



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report January 2018

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- The Christmas period is often pretty quiet for groups visiting the island via the barge but we have had a few groups over in the last month to keep us on our toes. We had a lovely time running over the island with the Whangarei Home Educators Group the week before Christmas. It was great to see this group of independent learners explore the island and entertain themselves during their visit. We also had a fun day out with the Kohatu Developments summer school holiday programme in the second week of January. The day was super-hot and finished with a swim, which seemed to be the highlight of the day for everyone.



Kohatu Holiday Programme

- At the start of January, the Wednesday volunteers got stuck into weeding around the cement works and clearing vegetation from and undertaking some maintenance to, the fences. We also cleared out the water tables and culvert sumps on the all-weather track in advance of the big storm on 4 January, and Dave did his usual wonderful and enthusiastic mow of the bait lines and fire breaks on the north side of the island, the latter being especially important this time of year.
- Due to the absence of the pontoon and the subsequent restricted access to the island via the Waipapa harbour cruise boat, we decided to offer transport to the island on Saturdays in January for members of the public via the barge on 6 and 13 January. The first trip was only two days after the big storm and the weather was still unsettled, but 15 visitors made it over. Later that day we also had a group over from a classic car club who wanted to include the island in their itinerary, which also included a tour of the GBC Winstones cement factory at Portland. The second trip was on a much nicer day but with smaller numbers. We only advertised the opportunity via Facebook so as not to be inundated with visitors but we will reconsider how best to promote the opportunities into the future, along with the best time to do the trips, as many locals who might otherwise have been around and who we would like to engage with, were probably still on holiday.

- We haven't noticed a drop off in visitor numbers encountered day to day on the island, with the obvious exception of those who used to arrive on a Sunday at the pontoon via the Waipapa. We have observed about 100 people on the island since Christmas Day aside from those we have brought over on the barge ourselves, versus about 70 in the same period last year, so it seems self-propelled visitors are still making use of the island in the absence of the pontoon.
- We had Rory Renwick, Deputy Principal Rural Fire Officer over to the island along with Ian Page from FOMLI for a familiarisation tour and discussion of the unique risks and logistical challenges associated with a fire on the island. One outcome proposed is widening one of the central bait lines to three slasher widths, to act as an additional east/west fire break. Emma will clear the area of kiwi and other wildlife in advance of Dave and the tractor, the next time he comes over.
- Ken, John and Dwane from FOMLI came over the week before Christmas to help with moving the remaining fence poles off the island, which was greatly appreciated. This is the work that was started earlier in the summer with the Work Ready team. The stockpile has been a bit of an eyesore and a hazard since the fence was removed and we are now planning to clear the area out completely and replant it over the winter.
- Theda and her adoptaspot team came over to weed around the top edge of the cement works ruins, there is never a shortage of weeds to find and on this visit they took out a heap more. We have also been grateful to Emma's dad, Robin and his partner, Yuriko for a couple of short stints island sitting so we could get off with the boys for some short trips away over the holidays.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

The storm of 4 January was certainly wild and we were happy to receive the drenching, but we could always have done with more as the ground sucked up every drop (we always know when it's been a decent rain as the cut off drain behind the house starts running, but no luck that day). Nevertheless, so far this summer is proving much wetter than last year and while the brown tops of the carrot weed on the north face are abundant, there is still lots of green underneath and new growth on the trees.

Last year we had no significant rain from the end of November until the end of January, resulting in a month of being in the extreme fire danger conditions from Boxing Day. This summer we have yet to tip over into the danger zone. With more rain predicated for the middle of January we look forward to this situation continuing for the next little while.

The heritage kumara near the school site continue to thrive and haven't needed any water since the second week after planting - unlike last year - and we look forward to a better crop this autumn.



Kiwi

Te Uira, He Arahi Te Whatitiri (the bucket kiwi chick) has had a shaky start at the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre with a prolonged period of retained yolk sac. The yolk kiwi chicks live off for the first few days of their lives is usually completely gone by the time they are round a week old, but for some unknown reason this chick kept one for several weeks. It also favoured one leg and was slow to start eating (no doubt connected to the yolk sac retention). However, it is now using both legs and starting to eat well and we look forward to bringing it over to the island in the near future.

Also currently at the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre is Sheryl (named after our Mayor, Sheryl Mai) a young kiwi repatriated to Matapouri from Matakoho-Limestone Island late last year. Sheryl was one of Glen's chicks from late 2016 and she had a great start to life here on the island with no predators or vehicles to worry about. Unfortunately she was injured, presumably struck by a vehicle on the road near Matapouri in late December. Miraculously she survived and was found via her transmitter by Nan Pullman. X-rays have shown no broken bones but she has some spinal injuries that she is beginning to recover from. We really hope to see this otherwise healthy young bird with 50+ years ahead of her make a full recovery and be able to live out her life without any more vehicular encounters.

This is a potent reminder to visitors and locals alike to be ever vigilant at night to avoid hitting a kiwi, particularly in the Whangarei Heads and Tutukaka Coast areas.

Thanks so much to Robert Webb and his team for the effort and care they put in to giving these kiwi, and a host of other native birds the best chance to thrive. We certainly appreciate having someone so close and approachable to call on in times of need.

Meanwhile planning for an event to celebrate the 150th chick being returned to the mainland from the island is underway, with an event being planned for 11 March. Jane Winton from FOMLI is leading the mahi, juggling tides, weather, timetables, guests and no pontoon providing plenty of grist for the event planning mill.

Other Fauna

Sadly the torea/variable oystercatcher nest by the ranger station water tanks, as mentioned in the last report, failed with the cause unknown but suspected to be an avian predator (kahu/harrier or black-backed gull). The pair took up a new residence near where the grass slasher gets parked when not on the tractor, but the one egg spotted in this nest wasn't strongly defended and also failed, and this young pair may still be getting their act together as a couple! The first nest failed right before we ran out of water and had to pump from the tanks, so that was one upside. They are still hanging out from time to time on top of the Manager's house walls, where we have also seen a couple of white faced herons recently.

Unfortunately the egg loss does not appear to be a one-off event, with plenty of breeding behavior and eggs spotted from torea and New Zealand dotterel, but no chicks to date. As mentioned in the last report, this is linked to the huge king tides that we have seen in December and January, and with the January king tides being the biggest of the years combined with an usually strong Northerly wind and associated chop, the north coast nests didn't stand a chance.

To give you an idea of the height of the tides in early January, the high the day after the big storm inundated the end of the pontoon gangway, which has been stopped up since the pontoon was removed. Luckily torea are known to lay eggs as late as February and northern NZ dotterel as late as January, so there is still hope for this season. Fingers crossed they make their nest scrapes high enough up to avoid being taken out by the next round of king tides in late January.



Mr Penguino the little blue orphan fledged shortly after the last report was finished, about a week after he arrived (and just after Emma had gone and bought a big bag of fish and shrimp for him. Talk about ungrateful!. Mr Penguino seemed to have gotten quite comfortable in his penguin box, poking his head out whenever anyone walked by, but at about 10.30 one night we heard him making a bit of noise, not having done so before apart from at feeding time, and the next morning he was gone. We wish him all the best and appreciated his company during the time he was around. We hope he chooses the island as an ideal site when he starts breeding in 2-3 years.

The fish and shrimp was purchased only after a couple of days of catching food for the hungry little guy; mostly shrimp and cockabullies. These were netted at the western end of the island in the mangroves behind the sandspit. We also found out this area was home to a particular parasitic flatworm that causes swimmer's itch/duck itch. We found out the hard way. Needless to say we will be avoiding this water during the summer months from now on, and will keep a particular eye out to see if the birds in this area appear to be infected, as along with aquatic snails, ducks and shorebirds host this parasite.

Pest Control

Alarmingly we have had two more stoats trapped on the island, after the one caught last month, but no other pests on the island. On speaking to other trappers it seems the usual summer stoat eruption is particularly high this year, so this could explain them turning up on the island again. Our new trapper, Margaret, has settled into the role and is figuring out the tricks and traps of the job as she makes her way around the island and buffers.

Other Events

- As noted above, the 4 January storm was quite something, with waves breaking over the grass by the picnic table at the Manager's House beach, and enough wave action to warrant boogie boarding by the kids. A long-lost trap box was rescued from the shoreline towards the western end of the island; it had probably been washed away and replaced by a previous
- The island will be helping up with the major harbour cleanup being undertaken as part of Sea Week, on 4 March 2018. We will use the barge to assist with a land and sea-based ocean clean up involving NZ Royal Navy, Sea Cleaners, Blackdog Cats, sailors, schools and other local community groups, with the rubbish to be collected at Port Nikau in an effort to remove 15 cubic metres of waste from the harbour. Port Nikau will host food, music, navy vessels to explore, and other activities as part of this fun day cleaning up our special harbour. You can find out more about the event here <https://www.facebook.com/events/899474680209109/>
- We have had to replace both wheels on the barge trailer as one was no longer serviceable and leaking air out through the rusted rims and the other was headed in the same direction. Thanks to Onerahi Garage for sorting the replacement wheels so quickly!

Charlie Chat

From the 4 to 5 January 2018 there was a massive ex-tropical cyclone. The rain wasn't as bad as forecast, the wind however was reaching speeds of 45 knots. The waves were big enough to go boogie-boarding on. It was a very wild storm.



Wild seas

Quincy Quote

One day after school we went to the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre and we picked up two penguin chicks. We took them home in our little boat and made them a burrow. We fed them their dinner and then it was time for them to go to bed. The end.

Finally

- Don't forget Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday 7th February, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.
- Also, for more photos of life and work on the island, don't forget to visit our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MatakoheLimestoneIsland/>



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.