



Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report February 2019

Emma, Jono, Charlie and Quincy are in their last couple of months on the island, enjoying the warm water and calm seas in advance of finishing their term as Rangers in May.

Visitors, Volunteers, and Other Comings and Goings

- We have had an uptick in self-propelled visitor numbers from mid-January as locals returned from holidays and started spending summer weekends on the harbour, however those numbers have fallen off again due to the pontoon gangway being out-of-commission (see more at the end of the report).
- The Limestone Ranger's School Holiday Programme had a successful conclusion, having run over five weeks of the holidays. There were a number of children returning for multiple sessions so days out on the island certainly suited a particular sort of kid.



Kids enjoying the darker side of conservation and looking at crabs
Credit: Safe Outdoors NZ

- You can get an idea of what everyone got up to via this great video from Safe Outdoors NZ: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjgaY3pShD4&fbclid=IwAR3jeU-muVB-rTLJE49kMHoCu3Rzu2M2F5k-Bxp7ieS3F1RcNkYwNEFNXW4>
- We had a massive Volunteer Wednesday on Waitangi Day, with 30-odd volunteers including a large number of regulars, newcomers from the Whangarei International Newcomers Group social (WINGS) and a couple from CCS Community Support. More new signs were installed at Shipwreck Bay and the sandspit, the petrel station tracks were trimmed of overhanging branches, the leaf litter was raked from the track to the ruins and the drains and sumps cleared, and a large amount of periwinkle and mothplant was pulled from a number of sites. Dwane Kokich also brought out some seeds to spread from his own place.
- FOMLI deputy chair Theda came over with her adoptaspot crew to weed behind the ruins. They pulled out a heap of weeds, including flowering and fruiting mothplant so thanks Theda.
- Kevin Parker, a species translocation specialist (<http://www.parkerconservation.co.nz/>) came out to the island for a day for a walkaround with Emma, FOMLI Chair Pam Stevens, with Fred Tito and Jacque Lowe from the Onerahi Orbit joining in for part of the day. Kevin was asked to provide advice regarding potential future species translocations to the island given the constraints and opportunities Matakohē provides. Extensive planning, consultation and documentation is required prior to conducting a translocation and Kevin and his team specialise in the work. Among their many projects they facilitated the release of whiteheads/popokatea to Bream Head in 2017.

- We also had a lovely visit from a family group who won a competition run by Northtec tutor Dai Morgan as an incentive to encourage community buy-in for the urban predator control project in central Whangarei. You can find out more about the project at Parihaka here: <https://predatorfreenz.org/parihaka-community-landcare/>
- Dwane and Angela Kokich came over for a day to set up their annual Hash House Harriers run on the island in mid-February, and we will report on that event next month.

Flora and Fauna

Plants

There is some sign of plants starting to wilt and die back a little around the island with the dry weather, and several days of wind wicking the moisture away after the bit of rain we did get at the end of January. That being said, there are still lots of new plants popping their heads up, with a dozen little karo recently appearing from amongst the shelly patch between the ranger house and shed. These hardy little plants are popping up everywhere through the gravel on the track to the ruins and in other more useful places, and its great to see the island starting to look after its own revegetation! The native hibiscus around the Manager's House ruin have really come away, but with the dry are definitely looking a bit straggly and brown, but with the odd flower still amongst the abundant seed pods.

When Dwane and Angela came over to set up the Hash House Harriers course they brought over approximately 145,000 whau seeds shaken off their tree at home. Full credit to Dwane for weighting a suitable sample to figure out approximately how many they managed to catch in a tarp laid under their whau.

The heritage kumara are still thriving without any human input and despite the hot dry weather. If you are interested in learning more about these heritage tubers, or even growing some of your own, check out Koanga Gardens extensive range, and their fascinating account of how their stock is grown up in the Hokianga, and how to grow smaller plots at home:

<http://www.koanga.org.nz/grow-great-kumara/>

Kiwi

Unfortunately, Glen's second clutch at the Cement Works Ruins which was mentioned in the last report, failed before it hatched. This is not uncommon, and often occurs when one of the eggs gets a bacterial infection and dies. However we are pleased to report that Sir Ed has successfully hatched two new chicks at the other end of the island. We are especially pleased with Sir Ed, because he had been 'missing' for the best part of a year due to a failed transmitter. Emma had made several attempts to find him around his regular haunts and, although she spotted him several times he is a wily and wise bird and was not about to be caught.



Luckily we were able to secure the services of kiwi dog contractor James McLaughlin who came over for a night with his two kiwi dogs to help find Sir Ed. After sitting out overnight to listen for calls that might indicate Sir Ed's whereabouts, it took only about an hour the following morning to successfully locate Sir Ed and five other kiwi (not in the exact same spot, but in the same area of the island). What talented dogs.

Sir Ed was on a nest so Emma monitored this regularly and, when she thought it had hatched visited at night when Sir Ed was off for a well-deserved meal break. Sure enough there were two perfect little chicks nestled in together. Emma visited again the following day and was able to attach a new and functioning transmitter to Sir Ed and insert transponders in the chicks so we know who they are when we find them again. They were particularly calm (and cute) chicks, and they slept through most of the weighing and measuring procedures.

We had another successful kiwi whakawaatea to return birds to the mainland, on 17 February. Todd, arrived on the island at 8am that morning along with DOC ranger Julia Brady and Otago Masters student Taylor to help Emma catch the four birds she had caught and transmitterd over several evenings in the preceding month. Emma and Julia's birds required some manoeuvring through the buffalo grass on the north face of the island while Todd and Taylor's were around the 6-pack quarry and the Singlemen's Quarters. Despite the hot dry weather all four birds were in reasonable condition and we haven't seen any kiwi out and about on the island during the day looking for water, as has been reported up in the Bay of Islands and at Trounson Forest Park recently.



There were at least 50 people at the Whakawaatea including lots of new faces. There were almost 500 people at the pre-release event at the Parua Bay rugby field, with the Awhi, Teina, Malaika and Pakiri released on the Ross family farm just behind. The boys named Awhi the kiwi thinking of its main connotations of cuddles and support, but then Emma saw one of the alternate meanings was to brood and the name became even more perfect for a wee kiwi (even if it is a bit ironic given that she is a non-brooding female)!

Awhi is 4 years old and is one of Sir Ed's chicks, so island hatched and raised and the grand-chick of Glen the patriarch of the island kiwi. Teina is 3.5 years old and is the chick of Ray from Rarewarewa. Malaika and Pakiri are both 16 months old and were transferred to Matakohē-Limestone Island on the same day in October 2017. They were from different nests though, with Malaika being the chick of Chocolate Fluffy Unicorn (CFU for short) and Pakiri being the chick of Waimarie; both also from Rarewarewa.

Several kiwi chicks have also been released on to the island this month.

Petrel

Emma has prepared the annual petrel report. It has been interesting trying to decipher what is going on with the three adults who have visited the petrel station most frequently. There appear to be three petrels highly connected with the site and each other; and participating in breeding activity. They were E212633, E212679 and E212652. E212633 was a known male. He was encountered on 29 separate occasions, including being found with E212679 seven times (across three seasons), and once with an egg (in 2017). E212679 was a known female. She was encountered on 13 separate occasions, including being found with E212633 seven times (across three seasons), with E212652 twice (across two seasons), and twice with an egg (once each in 2013 and 2018). E212652 was gender unconfirmed but presumed to be male. He was encountered on 15 separate occasions, including being found with E212679 once each in 2013 and 2018. Although all three adults used the same burrow in 2018, it is thought that the parents of the successfully fledged chick Ahi Kaa Tuarua were E212679 and E212652, as both individuals were observed incubating the egg and visiting/feeding the chick.

Other Fauna

We have seen spoonbills feeding on the mudflats again over the last month. There are still a number of oyster catcher pairs around the island, along with the regulars at the old sand barge, but no sign of any shorebird chicks this season.

Pest Control

There have been a couple of rats caught on the island over the last month, but stoat footprints are still appearing on the sandspit at the western end of the island.

Other Events

- Unfortunately, less than three months after the new pontoon was installed, it is out of operation again due to the failure of the gangway. It seems as if the hinge and pins where the gangway connects to the concrete pier seized, and then sheared on one side during a king tide at the end of January. We are waiting to see what is happening about replacing the gangway and will let you know.



- The island fire extinguishers were given their annual service at the Yacht Club boat ramp by Wormald.
- Our main water tank ran dry at the end of January necessitating pumping from the backup tank which takes water from the shed roof. This is only the second time we have had to use that tank in almost three years, testament to the hot dry summer. We were grateful for a couple of days of soaking rain soon at the start of February, to top up the backup and add some more into the main tank. We had the water pump serviced by McQuinn Pumps and were grateful for a very fast turnaround with this critical piece of island kit.
- We are keeping a weather eye on the Fire Weather Index and other information provided by the NIWA Fire Weather service but have only had a couple of days getting up towards extreme fire danger. We are pleased to note that unlike up in the Bay of Islands recently, we have not had any silly behaviour with fires/fireworks/home-made incendiary devices on or around the island. Thanks to Ian Page who is also keeping an eye on the weather and fire-related issues for us.

Finally

- Don't forget **Volunteer Wednesday, 6 March** with 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/>



www.limestoneisland.org.nz