



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report July 2017

**This season's plants are in the ground, orca and petrel have visited the island, and the weather has turned cold and wet.**

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

- Our Matariki Planting Day on 25 June went off nicely with a boatload of volunteers making it over for half a day of planting around the quarry at the northern end of the island. We planted some tough species like astelia and pimelia around the talus slopes at the base of the quarry, along with several different coprosma species, coastal maire, ngaio and pohutukawa along the coastal strip. Everyone had a great time despite the ankle-deep mud in places. The rain mostly held off and the sun came out from time to time. After the planting there was time for a quick trip over to the Visitors' Shelter and cement works ruins, where we met a large group off the Waipapa taking lunch at the Shelter. Many thanks again to Tawapou Coastal Natives for providing us with such healthy specimens for this year's planting.



### Matariki Planting Day

- Hayden from Rouse Motorcycles spent half a day on the island fixing a broken gear shifter cable on the Polaris ATV, and servicing the Polaris at the same time. We really missed having the vehicle to call on for the week it was out of service as it has become an essential piece of island infrastructure. While we made do with the tractor for launching the little boat and pulling the trailer for planting, it was nowhere near as convenient, and much harder on the wet tracks and driveway.
- We had a very productive Volunteer Wednesday at the start of July (thanks in part to Pam's famous Anzac biscuits) starting with underplanting a couple of hundred karaka and kohekohe on the mid-slope either side of the hill track on the south side of the island. At the same time we pulled Mexican devil weed and cut and painted blackberry and dealt to some moth plant. While we were working a team building group from the Whangarei Aquatic Centre turned up in waka at Shipwreck Bay. Our volunteer group split up after lunch with some going up to Badham's knob to plant the last of the mountain flax and the others putting pohutakwa in between the beach and Manager's House ruins before tackling some sneaky wattles around the oak tree.
- Dwane and his crew came over for several days and planted a large number of the 'special' species which required a bit more care in planting.

- We had another visit from the Regent Training Centre (RTC) students who planted about one hundred kanuka above the small quarry west of the ranger station and underplanted 120 kohekohe between the coast and the dam on the centre of the north side of the island. Regent Training Centre has new intakes of young people every four weeks after which they are assessed and entered into different courses or industries depending on interests and aptitudes; RTC want to bring out their students at the end of every intake to do volunteer work on the island. We have certainly appreciated their input so far and hope we can continue this win-win relationship.

## Flora and Fauna

### Plants

All this season's plants are now planted, each with a fertilizer tab and some crystal rain which will give them the best start for their first year in the ground. Some of the planted species are already looking so happy we can almost watch them grow. Along with the usual species we have also put in a few uncommon ones which are being watched closely to make sure they are thriving.

Jono spent several days at the end of June while the weather was fine, spraying weeds and cutting and painting blackberry. We continue to battle mothplant on the island with the odd adult vines with pods still being found, as well as 'carpet' areas where hundreds of seedlings pop up. It is very useful having the WDC-supplied rubbish bins on the island so we can get rid of this green waste without having to worry about it re-sprouting on the island. We filled up a 240L wheelie bin with moth plant vines and pods last month alone. We have also found quite a few pampas this month, more than we have seen before. All were able to be dug or pulled out.

It is amazing how much the bush has changed in the fifteen months since we have been here. The canopy is closing over the top of the school track and starting to close over the Badham's knob track and ski slope track. The under-storey is much clearer and less scrubby than it was when we arrived as the trees are growing up, albeit with plenty of self-seeded plants coming through.

### Kiwi

Emma has continued to monitor the transmittered kiwi. Neither Glen nor Sir Ed appear to be nesting yet, but it should start happening soon. We have heard a lot of calls at night, especially when the moon is dark and there is little wind.

We have heard from Kiwis for Kiwi that they will support our project with almost \$5000 over the coming year. This support is always appreciated and will be put to the good use, keeping the buffer clear and reducing the chances of pests (specifically stoats) invading the island.

### Petrels

There had not been much in the way of activity at the Petrel Station this month until Emma and the boys had an exciting discovery on 14 July. The male bird which had been found several times since May, including canoodling with a lady friend on a number of occasions, is currently on an egg. This is only the second petrel egg laid on the island and the first in four years so everyone is very excited and hopeful. We will be leaving the petrel and their egg to their own devices as much as possible, but of course crossing our fingers and all our other bits that sometime in September we may find a little fluff-ball in a burrow.

## Other Events

- The island pontoon has been taken away for repairs this month. At this point in time we are not sure when the work will be finished and the pontoon reinstated but suffice to say there is no landing available at the cement works ruins at the moment. The lack of pontoon has probably surprised some would-be visitors, but others have just seen it as an opportunity for visiting other parts of the island, with more boat traffic noticed at both Shipwreck Bay, and the bay below the old Manager's House.



- We were very excited to get a call one grey, wet Sunday afternoon from Ingrid Visser of the Orca Research Trust, telling us that a pod of orca was making its way towards the island. We jumped in Petrel Tua Toru with multiple layers of polypro, merino, fleece and rainwear from head to foot (and lifejackets!) and headed out to join her in shadowing the pod from a distance. We spent several hours on the water watching the orca hunt stingrays in the Portland Channel, and between Tamaterau and Mangawhati and Hewletts Point.



- We are in the middle of having our Maritime Transport Operators Certificate approved for running Petrel Tua Toru. This process, moving from the old Safe Ship Management system to the new Maritime Operators Safety System has been a huge learning curve involving formal statements of Fit and Proper Personness for Emma as the skipper and several of the FOMLI executive as the Maritime Operator, the preparation of a 60-page Maritime Transport Operator's Plan by Jono outlining how Petrel operates, health and safety processes, hazard identification, maintenance, training, audit and review processes and the like. We also had an on-site interview with FOMLI Chair, Pam and Deputy Chair, Theda, and Maritime NZ staff about the operation and everyone's roll in it.

The amount of money involved in the certification of the island's relatively small and simple non-profit operation is truly eye-watering (even aside from the costs of requiring the Ranger to be a qualified skipper, upkeep of the Petrel as a commercial vessel and the day to day running costs). While the certification will end up costing several thousand dollars and last for ten years, anytime a new name is added to the operation there is a charge of more than \$400, plus the costs of Maritime NZ audits every few years. We look forward to adding it all up at the end of the process and having some discussions about how to make it less financially burdensome when a new ranger comes on board every 3-4 years.

### **Pest Control**

No pests have been caught on the island this month with just a couple of rats in the buffer traps to speak of.

### **Charlie Chat**

On Friday Mum, Quincy and I were up doing the Petrel station. We looked into a burrow and we saw a petrel. Mum gasped. She lifted up the petrel's tail and when she looked up she was smiling so much I thought her face was going to burst. She had seen a flash of egg. "There's an egg!" she said in a squeaky whisper. She quickly put the lid back on the burrow and she looked so happy.

### **Quincy Quote**

This morning we had to wake up very early because my mum and dad needed to go to a meeting. Me and my brother watched TV and had some crackers. Then after that we went home and we saw a big, BIG log. And then we pushed it into shore with our little boat so no dinghies could crash into it. Then my mum hopped out and got her boots and her pants very soaking wet. We pulled the log up with the Polaris with a big rope. The Polaris got stuck in the sand then it backed up and then it could drive again. Maybe we can put the big log in the bird area for the dotterels to hide under.



**Maritime hazard removal**

### **Finally**

Don't forget **Volunteer Wednesday**, 2 August, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual. There will not be a volunteer Wednesday in September.

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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