



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report October 2018

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- We have had a busy month of visitors, with four days over the school holidays hosting the "Limestone Island Rangers" school holiday programme. The programme, established by ex-Whangarei Girls High School Outdoor Education teacher, Luke Kirner provided an environment-themed, adventure-based, learning opportunity for a bargeload of primary school-aged children from around the District.
- We also had a day out on the island with the Whitebait Connection/Drains to Harbour school holiday programme and had a good walk around the coast with Jordan and her charges, picking up rubbish and then turning it into art. There was a good article in the Advocate about the day, available here:
<http://www2.nzherald.co.nz/theountry/news/article.cfm?cid=16&objectid=12137642>



From rubbish to art

- Volunteer Wednesday was a stunning early spring day, calm and warm with a good turnout of our regulars. Most of the day was spent with a large group weeding Mexican devil weed from the south side of the pa and the upper third of the hill track. At the same time, we had Else and Lei, our NorthTec students helping pull mothplant west of the pa, other volunteers trimming the overhanging branches above the edges of the mown fire breaks/tracks to make mowing easier for our volunteer Dave, and trimming the flax at the bottom of the all-weather track to the ruins. Unfortunately, the slasher on the tractor gave up the ghost early on in Dave's run. As the tractor was due for a service we had Rory out from Norwoods Tractors to have a look at it at the same time.

- We were pleased to have a bargeload out to the island before dawn on 11 October to bless the new pontoon at the cement works ruins, following its installation at the end of September. Fred Tito, Pari Walker and several rangatahi from Te Parawhau took care of the tikanga on the day, supported by Whangarei District Council Maori Liaison team Andre Hemara and Aperahama Edwards, Parks Manager Sue Hodge and Project Engineer Fiona Pratt, and Pam and Grant Stevens representing FOMLI. It was another amazing, still morning and watching the sunrise from the eastern end of the island and enjoying the breakfast provided by the WDC was a lovely way to start the day. As we breakfasted the Aotearoa Chief cruised past on the way to Portland Cement Works wharf and our guests were able to experience its passage at close quarters from the pontoon.



- The new pontoon is slightly smaller than the old one, but has additional piles at either end of the seaward side for larger vessels to tie up to. Since the opening we have started to see visitors tied up there and we expect the numbers to increase as the word goes out, the weather settles and more people make it out to the island via the 'Waipapa' and other vessels that cannot land easily on the beaches.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

The flax on the island is in full flower at the moment and a large number of orange-beaked tui are happily zooming around making the most of it. The island whau are also in full flower, with particularly nice examples next to the steps down to the beach from the Manager's House ruins and over the track to Shipwreck Bay from the Singlemen's Quarters. Otherwise everything else is still growing like crazy and it will be interesting to see how all goes over summer if it stays dry.

Kiwi

It has been a busy month for kiwi on the island with a number of chicks brought over for release over the last four weeks. After the hiatus, the boys have been enjoying meeting these new arrivals as Emma processes them before they are released in the evenings after they arrive. They are very active around the ranger station/Manager's House ruins at night and regularly seen or heard stomping through the bush when we are out at night.

One of the new arrivals was returned the next day as, when Emma was about to insert a transponder she noticed a strange skin infection. Kiwi occasionally suffer from tick-related rashes, but this case did not present like a tick issue or like anything else Emma had seen in 20 years of kiwi handling. The kiwi was kept on the island overnight in a bespoke terrarium chock full of handpicked invertebrates, and then delivered into the ever-loving arms of Robert Webb at the Native Bird Recovery Centre by NorthTec student Kelsie.

Like all animals, kiwi can be prone to bouts of various diseases and disorders. Although we like to think that "our" kiwi here are particularly hale and hearty, they can succumb just as readily as those on the mainland. Therefore it is vitally important that we have a thorough inspection of all kiwi when they arrive and depart the crèche. This quarantine process helps ensure the island kiwi remain in good condition.

After several days of observation, the bird came back, had a microchip inserted without incident and was released. A number of kiwi were calling nearby as this new little fellow was let go, with one bird darting off through the grass by the hazardous goods shed as we walked past. It truly is an amazing experience to have this abundance of special birds active and around us at night, and will be one of the things Jono will miss the most when we leave the island next year.

Emma was out over several evenings, catching kiwi in advance of the next transfer of adult birds back to the mainland on 24 October. At the start of October she caught the large, noisy female who had been creating quite a ruckus around the ranger station over the last few months at night. Suffice to say, since being caught and transmittered, this bird has been a little more circumspect! Emma has since caught and transmittered another bird and caught a third bird for transfer to the Tutukaka coast.

Petrel

Ahi Kaa Tuarua, our oi chick is still up in its burrow, putting on condition ahead of its expected departure from the island around the end of December. At that time the oi will fledge and leave the island, hopefully to return in around seven years time.



Ahi Kaa Tuarua getting bigger

Other Fauna

We have observed the oyster catchers participating in some consensual cloacal grinding on the beach below the Manager's House. The Caspian terns which nest on the shell bank at Rat Island have also returned in numbers for the summer breeding season, making good use of the freshly weeded area reported on last month.

Pest Control

- Rats are starting to turn up on the island again, in the lead up to summer. Emma observed one around the Ranger Station one evening, and one (hopefully the same one) has since turned up dead with a stomach full of toxin. Emma autopsied the rat with the Limestone Rangers holiday programme kids in attendance, an event apparently enjoyed greatly by the young audience.
- The brodifacoum went out into bait stations at the end of September and we will keep up the baiting as long as it is being eaten. While the mouse numbers based on indexing prior to putting the toxin out were lower than expected, we are gratified to see the toxin turn up in the pests and hope that along with the lack of stoat sign reported last month, this is a good indication for summer. Otherwise, the only pests caught this month have been over in the buffer traps, with rats and weasels caught recently.

Other Events

- Just after our last monthly Report was sent out, Total Marine Services turned up at the ruins to install the new pontoon, although not without incident! With tug, barge, digger and crane they started the piling for the pontoon and got halfway done when their auger bit broke going through some hard rock. This necessitated several days stand-down while they sourced and fitted a replacement and then returned to the island, turning what should have been a five day job into a six day job.



- We got a bit of a surprise in the same period when Petrel Tua Toru slipped her mooring during the September king tide and ended up high and dry next to the barge landing steps. This necessitated a 1am wake up for both rangers, to tie her back up on the next high tide.

Finally

- We are having ongoing issues with our solar power system at the Ranger Station, meaning we have often been without power even during sunny days. Because of this we often have no service to the island phone number so if we miss your calls, apologies!
- Don't forget Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday 7 November with 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/>



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