

# Island Time

Issue 4 - June 2004



## Rangers Report - by Colin Bishop - Resident Ranger

It's been a busy time on the island since our last newsletter; the summer was generally very dry allowing us to catch-up on all the work that had been put on hold last winter.

We have up-graded our predator control system with 40 new trap boxes built with the help of Tony Pierce and funding from the Bank of New Zealand Kiwi Recovery Trust. The final touches to the new ranger's residence have nearly been completed and a number of new projects are under way.

The dry hot summer was a big concern to us with the fire risk rising to extreme at times. Due to the dry autumn the fire risk climbed to high again in the first few weeks of April. It has dropped now with the cooler temperatures and moisture about.

Another planting season on the island is underway. We have seventeen thousand plants to put in the ground this season so it's all hands on deck.

We had another successful shore bird nesting season with twelve pair of Variable Oyster Catchers and four pair of New Zealand Dotterels all getting at least one clutch of chicks away.

The kiwi have just started calling again as the moisture content in the soil increases and they start to stake out their territory and look for mates. We have 21 kiwi on the island at the moment with the arrival of Zorro recently. Zorro, a 3 week old (approx.) chick from Sandy Bay was handed into the bird recovery center after being brought home by the family dog. This chick was very lucky to have survived.

The National Kiwi Hui was held in Whangarei recently with community groups involved in kiwi work from all

over the country in attendance. A major topic at the hui was the issue of funding. Listening to the speakers and comments from other groups made me more aware of how lucky we are to have substantial support from Golden Bay Cement and the Bank of New Zealand Kiwi recovery Trust.

We've had a large number of groups visiting the island with many schools from the district making it over already this year. Many people visit under their own steam in yachts, power boats and kayaks, we even had a woman in her nineties kayak over recently. The fact that the island is so accessible is a real advantage to the community, but it is also within the

swimming range of two efficient predators – the rat and the stoat.

The island has an extensive predator control and monitoring system with traps, bait stations and tracking tunnels covering the island. Last year we caught a rat every three weeks (on average) in our traps and a single stoat. While rat numbers seem to be similar this year we have caught three stoats. Stoats are a particularly effective predator and kill more than 50% of all chicks that hatch in areas where stoats are not being controlled. They will eat anything – rodents, birds, weta, lizards and kiwi chicks. Our traps are baited regularly with rabbit meat, a favorite stoat food.



Left: Sue holds Zorro

Below: Colin with new found Mel



### Inside this issue:

Editorial 2

FOMLI Contacts 2

Kiwi News 3  
(Kiwi Recovery Trust)

Pub Charity Grants 3  
Update

Fernbirds 3

A Day Trip into History 4

2004 Planting Season 4

## Editorial by Sandy Page

The summer of 2004 has been one of consolidation. After the intense pressure created by our building projects last winter, it has been important to get back to the basic requirements of running the island – keeping the pests out, reducing the weed infestations, attending to track maintenance, and continuing on with the enrichment of the island flora and fauna.

Visitor numbers continue to rise, with both organised groups, schools and independent arrivals. The volunteer shelter has been useful for “stand in” island caretakers when Colin has been away, and for DOC staff who have been working at night with Colin to try new ways of catching kiwi.

It was with some sadness members of the committee met to farewell Gerry Brackenbury, who resigned from our committee in order to spend more time with other commitments.

Gerry can be credited with the idea of creating a scenic reserve on the island, and was involved in the initial negotiations with various bodies to make the dream a reality. He has been on the FOMLI committee since its inception in 1990, and has been the instigator of many of our projects since then.

He spent countless hours cajoling and liaising with the many people involved in the production of our history book, and was pivotal in its publication. His commitment to re-establishing the biodiversity of the island has been unwavering, and his enthusiasm and passion for this has been infectious. Many of our volunteers have first heard about the island through Gerry, as he has talked about it on the radio and to groups and schools throughout Northland. We have much to thank him for.

In recognition for his endless work and support, we have awarded Gerry a life membership to the society.

He is still involved in assisting with the introduction of new species to the island, and we know that he will continue to share his knowledge and passion with others.



Whangarei Primary School pupils help out



Conservation Corps help with Track Building on the Island

The planting season has started well, with good weather for our first public planting day. For those of you who are able to help with planting, we are going over every Sunday in June through until July, weather permitting. If there are still plants to put into the ground after this, there will be fortnightly Sunday planting days. This is because we have noted better survival rates among plants put into the ground in autumn and early winter, they seem to be able to get established before the ground becomes permanently cold and wet in late winter/early spring.

See you on the island soon...

## 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](http://www.limestoneisland.org.nz)

FOMLI would like to thank the Publishing Unit of Whangarei District Council for their assistance and support in producing this newsletter. Without their help this would not have happened.

## Kiwi News By Colin Bishop

As you are aware Matakohe-Limestone Island acts as a 'kiwi crèche' for the Operation Nest Egg programme and produce kiwi for release on the mainland. The Friends of Matakohe-Limestone Island (FOMLI) successfully applied to the BNZ Kiwi Recovery Trust for funding in the 2003/04 year. This allowed us to upgrade and maintain our predator control and monitoring system, and assisted us in funding other kiwi work. We are hoping to further upgrade our predator control system by installing new traps (DOC 200's) in our trap boxes to replace our aging Fenn traps.



During May two kiwi were caught while I was out at night. Both of these birds were Operation Nest Egg birds that had been brought over to the island as chicks. Both birds (a male and female), weigh over 2kgs and are in excellent health after a very dry summer. Transmitters were fitted to the birds and they will soon be heading to the mainland.

At the other end of the operation we received a 3 week old chick recently which had been handed into the Whangarei Bird Recovery Centre after being brought home by a family dog (a spaniel)!. Named Zorro, (after his captors Spanish ancestry), this bird is very lucky to have survived, as without wing feathers to protect it, the kiwi's chest structure can easily be crushed – a dog can kill a kiwi, simply by picking it up in it's mouth. Now safe from dogs and other predators it is enjoying the island life.

We are finally getting a bit of rain and the kiwi are responding vocally after many quiet nights. It has been interesting watching the change in the kiwi scat (maybe I need to get off the island more?) from the brown splatter of last winter (worm tucker), to being full of blackberry over the summer, to being a mass of native cockroach shells in the autumn.

Dwane and I got a lot out of the recent national Kiwi hui. The networking, support and information available was huge I look forward to the next one. I feel that the kiwi programme on the island is progressing really well. A highlight for me is sending a big, healthy sub-adult bird back to the mainland, fighting fit and ready to go. Getting into night capture work (which seems to be more successful than using dogs to catch kiwi on the island) will hopefully give us a faster roll-over of birds.

## Fernbirds

The fernbird kept last year's planters company a number of times, and we are looking forward to hearing it again as we start this years planting. It is impressive that it found its way to the island, as it is a reluctant, poor flier, rarely more than 100 metres. It is however a smart climber, using its claws and tail to move up plant stems in little runs. It most commonly remains hidden as it moves through the undergrowth, creating only movement of the foliage as it goes. The common Maori names for the fernbird are Matata, Ngako, Wetito or Kukurutoki. In Murdoch Riley's "Maori Bird Lore" he says that Maori regarded the calls of the fernbird as omens of bad or good

luck. "if when a person goes eeling, fishing or whatever, the bird starts with a sound like kore ti kore ti kore ti. The birds message is the hunter is going to be unsuccessful.

However if the bird makes the following sound toro kitoro ki toro ki then they will be successful. " Early settlers named the bird the "utick" because of its metallic "click click" call, the consequence of hearing a pair of fernbirds, one calling "u" and the almost instant reply "tick".

"Te whare o te matata is an expression for a waterproof covering or cloak, comparing it with the neatly made nest of a fernbird in a flax swamp.

## Pub Charity Grants Update

We have been fortunate to gain funding from Pub Charity to purchase a small 4x4 truck for the island. This will be wonderful for many transporting jobs on the island. At present there are many parts of the island which are not passable for our tractor once the winter wet sets in, which makes moving plants and equipment an arduous and slow activity. Often the plants for planting days have been manhandled across swampy places and up or down steep slopes by volunteers, making it all slow, backbreaking work. We are sure this little machine will be in constant use, and hopefully will make Colin's job a little easier.

We have also been able to buy some equipment for the island, including 10 planting spades. No doubt some of you may get to use these on planting days. They are infinitely superior to the old blunt garden spades provided previously.



The Islands new 4x4 gets loaded for it's trip over to it's new home

With luck this years planters will again hear these elusive birds call, and may even catch a brief glimpse.

For those with good memories the scientific name is *Bowdleria punctata*.

Description : 18 cm high. Sexes are alike. Upper parts warm brown with darker brown streaks, under parts white with dark brown streaks. Legs pale brown. Tail feathers have a spine like appearance often frayed at the ends. Has a drooping tail when in flight. It is found throughout the country, around swamps and scrub lands, but is becoming localised through loss of habitat.. It feeds on insects, and will forage along the beach, in grass and scrub land, or on top of low Hebe canopy.

## A Day Trip Into History by Pam Stevens

On September 17 1874, the Rev J Wallace officiated at the marriage of John Fraser and Sarah Edge in George and Harriet Edge's house on Matakahe/Limestone Island.

John Fraser was a stonemason and worked on the island building the single-men's quarters. We can safely surmise that this is probably how John met Sarah, as her family lived on the island. John also helped build their second house (now in ruins, having suffered from military bombing practise some years ago).

Nearly 120 years later, on 16 April 2004 Len and Pam Edge, along with Ivan and Lois Walker, arranged a day visit to the island. By sheer chance Rex Thomas decided to take his visiting Aussie brother Brian and nephew Raymond to the island on the same day. It was as they were boarding the boat that we realised the family connection. The Thomas team was connected through their mother to the Fraser family. It was a chance meeting, the two families had not met previously.

Along with Brian, Rex and Raymond, we spent a few hours circumnavigating the island, as the two groups compared and shared family stories and memories. We

spent some time admiring the high quality of their ancestors workmanship, the concrete blocks being made using hydraulic lime.

The Edge family has an early and long association with the island. As early as 1857 George and Harriet lived and worked on the island. We spent some time around the two old Edge house sites and tried to imagine how life must have been, especially for Harriet Edge (mother of Sarah). She had six girls and five boys, some of whom were born on the island.



There were others but they did not survive long apparently. We were there on a beautiful autumn day. How different it must have been living through those wet winters. They ran a small shop in one of the rooms of the cottage and must have had a lot of contact with the Maori families that were living in the area. In Tim Clark's Book "More Than a Little Island" there is much mention of the Edges and the Frasers and also a copy of Sarah and Johns marriage certificate.

The day trip certainly brought the history of the island alive. The island yet again wove its magic of bringing people together.

## 2004 Planting Season

We have another busy planting season scheduled this year.

Last year we managed to plant 20,300 plants. This year we have cut back a wee bit to about 17,000 plants, including 5,300 plants ordered from Tawapou Coastal Native Nursery. The rest, including 8,000 manuka have been grown by us, at our Golden Bay Cement nursery site.

Volunteers have weeded, watered and potted up these plants for us, under the watchful eye of super nurseryman Iain. A big thanks to our helpers.

Another major operation is transporting the plants to the island and once again a host of volunteers have helped with this, and then getting the plants to the actual planting site.

Going over to the island this year are thousands of flax ( *Phormium tenax*) potted up by pupils from Otaika and Portland Primary Schools.

Unusual or rare plants going to Limestone Island this year are – Shore Spurge ( *Euphorbia glauca*), true flax ( *Linum monogynum*), Crimson rate ( *Metrosideros carminea*), twiggy Mahoe ( *Melicytus micranthus*), Hairy Pinatoro ( *Pimelia tomentosa*), Big-leaf milkwood ( *Streblus banksii*), as well as our regular core species

Ngaio ( *Myoporum laetum*) have been grown from cuttings from nearby Onemama Point where five or so old moribund trees survive.

The planting sites have been prepared beforehand – the grass sprayed with Galant by helicopter, courtesy of Whangarei District Council, and planting areas cleared by a bevy of helpers using scrub bars to make planting easier on our volunteers. Plus the rain has finally arrived – not to soon for our first planting day – Sunday -May 16<sup>th</sup>. This has gone very well, with beautiful weather, a good turnout of planters, and an estimated 1000 trees already in the ground.

If you have a free Sunday, please come and join us this planting season.

### Planting days this year are on Sundays

<b>June</b>	6 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>	27 <sup>th</sup>
<b>July</b>	4 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	18 <sup>th</sup>	
<b>August</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup>	29 <sup>th</sup>	(if any plants are left)

**Meet Onerahi Boat Ramp or Jetty – 9.30am  
Return from 1.00pm**

**Bring a spade and your lunch.  
Dress for the weather and bring as many friends as possible**

Trees will be provided by us, and the transport to the island is free – though a donation is appreciated.

Subject to cancellation (the weather) listen to local radio station or Phone: 436-0923 (Colin)

Other planting days by arrangement.