



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report June 2018

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- We had several fun days out with schools last month, including Jan and her kids from Hora Hora Primary School and a large group from Otamatea High School.
- The group of 75 from Otamatea High School was due to come over as two smaller groups split over two days but due to the weather closing out for the second day, a late decision was made to get them all over to the island in one go while the sun was out and the sea was calm. It was an extra special day as Emma needed to provide some emergency tick relief to a kiwi she encountered earlier in the month (more about that kiwi below). While Jono brought the kids up to the old school site, Emma found the bird and then provided the tick treatment while the children watched, silently thrilled to see a real kiwi so close.



Otamatea kids meet Maia the ticky kiwi

One of the Otamatea students (and Emma's second cousin) was a host DJ on the radio the morning after her trip here. Hannah did a great job on the radio, including describing her visit to the island and a few highlights from the day before. It was great to have the message about the work that goes on here spread to such a large audience.

- Jan has been bringing her students from Hora Hora to the island twice a year for five years now to look after an adopt-a-spot at Badham's Knob at the north eastern end of the island. The bush on the Hora Hora spot is now well established with lots of new self-seeded plants coming up underneath the existing canopy and only a few weeds, so we are looking at new work for Jan and her enthusiastic tamariki.

The kids weeded half the bait stations on the north side of the island, a great help. They also got to see Emma check on the ticky kiwi, visit their adopt-a-spot to see how it's doing, play at the cement works, and pick up rubbish from the coastline. In line with their previous visit where they were equal parts fascinated and disgusted by a dead stoat, this time around they got to meet a freshly trapped rat and a weasel thanks to Margaret who had just completed her buffer trapping round.

Some of the kids who came over are in their third year of visits and it's wonderful to see the connections they have made with the island (even if the most colourful memory seemed to be about the time Emma got them temporarily stuck in the mud on the barge trying to get out of the berth during the lowest tide of the year - our first time with them two years ago shortly after arriving on the island, and the one and only time Emma has been caught out!).



Hora Hora kids weeding bait stations, meeting Maia and learning the difference between weasels, stoats and ferrets

- The Wednesday Volunteers were challenged by regular downpours this month, but there was plenty of productivity none the less. One group was able to bag up and remove a huge pile of old fencing wire from the island, thanks to Dwane and Angela for bringing their trailer and transporting the wire for recycling. The volunteer drop-off coincided with a pre-arranged swap of the bins from the island with Northland Waste; they take away the bins filled with island and beach waste and leave us empty ones to bring back. We really appreciate having such a user-friendly system to get the waste off the island, especially all the rubbish that washes in from the harbour, as it can be substantial at times.
- Ex-Ranger Bernie was up visiting the north again so took three hardy volunteers over to Rabbit Island to re-cut the bait lines and weed a heap of the moth plant. It was a huge job in challenging weather, but very satisfying to see such obvious and tangible results.
- Dwane and Angela brought over some ti/cabbage trees and these were planted on the day at the west end of the island.
- Dave was here on the mower, and trimmed the areas of the island that were not knee-deep in mud, arriving back to shelter just a few minutes after a massive downpour.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

As noted in last month's report, we are not having any public or other planting days this year but we are planning to have a public weed bust and mouse bust over the school holidays in July instead. Keep an eye out for the details to come - at this stage we are looking at two days, either Sunday 8, 15 or 22 July, with one of those dates as a backup in case of poor weather.

The strong easterlies that blew through in early and mid-June knocked some large-ish coprosmas down over the tracks. Usually we would clear these with a pruning saw and brute strength, but the recent purchase of a battery-operated extendable pruning saw has been put to good use to make this task easier for us. It is a potential health and safety risk though, as using it might be addictive!

Kiwi

Emma came across an underweight young female kiwi in a petrel station burrow last month. The kiwi, later named Maia, was covered with an excessive load of ticks. Although kiwi are often found with both kiwi and cattle ticks this young one was particularly burdened by them so, after consultation with DOC and a wildlife vet it was decided to give her treatment then monitor her for a few weeks to ensure she had regained her health prior to being returned to the mainland. It was fortuitous that the health checks coincided with the two school visits mentioned above, and that both times she was located near the track so the students were able to observe what Emma was doing. After a few weeks Maia was transferred back to the mainland, starting with a whakawaatea with Freddie Tito at Onerahi and ending at her release site at Parua Bay. Both Whangarei Heads and Parua Bay Schools got to meet her before she was released, so in her few brief encounters with humans she has had a real impact on children from four different schools. Well done Maia.

There are nine species of ticks in New Zealand of which only one (the cattle tick) was introduced; the other eight are all native. The kiwi tick *Ixodes anatis* is found throughout the country on different species of kiwi and also some ducks and geese. I guess if a cattle tick doesn't have to live exclusively on cows it's only fair the kiwi tick doesn't have to be species specific either.

Ticklish!



Petrel

It has quietened down at the petrel station now, hopefully due to the adults being on the egg-laying exodus where they are back at sea waiting for the egg to develop in the female, and giving both parents ample opportunity to put on heaps of weight before they head back to the island for their protracted incubation and feeding cycles. The petrel station area is almost all under a full canopy now, a stark contrast to when the project began and the area was all grass.

Other birds

As the trees on the island have grown, so too have the species that inhabit them. There are large flocks of passerines that use the island for a nightly roosting spot, safe in the knowledge there are no prowling cats or stoats to knock them from their roosts. Unfortunately these nightly visitors bring with them a host of unwanted plants via their droppings, with all manner of weeds popping up in the most popular roost areas. Tony Beauchamp from DOC has been monitoring these island flocks for some time, and recently shared with me the figures he has been seeing of late (these are numbers of individuals per day):

Via Onerahi:

Mynah (650)

Starlings (200)

Pipit (few)

Goldfinch (few)

Variable oystercatchers (1-2 pairs)

Swallows (variable)

House sparrows (in the past many, but more recently these have been roosting locally at Onerahi)

Via Port Nikau:

Starlings (c. 10000)

Mynah (c. 240)

House sparrows (<50)

Via Portland:

House sparrows (c. 10000)

Starlings (c. 3000)

They can make quite a noise as they come over to the island in large flocks late in the day, and certainly get very upset if they are disturbed at night (when they make more than just a racket, but also an awful stench as well). Thanks so much to Tony for enlightening us with his data about our 24,000+ nightly visitors!

Pest Control

- Emma and Jono had the unpleasant job of salting several more months of rabbit for bait for the DOC200 traps, with the carcasses supplied mainly by Glen Coulston at Good Wood and a few coming to us via supporters of the island (thanks heaps). It isn't anyone's favourite job but it is necessary and it's a handy two-fer for conservation as they are removed as pests on the mainland and turned into pest bait for the island. A certain level of mordant humour is required by the vegan and domestic vegetarian for the several hours of being wrist deep in blood, bone and meat.
- Emma, Pam and Grant attended a pest control workshop at Opuawhanga, organised by Kiwi Coast and Northland Regional Council. It was an excellent networking opportunity with a broad and interesting range of speakers.

Other Events

- We are thrilled to report that a contract for the manufacture and installation of the new pontoon has been let by the Whangarei District Council to Total Marine Services (Total Dredging). The new pontoon is 8m x 4m and will be manufactured off-site and towed into place. The manufacture should be completed by the end of this financial year and Total Marine hope to have the installation completed by the end of August. This will require the removal of the timber piles and installation of new concrete piles, which should be more durable.
- Rory Renwick, the Deputy Principal Rural Fire Officer, supplied us with some 'No fire' signs to replace the rather faded and worn looking ones around the perimeter of the island. These will be installed shortly, well in time for next summer.

Finally

- Don't forget Volunteer Wednesday, *Wednesday 4 July* with pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.
- Please circle 8, 15 and 22 July in your diaries and keep an eye out for updates about mouse and weed busts on the island.



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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