

Island Time

Issue 3



Update on the Island's Birds

Gerry Brackenbury

I could hear it, but not see it.

That is often the way – a double note; sharp, in the bushes and getting closer. Was this the moment I finally get to see the elusive Limestone Island Fernbird? Yes! Here it comes, a shy, self introduced brown bird. At least two Fernbirds arrived on the island last summer, and have been breeding on the island. They seem relatively unconcerned by the human activities around them, and carry on calling while we are in their territory.

And what was I doing, face down in the dirt with a perforated shoe-box in my hand? Well thanks to two keen lads knee-high to a grasshopper, I was carefully putting six weta into a bush, in the hope that they, and the others re-introduced to the island, would start to breed. The two

Onerahi boys had been carefully collecting wetas for me from their fence, and I was into phase two of the restoration process. The next breeding bit was out of my hands, if you get my drift.

Other "News from Nowhere" (with apologies to William Morris), is that the Barge Dotterels have laid three eggs and dad's busy telling everyone to back off.

It was Samuel Taylor Coleridge who wrote in his tome "Christabel" "... and Spring comes slowly this way," and it has been late and wet hasn't it? Yet this powerhouse of energy is unstoppable and I hope on Matakohē/Limestone Island this year to see at least four pairs of breeding N.Z. Dotterel, and ten pairs of breeding Oystercatchers; a pair of breeding Fernbirds, perhaps the odd Kiwi egg turning up, N.Z. Pipits and the usual suspects of finches,

thrushes and blackbirds; and a Pukeko in a Punga Tree!

As I write this, the harbinger of Spring is calling outside my window. This particular Shining Cuckoo has travelled to my garden all the way from Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomons. No bigger than a sparrow, its' main objective is to find a Grey Warbler's nest, remove an egg, and lay one of its' own in place of it – a parasite no less! If it is such a smart idea, which it is, how come no other bird has worked this free labour ruse out?

It is a great tragedy the way humans have treated our flighted and flightless birds, and I thank heaven for our dedicated school teachers, who are getting the conservation message through to their pupils. Let's hope that one day we can all marvel at the myriad riches that is the world's avifauna.

Onerahi Kids On Limestone

By Sean Garner (9 years, Room 18)



Onerahi Primary School looked at Matakohē-Limestone Island and made it into their new environmental project. We raised money to help buy more life-jackets for visitors when they use the boat for a day out or to plant trees. Onerahi Primary School are also having trips to the island to clean it up and find interesting facts so the kids can do their own posters about the island. Matakohē-Limestone Island is probably one of Onerahi Primary School's biggest environmental projects ever.

We have a shade house to grow plants until they are big enough for kids to go and plant them on the Island. But that means arranging to use the boat and if the answer is yes (which it usually is unless they are very busy) we are off to plant trees on Matakohē-Limestone Island. We have also released flax snails onto the island.

We have learned a lot of interesting facts and here are some of the facts we didn't know before we started the project: Golden Bay Cement are the main sponsor for the island, traps for predators are set every 25 meters, there are over 1000 traps on the island. Our school is really proud to be working with Matakohē/Limestone Island to help save the kiwi.

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Editorial by Sandy Page

It has been a really busy winter for those of us who are involved with the island, and it is with some relief we look ahead to summer tasks.

Those of you who have visited will be aware of the great changes taking place at & around the ranger station. Colin & Wendy are now living in their new house, after 4 long months of being in the old cabin, with only gas lanterns and candles for lighting, surrounded by a construction site in the middle of a sea of good Northland mud. Hopefully life in the new, bigger & wonderfully sunny cottage will be far more comfortable. It also gives Colin an office, hopefully the 'nerve' centre of island administration. As more and more activities are taking place on the island, record taking becomes a more important part of the ranger's job.



A little helper plants on the island



View from the Island

Colin has just taken delivery of a new computer which will assist in this process. This has been purchased with assistance from the ASB Charitable Trust.

We have had a very productive planting season, getting about 20,000 trees into the ground. We thank all those of you who have come over and helped, for without the support & assistance of everyone, this would not happen.

Spring is here – and already we have had five tiny kiwi chicks released on the island, from eggs hatched at the bird recovery centre, and from Landcare Groups at the Nook and Purua.

This makes our efforts to keep the island predator free of continuing importance.

A reminder that our AGM will be held on November 27th at the Hearing Association Hall. We welcome anyone who is able to come.

Fire Danger

Fire continues to be an issue for those involved in the island, for if we have a dry and windy period of weather, the long dry grass on the island, along with human activity, can make a dangerous combination.

Those of you who can view the island from your homes can help us, as often you may be the first to see any smoke on the island. Colin may be on the other side of the island, or too close to see all that is happening.

As there is a total ban on open fires, should you see fire or smoke on the island, please report it.

Dial **111** (Fire Service)

If there is a failure of the 111 service, dial **0274 798 177** or **026 247 6559**, for the Principal Rural Fire Officer

Give the following information :

- fire emergency
- phone number from where you are calling
- Describe what you can see (fire or smoke location, Limestone Island, Whangarei Harbour)

Hang up, but stay near the phone as long as you can.

FOMLI Contacts

Names, email addresses and phone numbers have now (Oct 2012) been removed from this document for privacy reasons, many are also no longer applicable or relevant. Please visit our website:

www.limestoneisland.org.nz

Pub Charity Grants

We are very grateful for the assistance we have received from Pub Charity this year, allowing us to buy a new 40hp motor for the Petrel 11. The old 15 hp motor was making extremely hard work of transporting a full load over to the island, and this meant it could take Colin over an hour to get one class load of children across from Onerahi. It is a much quicker event these days, which makes a far easier visit for all concerned.

The extra horse power has also made moving the large amount of construction material needed for the new house and toilet across to the island a safer & faster event.

We have also received a grant for the purchase of a new generator. This has been the primary power source for the house construction and the building of our new public toilet. Obviously it has been well

used in the last 5 months, and hopefully will continue to keep activities on the island powered up.

We have also obtained funding from the **Bank of New Zealand Kiwi Recovery Trust** to assist in the costs associated with predator control and kiwi monitoring on the island. This will allow us to upgrade & replace some of our tracking and trapping tunnels, and fenn traps, and assist in payment for rodent bait. These traps are used constantly to ensure that any predators which arrive on the island do not stay long. The continuing success of the island as a safe kiwi crèche is very dependent on it being predator free, and many volunteer and ranger hours are spent ensuring that this remains so.

You may enjoy checking out their web site: www.kiwirecovery.org.nz. It has a great deal of information



about kiwi and what is currently being done especially by community groups to assist in its survival. There is a wonderful interactive section, and one of the kiwis shown has spent its childhood/adolescence on Matakoho /Limestone Island.

We still have copies of our book, "More Than Just a Little Island, the History of Matakoho/Limestone Island" available for \$30.00.

A great Xmas present, anyone wishing to buy some, please ring Dwane Kokich or Sandy Page.



(L & R) The Petrel II has a good workout taking people to and from the Island.



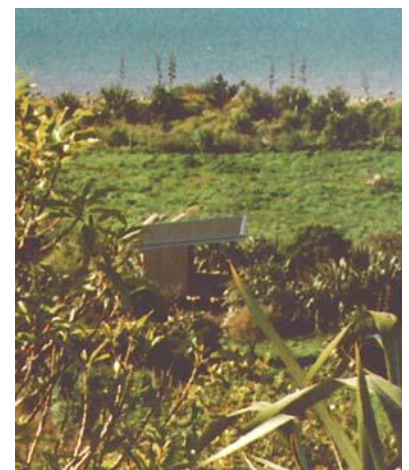
A New Toilet

For some years we have been aware of the need for more toilets on the island, especially near the pontoon landing. Funding from the Harbour Restoration Fund and Whangarei District Council have made this a reality. As well as building the house decks, our

friendly builders have constructed a fine new composting loo and washroom on the eastern side of the island, near to the pontoon landing and factory ruins. It has been extremely well christened, with various school trips over the last month, and

should make life a little more comfortable for our many visitors.

You can find it sheltering amongst the flax bushes, on the right when walking from the factory ruins towards the singlemen's quarters. Enjoy!



The new toilet

Another winter bites the dust with the ground turning soft and sodden to dry and hard over two days in typical Northland fashion. The first half of winter was really kind to us with little rain and light winds. This, along with much appreciated funding from the ASB Trust and of course Golden Bay Cement, enabled us to make good progress with our major project of the year – building a new rangers residence/ office, and setting up a volunteer shelter.

As you may recall from the last newsletter we have been living in very confined quarters. With the help of Stuart Ross and the Sunshine Homes crew we dragged our little cabin to one side and set it up again. The Sunshine team then set to and built a new larger dwelling / office on the old site. Stuart Ferris, Dave Waetford & co. then built decks on both buildings which really finished them off. Kevin Price helped us out with the plumbing and Solwind set up the power system.



While a project like this can become a handful on the mainland, on an island it's a real major. Building material, tools etc. have to be loaded onto the boat, shipped across and then carted from the beach to the building site. Every piece of timber is handled 4 or 5 times from the Onerahi foreshore to the building site. We shipped the whole house and decking etc. across bit by bit in our little 5 metre barge the Petrel II.

So after one year in a one roomed cabin, and four months living with no power during the construction phase we are in, up and running! We now have room to swing a cat or kiwi and really appreciate all the effort that so many people went to, to make it happen – outstanding.

We haven't quite finished yet as we still have the alternative power system to upgrade and a few other minor things but we are in and it's great.

The kiwi didn't seem to mind the building process at all as there was often fresh kiwi scat around the construction sites in the mornings. During this period the kiwi resident around our cabin (Manuiti and Baldrick)

had an unwelcome intruder, Helga (The Horrible), a kiwi that normally resides on the other side of the island. Helga decided that she fancied Manuiti. Baldrick (a female) had other ideas about this and as a result we had minor battles between the two over several nights. The fighting, which often happened under our cabin would sometimes go on for hours and on occasions I was forced to go out and break it up just to get some sleep.

Respite came in the way of Darwin, a male kiwi introduced just for Helga. These two seem to have hit it off and when I checked them out recently they were snuggled up together in a cosy burrow over by the ruins.

We now have twenty two kiwi on board with the recent arrival of five new chicks (Mini T , Sam Terry, Kiri & Flash) recently. One of these birds (Kiri) came from Whangarei Heads via the Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum.

The shorebirds are forming nests and one pair of NZ Dotterels hatched their first clutch of the season. The second half of the winter was very wet which was good for our planting programme with 20,000 trees in the ground this season. The spring growth has been huge this year and it's great to see kowhai, clematis and kaka bear all flowering.

The predator control is ongoing with rats regularly swimming across. These critters are quickly taken care of by our extensive trapping and poisoning regime. On the mouse front we have to settle with keeping them at low numbers for the meantime.

Hope to see you over on the island at some stage over the summer. Please remember no pets or pests, nothing to be taken off the island except your rubbish and no fires.

Thanks, Colin.



Iain Reid mixing cement for deck supports