



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report March 2018

The weather has been a mixed bag over the last month, with a settled week of hot sun and warm water over Easter bracketed by torrential downpours, howling westerlies and thick mists. The change in season has seen the stoat threat reduced, the last swims of autumn and an increase in organised visits to the island.

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- We were most grateful for a day's volunteer labour organised by Richard from FMG insurance. A team of eight staff from FMG arrived on the island and set to work clearing the petrel station in advance of this year's breeding season. Jono had sprayed the weeds, including patches of African club moss *Selaginella kraussiana*, several weeks before to get the ball rolling and the FMG crew were put to work hand pulling weeds from around the nesting boxes and clearing the paths through the bush, while Jono and several volunteers started re-surfacing the paths in advance of the winter wet. The heavens opened around midday and the petrel station soon became pretty miserable so Emma and volunteers decamped and were able to round up the sheep which had escaped the cement works ruins several days previously. We were exceedingly grateful that FMG were able to help with this task, otherwise impossible without some well-coordinated extra bodies. Emma decided that FMG stood for the "Feeling Mighty Good" crew, on the basis of their high spirits and hard work!
- A survey to see how the shore skinks were doing 10 years post-release was conducted (more about this later). Former ranger Ben Barr and some of his students from NorthTec came over to assist. We also had the Whangarei Girls High School Environmental Biology class over for a day during the monitoring week so, among other things, they were able to see some lizard handling close up.
- We had another lovely visit with students from the Blomfield Special School. We have hosted older students from Blomfield several times before but this time it was the younger, primary school-aged kids and included several with mobility issues. We were able to get them all over to the cement works ruins, assisted by the Polaris ATV and the group had a great time (as did we).
- In late March we had a day out on the island with the whole of Portland Primary School and it was awesome to connect with a community with such a strong historic association with the island. The children who came over had obviously spent a decent chunk of time learning about the island prior to their visit, if their intelligent and insightful questions were anything to go by. As well as having a great run around the island, we initiated discussion about the possibility of establishing a community pest control programme out of the school, to expand the trapping operation on that part of the mainland where our stoat issue has developed over the last summer. We look forward to seeing what we can do to help the community get this going, which in turn will help us with our work. The trip was facilitated and attended by Theda and others from GBC Winstone and it was excellent to have their presence and contribution on the day also.
- Seventeen volunteers made it out for the first Wednesday of the month and were set to work re-baiting the north side of the island while Dave leapt to his regular mowing gig. Dwane brought over a big bin of kohekohe seeds to plant as well, a boon for the island in the absence of planting this year. It is nice to see regular and new faces turn up, including a lady visiting from USA whose family had planted trees on the island 20 years ago but who had never been out herself.

- We also had a boatload visit from the Engage Home-based childcare group, the third time they have visited since we have been on the island. The most recent visit was child-directed and they spent most of their time playing on the beach below the Manager's house ruin, before exploring the ruin itself. To celebrate their third visit they planted a karo tree which Jono relocated from an undesirable spot near the implement shed where it had self-seeded.



**Clockwise from upper left: Whangarei Girls High Environmental Biology class
Portland School; misty motu; Engage Home-based Childcare.**

Flora and Fauna

Plants

Unfortunately, due to ongoing biosecurity issues we will not be undertaking planting this autumn. The break from planting will allow time for planning for future years plantings, enable us to more actively manage the plants we do have, and continue to try other methods to encourage regeneration in the areas that have proven hard to establish. Growing some plants on the island from thriving resident stock may be considered.

Lizards

As noted above, shore skink monitoring was undertaken this month. This happened via established baited pitfall traps at Shipwreck Bay, as well as some hand searching. Plenty of skinks turned up, the majority of which were copper! We did find some shore skinks in the mix, and they were looking fit and healthy. Huge thanks to Ben for the loan of gear and his endless expertise.

Kiwi

Following the successful return of more than 150 kiwi from the island to the mainland, and the release of a dozen kiwi into Pukenui, Emma has been busy preparing this year's funding application to Kiwis for Kiwi and doing the required reporting for last year's grant. As this report is distributed she will be returning to Motuora to participate in the next kiwi round-up, with the young birds destined for Pataua North.

Emma replaced Glen's transmitter this month and had a bonus catch-up with mate Baldrick who was with Glen when Emma caught him. It is always good to locate these adult females, in part because they are such impressive animals and can get to a pretty decent size when compared with the more regularly encountered males. It is also good to be able to check Baldrick's metal identification band. Coincidentally, Emma found Baldrick when Bernie was the island ranger while she was helping out Rolf from DOC. At that time Baldrick's metal band had opened a little, which creates a risk of entanglement. It was tightened up at the time and it was good to see it was still closed tight several years later. And in case anyone was wondering, yes she does still have the bald patch that spawned her name!

Todd Hamilton gave us a surprise couple of kiwi chicks this month. These were encountered while Todd was dogging for kiwi with kiwi expert Hugh Robertson, so they weren't on the radar. Luckily we were able to get them over to the island where they can grow big and strong in the absence of predators.

We have been hearing a young male kiwi calling quite close to the house off and on over the last few months but while early April's full moon was up the nightly sound of kiwi was replaced by lots of ruru calling, making a nice change

Pest Control

- In the absence of any stoat sign or trapped stoats on the island in the last two months we have returned to our standard trapping regime, returning to weekly trapping and baiting with salted rabbit, after several months of checking the traps every five days and re-baiting with fresh rabbit. We are hoping that Ange Newport and stoat dog Macca will make it over in the next few weeks and be able to give the island the all-clear.
- Margaret had a busy time checking traps at Onemama Point during April, with one stoat, two weasels and one huge rat turning up all on the same day. Such a relief that they got intercepted before making it to the island, and it also confirms our traps are working well!
- As noted above the north side of the island was re-baited this month, but when it came to do the south side a massive increase in wasp numbers coinciding with the hot, still weather over Easter meant we postponed putting bait out. Although all the wasps that we identified were the generally docile paper wasps rather than the aggressive German wasp they were so abundant, widespread and active we didn't want to take any chances. We will wait for a cold grey day and give it another shot. As a further reminder of just how careful we have to be about pests on boats or pests making use of good weather to swim over, we were disturbed to see a rat running around the beach in front of the Onerahi Beach Road playground at 1030 am when picking up the Portland kids. Emma has seen three of four rats at a time running around the area and goodness knows how much bigger the problem would be without our volunteer trappers in Onerahi who keep a lid on a lot of pests that might otherwise make it over to the island

Other Events

- Emma spent a morning with Sea Cleaners (a non-profit organisation committed to removing rubbish from the sea (www.seacleaners.com), retrieving six tyres, an inflatable dinghy, and six rubbish bags full of general waste from the mudflats around the island and the island buffers. It was incredible to see how much plastic waste was around in areas that looked generally clean and waste-free from a distance. Some of the plastic waste was identifiable, and it was a real wake-up call to re-consider single-use plastic for packaging food.
- The weather and tides (and barge motor) were also cooperative for the Opus engineers' inspection of the GBC-Winstone's wharf, delayed by the head gasket failure last month. The barge makes an ideal work platform for this sort of work and a useful source of generating additional funds for the island. The weather co-operated and the task was completed in record time.
- We also had Rob Brown, an engineer from Richardson Stevens, make use of the barge to do some geotechnical assessment for the new pontoon and check out the old Portland wharf.
- The boys had a lesson in practical activism, stimulated by finding plastic-coated parking tickets washing up on the island and neighbouring coastal areas. The boys attended a public session of the Whangarei District Council to request an alternative to the plastic tickets be found, especially as they only need to last a few hours. This led to a well-received article in the Northern Advocate about their advocacy. A reporter and a photographer later visited the island for a few hours to do a profile on the boys and their life on the island, which we are looking forward to seeing.

For those of you who missed it you can see the article below:

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503450&objectid=12022766



Seacleaners hard at work; Dewi from Opus inspects the GBC wharf; Rob Brown at the island pontoon.

Finally

- **Don't forget Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday 2nd of May, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.**
- A kiwi whakawaatea has been scheduled for Sunday May 8, 10am at the Onerahi Yacht Club. Come and say farewell to birds leaving the island for Tanekaha, west of Hikurangi. Keep an eye on Facebook in case the weather plays up and we have to postpone.
- 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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