



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report January 2019

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- Along with the usual weeding and trimming activity, our December Wednesday Volunteers also helped install two new estate signs on the island. We all enjoyed a shared lunch with the FOMLI crew. New signs were installed at the ruins and barge landing, a new sign for the Petrel Station at the top of the Hill Track and replacement signs for the Shipwreck Bay and Flax fields signs - the former with a great photo of the Tiri and Victoria before they were burned on the beach in the late 1970's. FOMLI Committee member, Theda Hall has put a huge amount of effort into the signs project over the last two years, and tracking down that particular photo took a great deal of work. There was no Volunteer Wednesday in January due to it being so close to New Year's Eve, so we look forward to seeing everyone on Waitangi Day for the first of the year!



- We had a comparatively easy time of it rounding up the sheep for shearing this year, with a little bit of prep seeing the sheep into the Singlemen's Quarters in about 30 minutes and on the first go. This was a big improvement on the first year when we took two days and several attempts! The following day Ken Massey and his helpers came out to do the hard mahi. The sheep were shorn and drenched in good order.
- Fred Tito and crew came out and planted some more heritage kumara, with the school holiday programme group providing some of the labour. Murray from Northland Park Care came out with his son to weed-eat the public tracks at the start of December, and we also had volunteer Dave come out after his recent cruise holiday to mow the tracks on the north face. We had an evening visit from Whangarei ICONZ (Boys Brigade) who had a lovely evening picnic, explored the island and had a chat with Emma about kiwi and Jono about the history of the island. They seemed keen to come again and spend a bit more time over here. We also had a visit from FOMLI committee member John Ward's tramping group, who spent half a day exploring the island. We also had a visit from Parklands Playcentre.
- The week before Christmas we had the FOMLI committee over to the island for a shared dinner and a visit to see Ahi Kaa Tuarua and look at the new signage. We also had Miriam Ritchie and her stoat dog Woody over, supported by the DOC/Kiwibank Conservation Dogs programme. We have been hugely grateful for their support over the last year, and we know the predator dogs and their handlers are run off their feet. Unfortunately the summer stoat season has returned, see more below.

- We have had a very busy summer on the barge, unlike earlier years, thanks to Luke Kirner/Safe Outdoors NZ Ltd and his Limestone Rangers School Holiday Programme. Usually the summer holidays don't have a lot of barge bookings but we have had three visits a week from Luke, his assistants and 10-20 primary school-aged visitors per day. They set up a sun shelter at Manager's House beach, then spent the day swimming, playing games and have helped out with activities like argentine ant and rodent indexing, collecting mown grass to mulch orchard trees and gardens, helping Fred Tito plant kumara, and removing oyster shells from the beach. You can find out about the programme here:



<https://safeoutdoors.co.nz/> and see photos here:
<https://www.facebook.com/Limestone-Rangers-2046452975684839/>

- The weather has been very settled apart from the storm just before Christmas, meaning lots of activity out in the harbour. An increasing number of self-propelled visitors are turning up and using the new pontoon, which is great to see. We are also seeing the usual bunch of kayakers and small boats turning up at Shipwreck Bay and Manager's House Bay. The Waipapa has landed a few times but we understand it is not yet returning to regular visits.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

Just after the last report the asked-for rain arrived in late November giving the island a good soaking over several days and closing-up the cracks in the ground. Then it dried off again until a few days before Christmas when the island received another good soak. It has now been three weeks since we had good rain, with only a couple days of light showers followed by those drying westerlies so fingers crossed for a little bit more before too long.

In the last week of November the big pohutakawa above Manager's House beach started flowering, kicking off the summer season for us. Within a week or two most of the pohutakawa around the island were in flower, with a particularly stunning example next to the gate and stile on the south side of the cement works ruins - one of the earliest planted according to long-time volunteer Rusty. At about the same time the old plum trees at the ruins showed ripe fruit and we had a number of feeds of these yellow-fleshed Christmas plums (although the birds got more of them). FOMLI Chair Pam remarked that it was the first time she remembered the tree fruiting in about 15 years (but perhaps past-rangers kept it to themselves!). The whau were flowering at the same time and there are plenty of native hibiscus flowering around three sides of the Manager's House now, some of them standing almost 1.5m high. The showey hebe, the purple-flowered *H. speciosa* are also starting to flower about the place and the karaka are heavy with unripe fruit.



Kiwi

Glen is about half way through his second nest of the season, located in his usual area near the ruins. In general the kiwi have been pretty quiet over the last couple of months but just in the last few days a pair have started calling quite loudly around the house, which is lovely to hear again. We will be having another kiwi whakawaatea to return birds to the mainland on 17 February. See the end of the report for more details.

Petrel

We were both happy and sad to say goodbye to the island's first successfully hatched oi, Ahi Kaa Tuarua, when it successfully fledged at the end of the second week of January, although not without a degree of stress for the two-legged adoptive parents. The trail camera over the burrow started picking up Ahi Kaa Tuarua coming out of the burrow to stretch its wings in advance of fledging, on Christmas night. About the same time, stoats started turning up on the island again, with two trapped in two weeks and a third observed by Emma at the petrel station during a daytime visit.

Emma and Jono had already been paying almost daily visits to check on the bird from before Christmas to observe the change from fluffy down to flight feathers as it prepared to fledge. Those daily visits became twice daily, to block the burrow up in the morning to prevent any stoats getting in if they were about, then an evening visit to open the burrow and 'chick sit' with the aim of leaving as much human scent around as possible, aided by leaving the day's smelly work shirt near the burrow.



Ahi Kaa Tuarua with down and flight feathers

We had hoped that the trail cam would pick up the chick leaving on its last night, as it had picked up the first excursions and the parents coming in and out (along with various other bird life and that first stoat back in August). Sadly it was not to be and on the morning of 10 January Ahi Kaa Tuarua was gone (and no sign of foul play!). We are obviously very hopeful that the bird will return in about seven years.

Other Fauna

We have four pairs of oyster catchers nesting on Manager's House beach and the old sand barge. Various other pairs are spread out around the island. Black-backed gulls had taken over the old wharf at the end of last year and couple of their chicks have been running around there for a few weeks, with oyster catchers starting to return to that area.

We were sad to say goodbye to the island pet Lambie just before Christmas. She was starting to be a bother with large groups of school children, sharing their excitement to see her a little too exuberantly. Ken Massey kindly arranged a new home for her (not a freezer!) and took her with him when he finished shearing the other island sheep.

Pest Control

- The island was pest free until Christmas with only the odd rat turning up in the buffer traps and nothing on the island. As noted above, since then two stoats have been caught, one in an incursion trap set up near Ahi Kaa Tuarua's burrow and another at the western end of the island. Our mainland neighbour David who has taken over the trapping at Onemama reported seeing a family of stoats playing on the beach over there recently and we have now seen groups of different-sized stoat footprints dancing across the sand at the sandspit on the south west corner of the island. Little beggars!



Stoat tracks at sand spit and Woody the Stoat Dog

- As noted, Emma undertook ant indexing assisted by the school holiday kids, who really enjoyed filling the sample tubes with peanut butter and honey, putting them out, and collecting them back again (for some reason they were less keen on cleaning them!). Happily, the island is still argentine ant free!

Other Events

The little boat had a new anchor warp fitted as the old one was pretty rusty, and Petrel Tua Toru is now sporting some new flares.

Finally

- Another kiwi whakawaatea will occur on Sunday 17 February, time to be advised. Come and meet another island kiwi at the old boat ramp next to the Onerahi Yacht Club
- Don't forget *Volunteer Wednesday, Wednesday 6 February* (Waitangi Day) with pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 9.00am as usual.



www.limestoneisland.org.nz