountiful rain in early March. As noted above we have started mowing, scrub-barring and spraying in earnest as the vegetation comes away again. When out with the boys we make sure to have a feed of blackberries before cutting the stems and painting them with herbicide. The heritage kumara up on the ridge have made it through the summer (with a bit of help) and now appear to be taking care of themselves, apart from needing a weed now and then. The native hibiscus have burst into flower and we are really appreciating volunteer Anna Agnew's propagation efforts.

Kiwi

Island kiwi, Sir Ed has successfully hatched another two chicks and we have transferred another mainland chick to the island from west of Whangarei via Todd Hamilton.

Two birds were moved off the island for release north west of Whangarei. Todd, Pete Graham from the NRC and Ranger Adam Willets from Bream Head came out to help catch the birds. A whakawaatea was held beside the Onerahi Yacht Club before the birds were taken out to Fonterra's farm on Jordan Valley Road. The birds were named Geoff, after Geoff Wightman who founded the Waimate North Landcare Trust almost 20 years ago, and Charlie, after our Senior Junior Ranger. One of the next birds to be taken off will be named Quincy, after our Junior Junior Ranger and we are all thoroughly honoured by the kindness shown by FOMLI in the naming of these birds. You can read more about the release here:

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503450&objectid=11812890

Emma and Charlie also attended the one day Kiwi Hui up at Waimate North, and Emma presented a kiwi pecha kucha style talk with Pete Graham. Emma said it was one of the best kiwi workshops she had attended and the quality of the presentations (and food) was exceedingly high. We are now in the midst of reporting on the use of the funding received last year from Kiwis for Kiwi (K4K) and finalising the application for its continuance. Next month Emma will be off to the national Kiwi Hui in balmy Inglewood

Lizards

Ben showed us all how to set the funnel traps, 1/3rd to 1/2 full of leaf litter, a small chunk of pear, and placed level on firm ground. The pitfall traps were also all found, opened up and baited. All the traps were checked over the next two days, with lizard numbers and vital statistics recorded. Over two days we turned up 18 moko skinks which was very exciting, and examples of all the resident skink species. Spotlighting at night for geckos was less successful, with the lizards playing hard-to-get. A combination of factors meant we only left the traps out for two nights rather than the standard four, but we are now all skilled up and know what to do for the next round. Thanks team Barr.



Lizard monitoring with Ben, Charlie and a cooperative Moko skink

Other Fauna

Now that the ponds have filled up again the frogs are madly croaking and the ducks have returned.

Other Events

- Emma took Petrel Tua Toru over to Lower Port Road this month, where Kevin and Luke Ogle from Black Dog Steelworks met her with their big trailer to get the barge to their shop to weld up the split seams around the front hatch and sandblast the hull. Following the sandblasting Petrel apparently gave the Cat a run for its money on the return trip and we can attest to the vastly improved performance in terms of speed and ride. With only a few passengers on board it's about a 30 second trip on a flat day from the Onerahi jetty to barge landing. We were very pleased with the quality of the work and the service, thanks heaps Kev and Luke.
- We also replaced the winch on the small island trailer as the lock on the old one was no longer serviceable; and the bung on the small boat as it was badly cracking.



The Petrel Returns

- Also in boating news, Emma and John Ward are working together with support from Maritime New Zealand to get Petrel Tua Toru into the MOSS system. It will require a fair bit of paperwork but should result in documentation that is more fitting for the operations this boat undertakes.

Charlie Chat

Last weekend Ben Barr the lizard expert came over to do lizard trapping at the moko skink site. We caught lots of moko and copper skinks. We found at least two pregnant moko skinks and a baby one. Over at the ruins we caught one copper skink. At Shipwreck Bay we caught one copper and two shore skinks. We found a trap with five lizards in it at the moko site, three copper and two moko. We found a trap at the ornate skink site with two ornate and two coppers. The other day when we weren't doing lizard trapping we found one Raukawa (common) gecko, two shore skinks, and one baby copper or ornate skink under rocks when we were just having look.

Quincy Quote

This island is the greatest island ever. It's a big rock in the middle of the ocean. It has lots of birds on it, its gigantic. We have a little pet lamb called Lamby, she's very nice. Sometimes we go swimming on the beach at the island, is very great here. We have a bombing platform that we can put in the water and everything that it is made from was bits washed up out of the ocean. It is so great. There is a little rope that keeps people out of the bird nesting area there.

Finally

Don't forget to mark the date of the next **Volunteer Wednesday on 5 April**, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 0900 as usual.

Also, we are planning an archaeology-themed public open day supported by Kaumatua Fred Tito from 10-2 on Sunday 9 April to celebrate NZ Archaeology Week established by the NZ Archaeology Association.



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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