



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report February 2018

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- The last month has seen an uptick in groups visiting the island and self-propelled visitors turning up, despite the regular downpours and heaving easterlies we have experienced weekly for the last month. While the absence of the pontoon has meant quiet Sundays and a presumed halving of numbers due to the absence of the Waipapa cruise, we have actually had more self-propelled visitors in comparison to last year.
- We had a great mouse bust at the end of January, specially considering we had to postpone for a day at the last minute due to one of this summer's innumerable tropical fronts forecasting strong winds and rain for the original date. We had 24 volunteers over for a couple of hours including several new to the island to rebait the north face of the island.
- We had a fun volunteer Wednesday at the start of February and are enjoying getting to know some new volunteers as well as catching up with the regulars. They trimmed overhanging vegetation from along the tracks and did a big moth plant hit on the western end of the island. The volunteers also cleared the sumps and drains on the school track and behind the rangers house (just in time for the huge downpour!). Dave did his usual fine and cheerful job on the tractor mowing. Murray and Andrew from Northland Parkcare came out to weedat the tracks at the end of January. We didn't need them much at all this time last year due to the drought, but this year the grass just hasn't stopped growing.
- We had a very adventurous group of Lions ladies over for an evening picnic. Their visit coincided with a howling easterly and associated steep chop. So although they were able to be transported safely, they weren't completely dry. A fabulous time seemed to be had by all, including during the bonus roller-coaster transportation.
- Dwane from FOMLI came out to spread some karaka berries and set up the route for the annual Hash House Harriers jaunt around the island which occurred the next day.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

The wet summer continues unabated, with the big storm after Waitangi Day dropping enough rain to get the cut-off drain behind the ranger's house and the waterfalls on the northern cliffs running for several days. The weeds, grass and plants are loving the wet and the heat and the contrast with last year is striking. Jono has been collecting seeds from the *Hibiscus richardsonii* and growing them with an eye to planting up the weedy patches around the back of the Manager's House and hazardous goods shed.

Moth plant continues to appear in the problem spots at the western end of the island with thousands of seedlings and hundreds of pods being removed recently. Moth plants are generally flowering at this time of year, and have their pods in autumn and winter, so seeing pods (many of them) turn up at this time of year has caught us a little off-guard.

The combination of wind and copious rain saw a couple of decent sized trees uprooted across the tracks, but these were able to be dealt with using a hand-saw so the tracks are clear again.



**Happy Hebe speciosa at the Managers House ruins
karaka at the western end of the island**

Kiwi

We are saddened having to report the deaths of both Te Uira, He Arahi Te Whatitiri (the chick of the bucket nester) and Sheryl. As reported last month, Te Uira struggled from hatch despite the great care and attention given by Robert and Robyn Webb at the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre. Likewise Sheryl did not recover from being struck by a vehicle out at Matapouri.

It was decided that the birds be returned to the island for burial. Nan and Malcolm Pullman, and Mike and Jane Camm from the Tutuakaka Coast Landcare group came over along with Pam Stevens from FOMLI, Freddie Tito, Caroline, Rico and Kora to say goodbye to the birds. While it was a sad occasion, it was acknowledged by all attending that Te Uira and Sheryl had, in life and death, been great advocates for kiwi in Northland.

Emma has started rounding up kiwi for the next tranche of translocations back to the mainland. Todd and Jack Hamilton came out to assist one night and caught and transmittered two birds, with Emma finding another one using a nesting box at the petrel station a week later.

Pest Control

As reported last month, we are currently facing a seasonal stoat irruption that, anecdotally, is occurring all over the place. Between December and January we had five stoats caught on the island, an alarming turn of events given in the past there has only ever been one stoat caught every year or two. We immediately asked Rolf Fuchs from DOC for help with arranging a stoat dog and handler from the Pest Detection Dog programme. Owing to other work being cancelled at the last minute, Ange Newport and her dog Macca were able to get over the day after we made the request.

They spent three days on the island, with a follow up visit a couple of weeks later. After traversing the island and island buffers we are relieved to report that there does not appear to be a breeding stoat on the island (which would be hugely concerning). However the continuing occurrence of stoat tracks and fresh scat at the western end of the island and at Rabbit Island and Onemama point, and the lack of subsequent catches in the island traps, suggests that stoat numbers have boomed alongside the rabbit population on the mainland, and stoats are now regularly using Rabbit Island as a stepping stone to and from Matakoho.

We have not found any sign of stoat predation on kiwi or lizards on the island and stomach and scat contents suggest they are hitting mostly insects and the occasional small bird (possibly sparrows, but on the island they could equally be banded rail or fernbirds), but the ongoing risk to the island has meant ramping up a response to the ongoing incursions.



**Macca and Ange hunt for stoat sign
Lambie takes a break amidst the flax after following Emma in while she checked a kiwi nest;
Macca enjoys a well-earned play after a hot days work while Emma and Ange enjoy his company.**

Stoat traps on the island and buffers are now being re-baited every five days with fresh rabbit, along with some fish bits (as stoat tracks had been noted around fish frames washed up on the island), and egg lures. We are grateful to Glen Coulston of Good Wood Ltd for being able to meet our unexpected and increased need for rabbits at short notice; we are aware that at times they are hard to come by. The traps are being visually checked every two days and Emma has also set out additional Fenn traps. We also had a trap audit undertaken by Glen, supported by the Kiwi Coast project. Both Ange and Glen have been very complimentary about the state of the traps and the general suitability of the predator control programme on the island, with just a few tweaks to trap location and setup, but one significant problem - at some point in the past the stoat traps had been adjusted from the factory setting with too fine a trigger, meaning that if one trap in the double trap box was triggered, the other would go to. This meant an effective loss of half the trapping capability, so we are now in the process of adjusting all the traps to rectify this problem.

We are very grateful to Rolf and Ange, along with Fin Buchanan the Pest Detection Dog technical advisor from DOC who approved Ange and Macca to come over and help, and Kiwibank who sponsor the Pest Detection Dog programme. Ange and Macca spent some very hot days scouring the island for stoat sign and were a pleasure to host. Thanks also to Ngaire Tyson from Kiwi Coast for arranging the trap audit, Glen for getting out to the island so fast, and Todd Hamilton for offering some good trapping advice. The response to the stoat issue, the care and aroha with which the two kiwi were returned to the island, and the continued supply of toxins for bait stations from Rentokil Initial just goes to show how many different parties are invested in the island kiwi creche.

- Otherwise, the island traps have been empty and there has been one weasel and one stoat caught on the buffer (the weasel in a new trap that had only been set for a few days). Emma has also made some new tracking tunnels to replace unserviceable ones. The black corflute was purchased after a chance conversation at Wynn Fraser paints in Whangarei and the huge sheet was even cut down on the spot to the exact sizes needed for the tunnels. Can't beat that for service.
- The island also had its first dog incursion since we have been here, dealt with by Emma. While having a swim below the Manager's House ruins on the afternoon of the Hash House Harriers run, she noticed a couple of visitors who had pulled up on the other side of the barge landing and were wondering off along the northern coast with a furry parcel in their arms. Emma followed after and asked if they were aware the island was a strict no-dog zone. New to the district and having just moved on to Beach Road, the couple were making their first trip to the island with their infirm and immobile but obviously much-loved geriatric dog. They were hugely apologetic and departed immediately after having a detailed Q&A about the kiwi on the island, promising to return without the dog for a visit another time. As far as dogs on the island go, it was probably at the lower end of the risk scale, but we still need to have one rule for all.
- After the ground got a decent soaking we had a few hot, sunny and humid days during which the ants were out in force. This was the perfect time to complete our annual ant monitoring of high-risk areas. Luckily no Argentine ants were detected, but it is clear to see there is no shortage of other ants on the island.

Other Events

- The huge downpours following Waitangi and the relative lack of wind has managed to see the harbour resemble a well-brewed cuppa (or possibly pea soup) for a week from the middle of February. We haven't seen the harbour looking so silty since we have been here and it just goes to show that despite all the fine work over the last few years retiring stream margins from stocking and being more careful about managing sediment runoff from pine harvests and earthworks, there is still a lot of work to be done in the catchment.



**The state of the harbour, three days after the rain stopped
Knight Island inundated.**

- The island will be helping with the major harbor 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/>

Finally

Don't forget Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday 7th March, 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.

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