

Island Time

Issue 5—April 2005



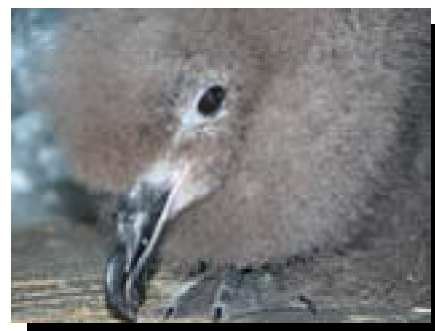
2005 Rangers Report by Colin Bishop - Resident Ranger

2004 – a very successful year. We planted over 17,000 trees last season and with the early wet summer we had in the Whangarei region, they are off to a good start. Visitor numbers were up last year from the previous years, with over 2,000 people transported over to the island. 17 school groups visited the island and well over 3,000 volunteer hours were put in on the island

Last year we had four stoats swim across to the island and 13 rats. These nasty little critters were quickly dealt to in our traps, and we have already caught our first stoat for 2005.

Our predator control system does seem to be working well, as this has been a bumper season for nesting birds on the island. All bird species breeding on the island have increased in numbers from the previous season. Breeding birds include: 14 pair of variable oyster catches, 6 pair of NZ dotterel, banded rail, fernbird, pipit and

kiwi. Two of our resident pair of kiwi raised 2 chicks – 4 island born chicks this year!. These are the first kiwi chicks hatched on this island that we are aware of.



At the tail end of last year we introduced 40 grey-faced petrel (oi) chicks. A report on this is on the back page. Suffice to say that it was a full time job for several months, and involved the help of many volunteers.

As the breeding season comes to an end we are trying to catch-up on maintenance, weed and track work before preparation for the next planting season gets underway.

Have you checked out our website yet?

We are delighted with it, you can find it at www.limestoneisland.org.nz

Another website which often mentions our island and the kiwis on it is that of the BNZ Kiwi Recovery Trust – www.kiwirecovery.org.nz, This is a great site for learning more about Kiwi, seeing what is happening all over NZ to foster the survival of the kiwi. It highlights the importance of community based programs in protecting our kiwi and educating the wider community about what we can all do to help protect this bird. Kieran Goodwin,, who administrates the Trust tells us that their site has thousands of hits, many of them from overseas people who are interested in kiwi.

Dwane tells us that our site also has plenty of overseas hits, and we have had a few expressions of interest from people coming to NZ wanting to visit the island through seeing our site. Check it out!

Matakohē/Limestone Island History Book

We still have copies of this book available. It is a great way to learn more about the island. Or to give to your friends. Only \$30.00

Ring Sandy Page: 09 437 2445,
or send your cheque, plus postage of \$5.00, to FOMLI, PO Box 10 206, Te Mai, Whangarei

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Editorial by Sandy Page

As many of you may know, the major focus of activity on and around the island over the last few months of 2004 was the translocation of 40 grey faced petrel chicks, oi, from Taranga (Hen) Island to Matakohe/ Limestone Island. This was an exciting project for us to be involved in, by far the biggest and most difficult of any species introduction we have undertaken. Hopefully it will lead to the long term establishment of a colony of breeding birds on the island. The success of the project relied on the help of many other groups, who helped us with their knowledge, manpower, sourcing of the birds and finance. We are grateful to them all, and to the volunteers who came and helped on the ground, making and installing the



Digging holes for the petrel boxes

nesting boxes and feeding the chicks. It would not have happened without you all, or our major sponsor, World Wide Fund for Nature New Zealand.

This summer has been a great breeding season for all the birds resident on the island. Probably the most exciting for us has been the successful hatching of four kiwi chicks, an indication that our efforts to restore the biodiversity of the island are beginning to be a reality. It is already a far cry from the grasslands of just over a decade ago, and every year sees an enrichment of the flora and fauna on the island.

The death of Oz Blumhart caused great sadness for many of us last year. Oz had been a wonderful member of our committee, and we miss his enthusiasm and enormous botanical knowledge. We were privileged to have had his skills and expertise to help in the propagation of our nursery plants.

We are delighted that committee member Sheryl Mai has been elected to the Whangarei District Council, and know that she will well represent her electorate, and

Matakohe Island. In early March we hosted some of our new District Councillors and members of Whangarei District Council staff on the island. It was a great opportunity for us to show them what we are doing, and bring them up to speed with what our current priorities and plans involve. We are hoping to obtain some funding from the District Council to assist with our wage and administration costs.

Subscriptions for the 2005 year are now due, see form attached. We continue to rely on our members for support, and look forward to seeing you on the island. Planting days will start in May, and we can often also do with help either on the island or in the plant nursery at Golden Bay Cement Works, Portland. If you can help at any time please contact our ranger, Colin.

Also included with this newsletter is the report Pam Stevens presented at our AGM. It gives a good precis of the last fifteen months activities, for those of you unable to attend the meeting.

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

Memorandum of Understanding

In January members of FOMLI, along with representatives of Ngatiwai and TeParawhau, signed a document which formalises a relationship to work together in partnership on projects of common interest. We are grateful to Ngatiwai for their generosity in allowing us to translocate the petrel chicks from Taranga (Hen Island), and see this as the beginning of an ongoing relationship.

Te Parawhau have for some years been actively supporting work on the island, and have provided guidance for us on many occasions.

Matakohe/Limestone Island has been a significant site for local Maori for centuries, and our restoration projects must take this into consideration, to create an environment on the island which reflect it's past and it's future.



Left: Wallace Heteraka and Ngatiwai members escort the oi on to Matakohe Island

News update

Darwin, one of our adult male kiwis, who successfully hatched two chicks late last year, is again sitting on two eggs. Quite a feat when you realise that it takes 80 days for the eggs to hatch. It is a long time to spend sitting in one spot..... he just leaves the nest to go walk about for a short time each evening to find his dinner. So we will have to wait for another 2 months to see whether these eggs will hatch successfully. Unlike us, the parent kiwis have nothing to do with their chicks once they leave their nest, so I guess he is just busy doing his bit to increase the kiwi population. It is yet another indicator for us that the island is now providing a very good environment for kiwis to thrive.

Some of you may have seen the article about the petrel translocation in the March – April edition of New Zealand Geographic magazine. Tristan Tuckey went with the collection team to Taranga and has written a great account of what it was like scrambling around on those steep slopes locating the chicks. There are some good photos too.

The committee spend a lot of time every year trying to source funding to ensure the development of projects on the island. We would welcome assistance with this task if anyone has time and experience in seeking sponsorship for projects like ours.

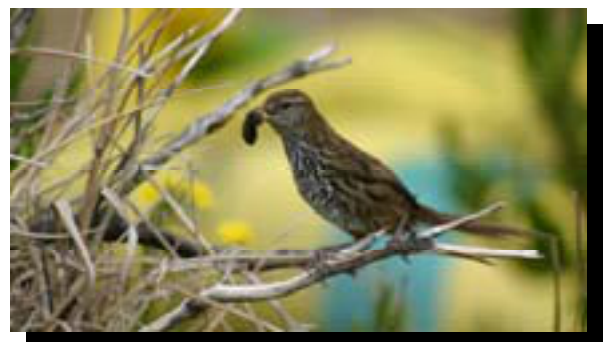
2005 Planting Days

Due to the survival success of plants from last year, we will try to get most of the plants in to the ground as early as possible this year. Planting days will be held every Sunday, starting on **Sunday May 22nd** until the end of July.

As usual, we will assemble by the Onerahi jetty or boat ramp, depending on the tides and weather.

Time: 9.30am. Bring your spade, lunch, strong footwear and a raincoat.

We hope to see you all there some time.



This photo shows one of the parent fern birds on the island taking a spider to the chicks in their nest, in a shrub right in the middle of petrel town. Taken by Olly Ball, he also has a photo which shows the parent bird carrying a skink in to the chicks. This is creating some interest amongst local ornithologists, as they were unaware of the fact that fern birds ate skinks at all. So one of our island photographers is adding to everyone's knowledge of this normally shy bird.

Grey Faced Petrel Trans-location - by Colin Bishop

As part of our restoration plan we recently translocated 40 grey-faced petrel or Oi (*Pterodroma macroptera gouldi*) chicks from Taranga (Hen) Island to Matakoho-Limestone Island. Grey-faced petrels are members of the Procellariidae family of seabirds along with prions, shearwaters and fulmars. All have distinctive external nostrils encased in a tube on the top or sides of the bill.

A translocation of this nature requires an incredible amount of work and commitment. The Friends of Matakoho-Limestone Island (FOMLI) spent well over a year preparing for the transfer. After a huge amount of research, consultation and paper work we got underway with the practical side of the project. With the assistance of many volunteers we cleared a site, built nest boxes, dug them into the ground (not always easy in limestone country) and covered them with bags of sand. Naturally, the chicks are raised in burrows up to a metre below the ground, and prefer cool temperatures, so we tried to keep them as cool as possible.

We then built a feeding shelter (the 'petrel station') so we could feed the chicks in all weather conditions. The site we chose is located high up on the island overlooking the water, looking out to the Heads, and provides a good launching pad for the birds when they fledge.

During October 2004 a team of volunteers spent 5 days on Taranga Island searching for grey-faced petrel burrow sites, locating easy assessable chicks, weighing and measuring their wing lengths and recording their locations. This was no easy task as Taranga is very steep and rugged. From this information we were able to predict their approximate fledge date. The chicks remain in their burrows until approximately 3 weeks before fledging when they begin to emerge at night, exercising their wings and becoming familiar with their surroundings. It is during this period that the chicks imprint the site as 'home', so chicks must be translocated before this starts to happen.

On December 1st 2004 I left the island at 4:00 am and with a team of volunteers headed back out to Taranga for the transfer. The FOMLI committee put in a huge amount of effort in organising the transfer day; invitations were sent out, charter boats and a helicopter booked, food and seating organised etc etc. To make things worse I postponed the transfer at the last minute to the following day due to adverse weather conditions.

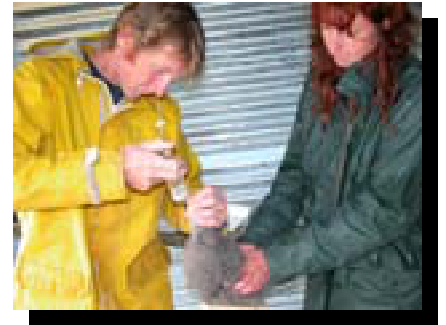


Pillow cases helped to protect fingers from these razor sharp beaks

On the day it all ran very smoothly with the burrow sites re-located, and the chicks settled into transfer boxes, loaded into the helicopter and flown to Matakoho-Limestone Island. Ngatiwai helped us out on both trips to Taranga and were on hand for

the transfer, accompanying the birds on their flight. On arrival the chicks were welcomed onto the island by Te Parawhau and many other supporters and after a drink to re-hydrate them, they were placed in their nest boxes on their new island home.

It had been hard work to get to this stage but now the real graft began. With the assistance of many volunteers and Helen Gummer, a seabird ecologist and petrel transfer expert, we hand feed each bird with a sardine



Colin & Helen Gummer feeding a chick

smoothie. For the first week feeding was carried out daily and then every second day after that. This was a full days task – preparing the food (sardines and water mixed together in a blender), feeding, weighing and measuring each bird, carrying out health checks, disease screening and extensive record keeping.

During all this action at the petrel site a pair of our fernbirds built a nest and raised four chicks in the small shrub at the centre of the petrel nest colony! The parents could be observed flitting between people working on the petrel site as they carried food to their young.

Each night a small twig fence was erected at the entrance to each petrel nest chamber so we could determine when and which chicks had come out during the night. Eventually they all began emerging, exercising their wings and having a look around. This was really exciting and interesting to watch. They certainly seemed to prefer wet, windy nights. Eventually they began to fledge with the last chicks leaving on the night of January 8th 2005. Once the birds fledge they spend the next 3-4 years at sea, without touching land, feeding on squid before returning to the place they fledged from. They breed at about seven years of age and live for 25-30 years.

The first transfer of grey-faced petrels to Matakoho-Limestone Island was a success and a very steep learning curve for all those involved. We hope to replicate this transfer annually for the next 4-5 years.

Many thanks are owed to the following participants in this project:

Ngatiwai, Te Parawhau, the Department of Conservation, the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ), Forest and Bird, the World Wildlife Fund (our major sponsor) and the huge number of volunteers who gave up their time to build and locate the artificial burrows, help with the transfer, offer advice and help feed the chicks. The contributions and support of these groups has been invaluable to the project.