



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report September-October 2017

The weather is warming up, the plants are growing, the tui are calling. Spring is in the air.

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- Emma, Jono, Charlie and Quincy returned to the island in mid-September after taking their annual leave in order to avoid the worst of the winter weather. That special pleasure was left to Emma's dad, Robin and his partner Yuriko, who did an excellent job island-sitting. Robin and Yuriko enjoyed visits from Bevan, Dwane and Bernie during their stay.
- Since returning to the island, we have had visits from an enthusiastic class of Year 1 and 2 students from Kamo Primary, and the Whitebait Connection/Harbour to Drains school holiday programme returned to the island for a day of hands-on education about what ends up in the harbour and around the island. Check out their art work, made from rubbish collected from the island coastline, at the central library over the next month. We had the Year 11 Outdoor Ed class from Whangarei Girls High visit the island to deliver some rat trap covers they made, to help with rodent indexing and (continuing the rodent theme) to do a rubbish sweep on Rat Island. We also had a group over from the Science Technicians' Association of New Zealand enjoying a fieldtrip as part of their annual conference. We have had a couple of teacher-only visits, one from Parua Bay School to arrange an Adopt-a-Spot (thanks Dwane and Angela for helping out with this visit also) and one from Ngunguru Primary School in advance of a day trip next month as part of their Year 3-4 camp.
- After missing the September volunteer Wednesday due to the rangers' absence we had a great volunteer Wednesday at the start of October, undertaking a 'Mouse Bust' and filling the bait stations on the northern side of the island. The group was so capable there was even time for some weeding, seat installation, and tractor maintenance. The remainder of the island was busted by Emma and our Northtec practicum students, Margaret and Surbhi, over the next couple of days. Angela, Delice and Constance have also been over to their adopt-a-spot this month.
- We say haere ra to our trapper Bevan Cramp this month, off to a full-time job for the Pukenui Forest Charitable Trust. Until we secure the services of a new trapper Bernie will be filling in, so welcome back Bernie!
- Jono from Marine North came over to do the annual service on Petrel Tua Toru and the tinny, as did Graeme from Norwoods Farm Machinery, to service the tractor.
- Surbhi and Margaret have been over for quite a few days helping out with various tasks, but mostly tackling the re-finding, re-cutting and re-marking of the bait station lines in a particularly difficult spot on the island. This is quite physical work and they have been doing long days, but they have really impressed us with their cheerful dispositions and can-do attitudes. We hope they will continue to be involved with the island even after their 90-hour practicum commitment is completed.

- Dave came over for a day and did an excellent job dealing to the spring grass growth on the tractor. Prior to his arrival Emma was sharpening the slasher blades when she noticed a pin had sheared off and the nut holding one of the blades on was only just hanging in there. Having one of the blades fly off while in use would not have been good! She did a temporary fix, and Graeme brought over the appropriate pin for a long-term solution during the tractor service. Murray and Andrew from Parkcare also did an excellent job to tidying up the tracks this month.



Jono captivates the WGHS Outdoor Ed students.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

We enjoyed the end of the kowhai season when we returned to the island and now the flax, karo, manuka and kanuka are flowering, with the odd pohutakawa, Poor Knights lily, native hibiscus and clematis too!

Kiwi

It was both lovely and slightly annoying to get back from our time away and be woken at night by kiwi calling right outside the bedroom window for several days afterwards, whilst dealing with re-adjusting to the time difference, then daylight savings kicking in. Perhaps Robin and Yuriko had been much quieter in the evenings than our noisy family and the kiwi had gotten used to coming in close, or perhaps we had just gotten used to not hearing them while we were away!

Emma, Margaret, Surbhi and Quincy had a pleasant surprise near the southern access track while re-cutting and marking bait station lines this month. Emma spied an unusual half-buried bucket in the ground which she hadn't seen before and suggested to Quincy that he check it out. He soon reported back that he thought it was a kiwi on a nest, and sure enough he was right! This currently unknown male is incubating two eggs. Once the eggs hatch he will be moved to the mainland where he can carry on his fatherly duties adding to the Kiwi Coast population. Emma couldn't understand why there would be a bucket in such a position but Bernie solved the riddle. He had found resident pair Sir Ed and Kahui Whetu in what was then a short burrow with an almost vertical entrance. Concerned the burrow would fill up in heavy rain Bernie constructed a fully covered and waterproof deck for them when they were absent one day. Sir Ed now resides on the other side of the island, but this new male was obviously impressed enough with the extensions that he chose to take up residence for the 80 day incubation period, if not longer.



Todd has been busy bringing chicks out, with four so far released on to the island this season. Glen is currently nesting over at the ruins, and Sir Ed is nesting too.

In many ways a kiwi's life is very easy on Matakoho-Limestone Island. A lack of predators and plentiful food make for 'cruisy' living, but the limestone rock means they need to be a little more creative with their nest making. In areas with mature trees and plenty of soil kiwi tend to have nests in hollowed-out burrows under tree roots. On the island the males are mostly found nesting in flax tunnels, whereas the juveniles like to make labyrinth tunnels through the thick rank buffalo grass, as well as making full use of the luxurious petrel station burrows.

We had the first of this season's Kiwi whakawaatea on 8 October, with some beautiful words by Freddie Tito and an audience of about 40 at Onerahi, then more speakers and a couple of hundred in attendance at Pataua North. Todd and Jack Hamilton came over at 7am that morning and, along with Emma, were able to catch the three kiwi without incident. We were humbled and honoured to have FOMLI name one of the kiwi Quincy, with the other two named Piper (after the granddaughter of long-time Whangarei Kiwi Sanctuary farmer and supporter, Bill Lovell) and Gail (named by the Pataua North Landcare group). You can view an article about the release here <http://www.kiwicoast.org.nz/kiwi-numbers-boosted-pataua-north/>

There is another whakawaatea scheduled for Friday 17 November. One young kiwi already has a transmitter attached ready to go for this release and Emma will be catching another one or two over the next couple of weeks for that release. We are likely to mark 150 kiwi returned to the mainland by the end of this season - a major milestone!

Petrels

Sadly the egg which we reported on in the last Ranger Report did not make it to hatching. The petrel was still on it shortly after we returned from leave, but a week later it had been evicted from the burrow. The state of the egg suggested it had failed some time prior to being ejected. However, we are somewhat encouraged as this season's egg appears to have lasted longer the first egg several years ago, and we are hoping that practice will eventually make perfect. Unfortunately, the burrow camera footage didn't allude to what might have happened, but it did regularly pick up a nosy looking kiwi having a good sniff around, as can be seen on the island's Facebook feed.

Other Fauna

There are a huge number of tui around at the moment, busily grabbing twigs for their nests and chasing each other around. Several pairs of oyster catchers are back at the barge landing beach and many more have been seen roosting at high tide on the old wharf by the ruins. The white oyster-catcher is obviously paired up and is undertaking courtship behaviors, so it will be interesting to see if any of its offspring from this year end up with the same unusual colour morph. The Caspian terns are back and can be seen on Knight Island and also on the old wharf. Royal spoonbills have been regularly spotted on the mudflats north of Shipwreck Bay and around the barge berth over the last couple of weeks, including some with their glorious breeding plumage. A couple of rosellas were also roosting on the Manager's House for a few days.

Pest Control

No pests have been caught on the island in the last two months, with just a couple of rats in the buffer traps to speak of. As noted above, we have just undertaken another mouse bust across the island and, with the continued support of Rentokil Initial and Jon Thompson, have secured a supply of bait to do another bust shortly in order to try and knock down the mouse population.

Other Events

- The island pontoon is still out of commission but Whangarei District Council has committed to replacing it. Unfortunately, the piles themselves are also no longer serviceable so both these and the pontoon will be replaced with a slightly small structure but we have no details about when this will happen.
- We are very pleased that our Maritime Transport Operator's Certificate and Maritime Transport Operations Plan for the operation of Petrel Tua Toru have been approved and issued by Maritime New Zealand. It has taken us about six months and thousands of dollars in direct costs and ranger and FOMLI hours to secure this approval, but thankfully it will allow us to operate for the next decade, subject to audit and survey requirements.

- Due to the quality of the Operations Plan, the scale of the operation and the good standing and lack of incidents since FOMLI and the Rangers have been operating a commercial vessel, we have been placed in the lowest risk category and it will be two years before we have to undergo the first MNZ audit, and then three to four years before the following one.
- Nevertheless, stuff still happens. Emma spent a particularly 'unenjoyable' day last month with Petrel beached at the old boat ramp at Onerahi. A fault with the trim meant meeting Jono from Marine North at Onerahi first thing in the morning to try and sort the problem. It became apparent that a locking pin had sheared off leading to a bolt coming loose and blocking the trim gear. This required beaching the boat and removing the motor completely to retrieve the bolt, which was undertaken in short order as the tide went out, but necessitating a long-wait to refloat. Unfortunately this coincided with a planned school visit which had to be postponed, but we understand they had a fun walk along the Waimahanga Track instead.



Petrel Tua Toru high and dry.

- The sheep are looking very woolly at the moment, especially Lamby who has moved through the ranks to become one of the largest in the small flock. Ken is watching the weather and will come over some time in the next few weeks to help relieve them of their winter coats.



**A couple of metal heads on tour
Looks like they went to the same baabaa!**

- Emma attended a meeting at NRC regarding the response required in the event of an oil spill affecting wildlife. Having participated in oiled wildlife training many years ago while at DOC (sadly no-longer provided) and being an experienced seabird handler and also having access to a very useful vessel in the event of an emergency, she has been added to the list of responders.

Odd Stuff About Old Stuff

- It always pays to ask an expert, so it was great to have retired mechanical engineer and blacksmith Robin (aka Emma's dad) on the island looking over the ruins with his particular professional eye. Jono had never really thought about what the simplest bits of rusted iron could tell us about the history of the island until Rob started pointing things out, like the hand split bolts securing concrete pillars to the foundations and the hand-pulled straps which used to hold the doors onto the cement store.

- He also hadn't ever noticed the makers mark "Netherton" with a crown on some of the iron; thanks to Professor Google we know now that much of the steel at the cement works came from Noah Hingley and Sons Ironworks of Dudley, Worcestershire (est. 1838), famous for making the anchor and chains for the Titanic! Hingley's was vertically integrated, owning the ore, coal and fireclay mining and quarrying operations as well as the ironworks itself. Netherton (Crown) iron was arriving in New Zealand as bars for local blacksmiths by the early 1880s, largely as a result of the establishment of commercial relationships based on personal visits to the Antipodes and other export markets by Noah's son and successor Benjamin. As with the discussion of changing kiln technology at the cement works noted in an earlier Ranger's Report, even the iron used here ties the Limestone Island cement works into the international industrial community!



Finally

- Don't forget **Volunteer Wednesday 1 November**, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.
- Next kiwi whakawaatea on Friday 17 November at the old (east) boat ramp next to the Onerahi Yacht Club. Further details to come so check back on the island Facebook page. The release itself will be held at Tawapou Coastal Nursery from 6pm that evening.
- 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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