



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report June 2017

This season's plants have arrived with help from the regulars, and some new friends. Despite the increasingly cold weather, school groups continue to visit and help out with planting and weeding; and the Ranger's Station has reappeared after its time in the shade, thanks to some judicious tree-felling.

Visitors and Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- It has been a very busy month for visitors to the island. In mid-May we had forty people out for Quincy's fifth birthday. Despite the foul weather, everyone had a great time and Quincy's story is at the end of this report.



- Dai and his NorthTec students came out so the students could try their hand at telemetry monitoring. After a brief chat by Emma about how the transmitters can be used to get different information about what the kiwi are up to, the students paired off and tried to remotely locate the two resident males (Glen and Sir Ed), a young kiwi awaiting transfer, and a dummy transmitter stashed in the Polaris. There were a few issues with uncooperative gear, but in general the students did very well.
- FOMLI Deputy Chairperson Theda and her adopt-a-spot crew came out for a day's weeding behind the cement works' ruins. Later that day we were grateful for a huge turnout for the Mousebust, rebaiting the lines on the north side of the island. Twenty-eight volunteers including many who had not been out to the island before turned up - a huge number for a blowy, wet and grey Sunday afternoon. The north face was re-baited in short order and good cheer. A couple of days later former rangers Pete and Cathy Mitchell and our current trapper Bevan came out to help Emma bait the south side of the island.
- Plant pickup went without a hitch (apart from having too many trailers for the smaller number of plants this year). Dwane, Jerry, Michelle, Pam, Alan and Sandy and Pagey arrived at Tawapou bright and early at 0830 to load, with the first trailer back at Onerahi shortly after 0930. The sea was flat as a pancake, the day was sunny and warm and a group of cheerful and capable NorthTec Foundation Studies students proceeded to load and unload the barge, shift the trees up to the staging area at the Manager's House ruins and then dig a bunch of planting holes on the coastal strip in front of the Six-Pack Quarry. Thanks to their substitute tutor, Ben for bringing them out to help and giving the regular volunteers and usual suspects a bit of a break.



NorthTec students plant transfer and the RTC crew planting

- We were happy to have Wiley and his students from Regent Training Centre come out a few days later and plant the first couple of hundred or so trees in the holes kindly prepared by the Northtec students. The RTC crew enjoyed themselves so much they will be back again next month to help with more work on the island.
- A few days after RTC, we had Jan and her class from Hora Hora Primary to plant trees around their adopt-a-spot south of Badhams' Knob. Their original area is now thriving and apart from occasional weeding doesn't need any more underplanting of trees so they are extending their horizons northwards towards the top of the northern quarry and got several hundred trees in the ground. When the plants were in and, on their own initiative, a number of kids dived into the established bush on their adopt-a-spot and started weeding; it's really special to see this sort of relationship develop between our younger repeat visitors and the motu!
- Paul Leyland along with his crew Paul and Zeth from Treescape, the Whangarei District Council's contract arborists, visited the island for a day to fell half a dozen very big ngaio which had grown up over the years to shade, what we were told, was once a sunny Ranger Station. The trees and shade have served to keep the house in the dark for all but a couple of hours in the morning and late afternoon over the winter, making it both cold and dark on the deck and inside, affecting the ability of the solar panels to charge and reducing their performance by the continuous movement of leaves causing non-uniform shading across the solar cells. The leaves also continuously filled the rain gutters. Removing the trees means the house is now bathed in sun during daylight hours for all but a couple of hours a day when it dips below the macrocarpa shelter belt, and the implement shed is also a lot brighter and easier to get the tractor and polaris in and out of. Some of the regular fisher folk on the Onerahi Jetty asked if we had just had a shed built on the island, having never seen the buildings before! Thanks again to Stuart Jackson from WDC for helping to arrange this work.
- The day after the trees came down our regular Wednesday volunteers helped to remove all the slash and tree limbs from around the Ranger Station. It was a mighty effort with most of the slash disappearing under the macrocarpas, with more towed around by tractor to the northern quarry to mulch down and provide a bit of extra nutrients to the poor soil of the quarry floor. Along with the usual band of merry men and women we were pleased to welcome back former Ranger Bernie, ever happy to jump back up on the tractor for us! The volunteers also had time to plant some trees on the northern coastal strip between the barge landing and northern quarry and along the School Track; and to dig out the culverts and sumps on the School Track.
- Murray from Northland Parkcare was flying solo over here for two days as Andrew was unable to be here. Murray completed all the public walking tracks by himself and we really appreciated his hard work which is usually done by him and Andrew together!



- We had a lovely day on the island with senior students from Matarau School north west of Whangarei. As well as a quick tour around the island they provided 30 person hours of mothplant weeding between the Edge House ruins and Ski Slope track, collecting thousands of saplings and dozens of vines with enthusiasm and energy. Matarau was our first school visit after we arrived on the island last year and was due to come back over last month but postponed due to poor weather. It was great to see them back out and reminisce about sweeping out the Manager's House and Singlemen's Quarters, and releasing plants behind the wifi antenna and Shipwreck Bay.
- On the same day that Matarau School was here, we had a walking group from Opuia come down and explore the island. The weather was fantastic for both groups, warm, sunny and still, and they had a good explore around the coast before walking the inland tracks. They asked lots of questions, mainly of the logistical variety about how the family survives on the island (I think this is a credit to the comprehensive interpretational signage available – if you read it you don't need to listen to Jono go on and on, and on and on and on!).
- A week later we had a first time visit from the Back 2 Nature home-based childcare group. The pre-schoolers had a great time exploring the ruins, examining weta and lamb, skimming rocks and finding crabs at Shipwreck Bay, and walking all over with no complaints at all. Quincy was the leader for this group, taking them over the School Track and down the other side, while Charlie arranged chasing games at the Visitors' Shelter for the bigger kids who needed to burn off some energy. As always the weta and the lamb were a big hit.
- Finally, the faculty from Manaia View Primary School in Raumunga came over via the Waipapa for their teacher-only day excursion. None of the party had spent time on the island before and, even though they only had an hour to spend Jono raced Principal Leanne, Ian who arranged the trip, and the rest of the staff around and showed them the highlights. The island really sold itself and all the teachers were very enthusiastic so we look forward to future class visits come Term 4.



Flora and Fauna

Plants

As noted above, the plants from Tawapou arrived earlier in the month, minus a few hundred manuka and pohutakawa which were left for the time being following DOC's recommendations, due to concerns about myrtle rust in Northland. We were also delighted to receive one hundred good-sized karaka from Briar at Ruatangata who had been growing them for a shelter belt but which had subsequently become surplus to requirements. They were sourced from local seed so were from the correct ecological district for the island. We are looking forward to planting up a few groves of these about the island and the local flying frugivores are sure to love them as well.

While Matarau School helped with mothplant seedlings, the pods high up in the canopy are a job for the experts. With Dwane's extendable hook and an avocado picker loaned by Emma's dad Robin, we spent a productive afternoon as a family snipping pods, collecting five shopping bags full in a few hours.



Matarau School moth plant bust

Kiwi

This month Emma caught and transferred Violet Barbara, the fit and healthy island-born kiwi discovered in a petrel burrow last month. The name for this kiwi came via Freddie Tito and was that of an important Aunty who had performed one of the original karanga in welcoming biodiversity back to Matakoho. The kiwi was taken over to the mainland and into the welcoming arms of Freddie and family, Todd Hamilton and about 60 people who attended the Whakawaatea and special naming ceremony at the Onerahi Yacht Club. Later that day it was taken to a meet and greet at Matarau School, before being released at Tanekaha. Some of the kids visiting the island from Matarau had been able to see the kiwi the week before coming out to the island and had family with long-terms connections to the kiwi project in that area.



Petrels

Petrel activity at the burrows has slowed down and our monitoring has reduced to once or twice a week. At this time of year mating activity has finished and the adults are back out at sea for the pre-egg laying exodus, although there may still be non-breeding individuals lurking about. We are hopeful that the amorous couple reported on previously will be back to lay as early as late June - we will keep you posted!

Pest Control

The island continues to be predator free with empty traps for the last six weeks or so. We have worked with the Onerahi volunteer trappers to modify the trapping regime on that side of the mainland by removing most of the stoat boxes and relocating them to the island and other buffer trapping sites. The local cat and dog population of Onerahi appears to keep stoats at bay in that area, with no stoats ever being caught over there so it made sense to reduce the load on the volunteers and augment the other areas. Volunteer trapper Ross kindly refurbished all the traps and boxes before bringing them out to the barge during the plant transfer. Thanks heaps!

Other Events

We are thrilled to hear that WDC has committed to repairing the pontoon over winter so that it is safe and fit for purpose come summer. We don't have a timeframe for the works but at some point in the near future the pontoon will be removed from the piles and towed to the Onerahi foreshore where the missing/leaking flotation barrels will be replaced, along with the geogrid netting and bollards. Stuart Jackson and Paul McDonald from the WDC Parks Department have been very supportive and have committed a substantial sum to getting the work done and we appreciate every cent. Thanks WDC!

Charlie Chat

I went to rat island to pick up rubbish and found a message in a bottle. It had a cork for a lid that was waxed on. The message was in a plastic bag inside. It had a map leading to a treasure; it had been launched five days earlier from Matakoho-Limestone Island. It lead us to a treasure, a geocache. I got to take a treasure home, a bead necklace. Quincy took a toy car. We left some other treasures in their place. It was the third message in a bottle we have found since we moved here.

Quincy Quote

My 60-horse power big boat called the barge carried everyone over to the island for my birthday and the waves were ginormous and on the way back everyone got wet but on the way to the island everyone got dry. There was a treasure hunt and we found clues which told us to go to the ngaio tree at Shipwreck Bay and the treasure was in the tree and it was chocolate coins and I had three. We had a scavenger hunt to find things on a list and played hide and seek in the ruins. I had mango and chocolate brownie and ice cream for pudding and I had a chocolate crackle which I made with dad, and vege chips. I got lots and lots and lots of presents and all my friends played with me. Bye!

Finally

There are two important dates coming up so don't forget to mark them in your diaries:

- **Public planting day on Sunday - 25 June**, to coincide with the start of Matariki. Pickup from the Onerahi Jetty on Beach Road at 0930 with drop off from 1330.
- **Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday 5 July**, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.
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Also, for more photos of life and work on the island, don't forget to visit our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/MatakoheLimestoneIsland/>



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