



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report August 2017

Marine Mammal Month has been extended to Marine Mammal Months this winter, but there are signs spring is on the way, and the plants (natives and weeds alike) are all flourishing on the island despite the season.

Visitors and Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- It has been a quiet month for visitor groups this month, with most people preferring to stay indoors out of the cold and wet - very sensible. Bookings are starting to ramp up for the spring and summer though, so we expect to see a flurry of school groups taking in the island tour as the weather warms up.
- We had an excellent Volunteer Wednesday, with many of the regulars braving the bad forecast (which, thankfully, ended up being mostly incorrect) to come and stomp up and down the North Face re-filling the bait stations. After a sterling effort the entire north side was completed and even some of the south side thanks to our regular trapper Bevan. After lunch the productivity continued with a bunch of rabbits sourced from Good Wood Aotearoa chopped ready for salting and turning into baits, and plenty of periwinkle and wattle removed from the usual trouble spots.
- Dwane and Angela have been over looking after their Adopt-a-Spots, getting quite a few extra plants in the ground, and carrying out some general weeding on the island. Seeing the difference a bit of regular TLC in a previously weedy area makes really shows how much the island could thrive with even more of these spots being adopted. If you think you might be keen to adopt a spot please let Dwane or the rangers know. It is free, fun, and very rewarding!
- We had two new NorthTec Environmental Studies, Margaret and Surbhi, start their practicum paper on the island facilitated by Northec Tutor and former island ranger, Ben Barr. The practicum involves working alongside the rangers on the island helping with whatever tasks require an extra hand, for 90 hours each. We are only a couple of days in but so far the students have really impressed with their hardworking attitude and commitment to getting the job done. Their first day comprised of a full eight hours out in pouring rain baiting the lines through the bush on the southern side of the island, with a rough crossing to and from – a very soggy introduction to the island which hasn't appeared to have scared them off.
- Murray and Andrew from Northland Parkcare paid a visit as well and, while there hasn't been much growth over the last few months, the tracks did need a tidy up and are looking wonderful again after a job well done.
- We also had a surprise visit from the young girl who had launched the most recent message in a bottle found on Rat Island by our boys.



Flora and Fauna

Plants

The plants new and old alike are loving the mild, wet winter. With the exception of a few days at the end of July when it was blimmin' freezing (by Northland standards) it hasn't really been cold, and the rainfall has been fairly well spread without too many massive downpours to wash the topsoil away. This has resulted in some very healthy, happy looking plants; but also some equally healthy and happy looking weeds!

Moth plant continues to be a nuisance, with several hundred each of pods and vines removed this month. We have also pulled or dug out quite a few nuisance pampas that keep springing up on the island and one from Knight Island.

Still, the kowhai are starting to burst into their verdant blooms - with the accompanying musical symphonies of the tui - and both the newly planted *Hebe speciosa* and *Clianthus*/kaka beak have been flowering.



Kiwi

We are now in the middle of kiwi breeding season, with Glen on an early nest and Sir Ed probably not far away. We have been hearing loads of calls at night, sometimes so close to the house that they have been waking us up in the hours just before dawn. This will mostly be from young birds looking for potential mates, rather than our established breeders. Hopefully the young hopefuls will be transferred off the island later this year/early next year so they can find mates and add to the growing kiwi coast population. There have also been lots of distinctive kiwi footprints in the mud around the old Manager's house, which are great to point out to visitors.

The TR4 receiver used on the island to track kiwi was malfunctioning so has been sent to Kiwi Track for repairs. Big thanks to Rolf from DOC and Todd from Backyard Kiwis for helping out with replacement gear, picking up signals etc while the island gear has been out of order.

The K4K end of year report was completed and submitted. They provided some funding for buffer trapping which really helped to ensure the island remained rat and mustelid free.

Petrels

We are keeping a semi-regular eye on the burrow with the egg but otherwise trying not to disturb the petrel station with our presence. We have had some interesting footage from the infrared video camera placed near the burrow including curious kiwi having a poke around, the petrels emerging from the burrow, and a bit of scrapping between petrels too. Check these out on the island Facebook page if you haven't already.

Pest Control

- The last round of rodent indexing showed there were still mice present on the island although at half the density of the previous round due to the mouse bust bait-station filling in between.
- We completed the full re-baiting of the island over three days thanks to our regular volunteers, the new NorthTec volunteers, and Bevan as noted above. A big thanks to Jon at Rentokil Initial for the provision of new baits for the work.
- The island continues to be otherwise animal pest-free although Bevan has reported mice all over Knight Island, so extra baits and checks are going in there to get on top of them.

Other Events

- We continue to work through the application for our Maritime Operator's Certificate, most recently by way of an hour long interview/examination of Chairperson Pam, Deputy-Chair Theda, Emma and Jono by a Maritime NZ officer. We have received very positive feedback about the plan itself, and the FOMLI operation over the years in general from MNZ, so we are confident that we will soon be re-certified.
- It has been a big month for sea mammal observations around the island, kicking off the orca visit reported in the last report, followed by the arrival of Sealy, the semi-regular NZ fur seal visitor, then a pod of dolphins, and then a leopard seal, probably Owha.

- Sealy the seal has been hanging out at the old wharf and at the top of the pontoon gangway off and on over the last month, having been observed elsewhere in the harbour before making it over to the island. It has been great observing this creature up close on four occasions, catching fish, and hauled up on the concrete at the top of the gangway. It was also very cool to see it interacting with the leopard seal who also spent a couple of days around the island.



- We were very excited to be visited by dolphins one Sunday morning. Alerted by shrieking teenagers, Emma saw the pod in the channel and we were able to spend about 30 minutes observing the pod as they travelled back down the harbour. This was mostly from a respectable distance, but the dolphins did come right up and play around the boat for several minutes, to everyone's delight. As we



- were on the water again a couple of hours later, the leopard seal was observed near the barge landing, adding an additional frisson to the day. The next day Emma spotted both seals fishing around the old wharf. Despite the size differential (leopard seals can reach a whopping 500kgs!!) the NZ fur seal seemed to be a much more successful fisher.
- Over the last few months we have seen a number of "Whangarei Rocks" at various places on the mainland around Whangarei and more recently they have started turning up on the island, so keep an eye out for these if you are over visiting. For anyone who doesn't know – these are brightly decorated rocks hidden in public places. The idea is that if you find a rock you admire it, then re-hide it for someone else to find and enjoy.
- Please note the Island pontoon is still out of action and we have not had any indication of when it will be returned - hopefully before the busy summer season).
- We are hearing ruru more and more on the island and have started to spot them semi-regularly under the closed canopy during overcast days. It is great to see these guys utilizing the island, although I'm not sure that the weta would agree!
- Australasian gannets have been observed regularly in the channel between the island and Onerahi. It is a pleasure to watch them hunt, dropping from the sky like stones. Now if only we can encourage them to take up permanent residence on the island.
- Caspian terns are showing up again and we will continue to encourage their presence at their usual breeding spot on Knight Island by a bit of judicious weeding.
- Rubbish pickup from the beach has been ongoing with another four 240L bins replaced this month, again thanks to the WDC and Northland Waste. This hassle-free waste disposal is greatly appreciated, and much better to know the waste is going to the right place rather than floating in the ocean or polluting beaches.

- We are seeing NZ dotterel in breeding plumage and the oyster catchers that nest around the sand barge/landing are being seen in their tight twosomes exhibiting courtship behaviour. The oyster catchers that flock on the old wharf by the ruins seem to be in greater numbers than last year, creating a cacophony whenever we are too close on land or sea. The white oyster catcher has also been spotted a few times; it will be interesting to see if any white chicks ever turn up.

Charlie Chat

One day we were going out on the boat and we saw a seal's head bobbing on the water. Mum thought it was a fur seal and we went to have a look. When we got closer we realized it wasn't a fur seal at all but a leopard seal, Owha, a leopard seal that's been in the Whangarei Harbour for a while. There was a big spotty head; the eyes were part purple, part black, and part red. A few days later we saw the fur seal and the leopard seal around the old wharf hunting. The fur seal caught more fish, they both have different feeding tactics. The fur seal who had smaller jaws than the leopard seal held the fish in his mouth and shook it until the rest of the fish flew off, then he ate the piece in his mouth and went back to do this over and over again. The leopard seal who had larger jaws preferred to grab the fish and swallow them whole. A few days later I was walking along the rocks looking down and I didn't notice the fur seal resting on a rock until he roared at me. I jumped back and got a fright. The end.

Quincy Quote

One time my cuddies came out for one night and then one day my mum decided we should go for a walk. Some teenagers were screaming down at the beach. My mum thought they would be only screaming like that if there were dolphins. Then she just screamed to everyone "dolphins, dolphins, dolphins". Then we all hurried on our life jackets and raced down to the boat. Then we started up the motor of the big barge then we went out to see the dolphins. Then all the people were watching on the side of the mainland. Then we saw another boat and we saw the dolphins. The dolphins came up to us very close. I thought "that's amazing". Then we went back home and had a walk to the ruins. The end.

Finally

- Don't forget **NO VOLUNTEER WEDNESDAY** for September. The next Volunteer Wednesday will be **Wednesday 4th October**, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.
- Also, for more photos of life and work on the island including dolphin videos, don't forget to visit our Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/MatakoheLimestoneIsland/>



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