



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report November 2018

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

- This month, Volunteer Wednesday focussed on clearing overhanging branches from the tracks and weeding. While most the volunteers cleared the ruins and hill tracks, a smaller group helped Emma clear the top of the track to the petrel station, and the petrel entry and exit points at the petrel station. The viewsheds from the seats on the Loop Track were also opened up a bit as the bush has grown so much the views of the harbour, Heads and Manaia were disappearing. To say thanks for their hard work this year, FOMLI will be putting on lunch for the Wednesday volunteers during their next visit, on 5 December.
- We had a big group out from Ngunguru Primary School with Charlie's old teacher, Tess Heswell and almost a hundred year 3-4 kids and their adults. They were enjoying a day on the island as part of their school camp and it was great to see so many familiar faces from the Tutukaka coast.
- It was also lovely to have Jan Thomas and room 18 from Horahora Primary School out for the day again. The class spent some time weeding around Badham's Knob, helping us find and release all the little natives poking their heads through the fennel. While the mountain flax and some bigger coprosmas have been planted there since we arrived, there are heaps of small self-seeded plants coming up there and it was great to see the kids reconnect with their special spot and get their hands dirty.
- Room 24 from Onerahi Primary School also came out for a day, led by teacher Jenny Campbell and class member Charlie Carpenter. Apart from delivering the class to the island, Emma and Jono were completely hands-off and allowed to carry on with other island work as Charlie did the health and safety briefing, led the tour around the island, and organised a coastal rubbish clean up and some weeding. Everyone had a great day, with a big swim and turns on the rope swing at the end.
- Sadly we say goodbye to our Northtec practicum students this month; we have really enjoyed having Kelsie, Alsie and Lei over regularly for the last few months and wish them all the best for the coming summer and their future studies.
- Following their successful trial, the Limestone Rangers' holiday programme will be running again in late December and January. If you have children, grandchildren (or great grandchildren) who might be interested, check out their Facebook page for dates and details
- <https://www.facebook.com/Limestone-Rangers-2046452975684839/>

## Flora and Fauna

### Plants

The island has been getting drier and drier through the start of November, with cracks starting to open up in the ground again. We had an hour of decent soaking rain on the weekend just gone, but it would be nice to have some more as we head into the summer fire season. Last summer was relatively wet and we could relax a bit but this year's mild winter and dry spring will require vigilance, so we are grateful to Ian Page for keeping track of changes to the Fire Weather information system and keeping in touch with the fire authority.

On the plus side there are lots of different things flowering at the moment, in particular the native broom and jasmine and the white-flowered hebes. Most of the native hibiscus are flowering now as well, along with the feijoa trees at the Manager's House.

### Kiwi

Emma assisted with another well-attended kiwi release at Tutukaka this month, with three island-raised birds returning to the mainland. Several hundred people attended the release.

This breeding season we have released 13 chicks on to the island, supported by Todd Hamilton as he has encountered them in his rounds on the mainland. It's always an absolute pleasure to meet these little fellows briefly, before delivering them into the ngahere (bush.)



Two cute island chicks – last kiwi of the season, first oi

### Petrel

Ahi Kaa Tuarua, our oi chick is still thriving and putting on condition. Cathy Mitchell came out to the island to band the chick and was pleased with its progress. He didn't regurgitate upon handling (Jono has added this descriptor to his own CV) and was very calm and well-behaved with a good weight. This is great because the oi chicks often lose whatever is in their tummies when they are handled, wasting all the effort their parents have put in over several days at sea to provide food for the chick.

Although Emma can also band seabirds it was really special to have Cathy come and perform this milestone given her close connection to the project over the years. We are really fortunate to have such a talented group of past rangers who are still in contact with the island, and it is wonderful to be able to celebrate moments like this with them.

### Other Fauna

We have four pairs of oyster catchers hanging out on the beach below the Manager's House at the moment, but far fewer dotterel sightings in comparison to the previous two years.

Emma saw a seal off the Onerahi Jetty at the start of November but was not close enough to see if it was a fur or leopard seal; with Owaha the leopard seal back in Auckland a few weeks ago we are hopeful we will see her again soon. It is great seeing these sea mammals returning to their pre-human arrival ranges and Jono was lucky enough to see a young fur seal playing in the shallows just north of the Opononi boatramp last month.

The historic ranger sheep managed to escape (thanks to someone helpfully leaving the gate open....) and go on their seemingly annual holiday tour of the island. They did a great job of chewing down the grass at the flax fields and didn't appear to go much further than the bottom of the hill track and the southern coast. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts to return them to the ruins, we were lucky enough to spot them from the boat while they were grazing the Visitors' Shelter lawn one morning after dropping the boys off at school. Tying up at the pontoon we were able to sneak along the coast and herd them back through the waharoa gate in short order, easily the quickest we have ever been able to round them up.

## Pest Control

The island continues to be pest free for the present; long may it continue. We are pleased to have new additions to our buffer trapping regime as Theda is working with Portland School to trap south of Onemama Point and we are arranging with David, a local landowner, to take over the Onemama trapping and save Margaret the difficulty with timing tides and weather to get to the traps there. David already traps north of Onemama and has also reported seeing a pateke/brown teal amongst the mallards on his farm dam and what with other sightings over at Waikaraka, it's only a matter of time before these guys make it to the island, we are sure!

## Other Events

- We were without the use of the Polaris for three weeks due to an alarming clunking from the right-rear quarter. We made-do with the tractor to launch the little boat and carry supplies up to the house from the barge. Due to a high work load, Rouse Motorcycles in Hikurangi kindly arranged for their former mechanic Patrick, now at Yamaha in town, to get out to the island with everything he might need to fix the problem. They correctly diagnosed the likely problem over the phone and several hours after he arrived, Patrick replaced the CV joint (with apprentice Quincy's help) and serviced the ATV and we were rolling again.



- This month we also replaced and fitted the two wheels on the little boat trailer, with one rim having rusted through and no longer holding air. We also took delivery of the new slasher for the tractor sourced by Ian Page with the help of Grant Stevens, and delivered to the island with the aid of Ken Massey and his nephew, John Ward, Jack Craw, Jerome Tito, Paul Doherty and Grant to manhandle the new piece of kit and the departing original off and on to Petrel Tua Toru.



**The slasher comes and goes**

- Emma, Jono and the boys ducked off to Wellington for three nights to celebrate Charlie's tenth birthday. While there we visited Zealandia which is managed by Emma's old university mate, Dr Danielle Shanahan. We were very lucky to enjoy her company for a couple of hours as we walked around the sanctuary on our Busman's holiday and talked volunteers, student research, and rodent control. But oh, to have some of her problems (like bountiful tuatara trying to escape by digging under their enclosure fence, and having hundreds of volunteers to manage). It was an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast general management and pest control strategies, especially mice.

- We are seeing an uptick in visitor numbers on the weekends as the weather improves and now that the new pontoon is available to tie up to. The Waipapa is not currently including the island on its cruise but will hopefully return to make use of the new facilities as its bookings increase over the summer.

### Finally

- Don't forget Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday 5 December 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/>



[www.limestoneisland.org.nz](http://www.limestoneisland.org.nz)