



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report August 2018

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- It has been a quiet month on the island, despite almost a month of unseasonably calm and warm weather broken by only a couple of days of foul winds and rain, here and there. At the start of August we had a great volunteer Wednesday, with most of our cheerful crew weeding on the south east corner of the island, along the hill track and towards the flax fields. The focus was on one of our problem moth plant areas, but plenty of Mexican devil weed and mist flower was also dealt to. A smaller party raced around the coastline of the island installing new kiwi signage, with the old green and gold DOC-style signs quite past it. The new signs, sporting the Kiwi Coast branding, were supplied by Ngaire Tyson from the Kiwi Coast project. They are made from aluminium so should last a long time in this environment, and also have updated messaging that better reflects the risk dogs pose to kiwi. Thanks so much Ngaire, the new signs look great!
- At the same time as the volunteers were over, we had a party from FOMLI, Te Parawhau and the Whangarei District Council over for a whakawaatea to bless the site of the island pontoon in advance of the installation of the new pontoon. The pontoon won't be installed until September or October, but it was good to get things tika and start off on the right foot. The harbour put on a stunning day with warm sun and glassy water, which was appreciated by the pontoon party and the volunteers. Pam, Grant and Sandy provided the victuals for morning tea after the blessing, thanks guys.



Pontoon whakawaatea

- We also had Murray and Warren from Northland Parkcare over to weed-eat the public walking tracks and, due to the fine weather within a week the grass was starting to look shaggy again at the top of the beach steps below the Manager's House!
- We have three Northtec practicum students coming to the island for the rest of the year, Alsie, Kelsie, and Lei. They have had their first visit and we look forward to getting to know them and having their help with managing the island. Their first visit was spent tackling a heap of Queen of the night that had emerged in the bush behind the recreation hall ruins, and getting all the paper work in order for the following visits. Thanks to Dai from Northtec for once again providing these extra hands to help lighten the load.
- Speaking of Dai, we had him bring over some of his students so they could practice their telemetry skills. Dave also came over to do the mowing, as it has been so dry the ground was still hard enough in most places not get cut up by the tractor.

- We have had visits from three solar installers, Hubands, Mercury Solar and Greenspark Solar. All are providing quotes for an upgraded solar system for the Ranger Station as the old system is no longer coping with supplying adequate power over the winter months as components have aged. One installer remarked that he had never seen panels as old as the ones on our roof.
- Troubles always come in threes, so we also had over a week of no internet or phone until the technician from Uber was able to get out to fix the wireless dish, which apparently failed due to the regular power outages caused by the failing solar system.
- And then...five weeks with no hot water after the gas califont died and it seems in Northland at the moment you can't find a gas man for love or money. Not being able to warm up/clean off with a shower over winter has been a real trial for the four of us necessitating a couple of hours every night boiling pots of water on the stove for bucket baths and dish washing We have been grateful for the odd hot shower at Pam and Grant's house, and Emma and boys took off for a few days holiday and Jono had several days off the island excavating up at Totara North, making the most of baths, showers and spa pools where available.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

Early August saw the kowhai start to bud and they have been in full bloom for the last week or two, with plenty of manuka flowering as well. As noted there has been no visible let up in plant growth for good or ill this winter, particularly from mid-July to mid-August when the weather could quite reasonably be described as balmy!

Kiwi

Kiwi work has been quiet over the winter months as it is the quiet season between young chicks being moved over to the island, and juveniles being taken back. That being said, the first of the Spring transfers of kiwi from the island will start next month, with a kiwi whakawaatea on the lawn at the Onerahi Yacht Club at 10am on Sunday 9 September, after which the kiwi will be taken out to Whareora Hall for an event with the Whareora Landcare group at 2pm. Information about the Whareora Meet-a-kiwi can be found here: <https://www.kiwicoast.org.nz/events/meet-a-kiwi-whareora/>

A young kiwi was found dead by the Northtec practicum students. There was no sign of external injury so we can presume the cause of death was likely either misadventure, or a medical event. Either way it was sad, but unavoidable. There has only been one other dead kiwi turn up in our time here, and interestingly it was in a similar place.

Emma also prepared and submitted the Kiwis for Kiwi final report, a requirement of the last financial year's grant.

Petrel

Our petrel pair are still in their burrow at the petrel station and still appear to be on the egg. The mean incubation period is 54 days so we are still a little way away from hatching, with fingers, toes, and eyes crossed (especially Jono, lols). We are grateful to Ngaire from Kiwi Coast for the loan of a couple of trail cameras, one of which was set up on the burrow so we could see what the oi were up to (you may have seen some of the footage on our Facebook page; if not, check it out).

Unfortunately, we were horrified to see a stoat inspecting the burrow on the first video taken by the camera, during the day no-less, and this is discussed further below.

Other Fauna

It has been great to have tui back on the island in large numbers, as the kowhai have bloomed. We have counted 20 or more birds in the trees at the Molly Stevens grove when going past and have started to see them darting under the eaves of the ranger station again.

The number of roosting oyster catchers on the old wharf continues to impress, with Grant Stevens counting 119 including the white colour morph individual, sitting out there during the blessing for the pontoon site. The dotterels are back in their breeding plumage at the old sand barge too.



Birds, kowhai and unwanted mammalian predator

Pest Control

- Following the highly alarming discovery of the stoat roaming the island, we were able to secure the services of Ange and stoat dog Macca, who helped us out earlier in the year. We were exceedingly lucky to get Ange and Macca right before they disappeared over to the Orkney Islands for three months' worth of eradication work over there, so thanks to them, along with DOC and Kiwibank for their support from the conservation dog programme.
- Ange and Macca were able to locate a stoat den which appeared to have been in use for some time, based on the scat, and associated bones and feathers found around it (largely passerines and shore birds). On the basis of the state of the den and the identification of the stoat as an older female, our understanding of events of summer has been revised and it looks like the stoats turning up in the traps every week were probably her kits, which she birthed on the island. Mother stoat, having survived so long, is obviously very wily and trap-shy, in comparison to her inexperienced offspring.
- Trap shy stoats are notoriously difficult to deal with, and despite using a variety of tempting bait and lures (including fresh rabbit, fresh egg, and stoat bedding), putting out some Fenn traps as they look so different to the DOC200s, and trying some Good Nature A24 automatic traps there is very little likelihood of the creature being killed by these particular tools. Unfortunately, while the stoat remains alive on the island we cannot transfer chicks from the mainland, and if the petrel egg hatches there is very little chance of it surviving to fledge with the stoat around. Likewise if it is not dealt to by summer we won't have any success with the shorebird breeding on the island either. We have had endless discussions about this issue, with experts from throughout the country and are trying our utmost to do all we can to catch or kill the predator. We are currently exploring toxin options, and will hopefully have more to report next month.

Other Events

- A number of other things happened this month including Petrel Tua Toru receiving the first service on the new engine, and replacing the roller on the little boat trailer with the still serviceable roller from the old boat trailer. We also attended the third birthday party for the Wai Ariki Food Forest at Onerahi and enjoyed the hangi and entertainment arranged by Freddie Tito and his band of merry gardeners and supporters.
- Emma also attended the Sanctuaries of New Zealand (SONZ) conference in Hamilton. She had a great time and enjoyed networking with other Sanctuaries people. It seems that everyone is dealing with the same issues in particular increasing stoat incursions, succession planning, and maintaining momentum for established projects in the face of competition for funding and helping hands from shiny new projects.
- As part of their ongoing crusade against sea-borne plastic, Charlie and Quincy (with a little help from camerawoman Emma) made a short instructional video about using MPark, the locally-developed mobile parking application available for use in Whangarei instead of the plastic-coated tickets issued by the parking meters in town. The video was posted on the island Facebook page and washed up over 10,000 views and 115 shares in just a few days. A number of those who commented said they had started using the app as a result of the video, which is a great result for the boys. If you haven't seen it, check it out at <https://www.facebook.com/Matakohelimestoneisland/videos/1771761946235438/>

Charlie Chat

At the start of the month, we found a piece of black obsidian we found on the beach. It was quite small but it was really pretty. I wanted to put it in my rock collection but dad said it was pretty special and because it was so brittle it might get broken. It comes from a volcano but not one of the Whangarei volcanos, but maybe Huruiki at Helena Bay or Little Barrier, or Kaeo.

Quincy Quote

Today we saw some dotterels down at the old barge. They were all squawking around and breeding.

Finally

- Don't forget *Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday, 5 September* with pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.
- Also, diary the kiwi whakawaatea at the Onerahi Yacht Club at 10am on Sunday 9 September, followed by the Whareora Landcare event at the Whareora Hall at 2pm.



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

www.limestoneisland.org.nz