

# Island Time



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www.limestoneisland.org.nz

## Rangers Report By Peter Mitchell - Resident Ranger

Cathy and I have been on the island for almost a year – it's been challenging at times but very interesting and provided the change of lifestyle we had both been seeking for the past year or two.

The island is a fantastic community project, which has achieved a great deal and has become a real asset to the people of Whangarei. The FOMLI committee has been very supportive and we have also enjoyed working with the many volunteers and various community groups who have actively contributed to the running of the island. The local DoC staff has also been great, freely sharing their knowledge and expertise as we have come to grips with the various ecological aspects of the job.

For us personally there have been many highlights including;

**Kiwi:** as with most NZers we had never seen a kiwi in the wild so you can imagine the thrill of having a 300gm baby kiwi delivered to us just a couple of weeks into the job. The local DoC kiwi team have provided training for us including handling, telemetry, and Cathy is now fully trained to microchip the young chicks as they come onto the island. One afternoon we went with Pete Graham (DoC) up to Purua as part of our training. We caught six kiwi in three hours, two of the birds hadn't been handled before - as you can imagine we came home absolutely buzzing.

**Community:** this is an aspect of the job I don't think we really appreciated before we started. The level of goodwill and personal commitment by all sorts of people

associated with the island is inspiring. We are also constantly amazed at the amount of work a keen bunch of volunteers or NorthTec students can get through. Without this assistance the ranger's job would be mission impossible. Thank you.

**Outdoor life:** as a family our recreation has always focussed around the ocean.

Being on the island we have enjoyed living more closely to the rhythm of the ocean, working outdoors and generally growing to appreciate the natural beauty of the upper harbour. Our visits (currently fortnightly) to the surrounding islands are a real treat with Cathy often asking me to hold off until she is also available. The white sand beaches and the nesting birds are just fantastic.

**Whangarei Heads & Rat Island Opportunities:** working on the island has also opened some unexpected doors. We have been over to the Hen & Chicks several times helping DoC, and working on the Petrel translocation. The fauna is incredible with saddlebacks, bell-birds, tuis, geckos and lizards all in abundant numbers. These offshore islands are a true refuge for our native species. Hopefully our little island will emulate these islands in the future but be accessible to all. The FOMLI committee have also encouraged us to attend several hui/workshops during the year. The continuing education has been great and Cathy has been inspired to look at doing a post-graduate Avian Medicine course next year.



Whangarei Heads & Rat Island

As I write this, a female duck with 10 ducklings in tow has just walked past our back door! We've also had Banded rail and fernbirds with their chicks come and visit us at the house – awesome!

Our year has been action packed and won't let up for a little while yet. 40 young Grey-faced petrels will keep us busy through Christmas and New Year. We would like to take this opportunity to wish every one a happy Christmas and fruitful New Year and look forward to working with you in the coming year.

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## Editorial by Sandy Page

2006 – Another busy year on the island. In January the rest of the oi, or grey faced petrel, chicks fledged and flew away – hopefully some will survive the rigours of ocean life and return in four or five years to nest and breed on the island. Preparations are well underway for this year's translocation of chicks from Taranga (Hen) Island. This is scheduled to occur on December 9th, weather permitting.

We have not been able to obtain sponsorship for this year's petrel translocation, (the World Wildlife Fund for Nature has been our sponsor for the previous two years) so this year we are funding ourselves – quite a substantial commitment. Should any of you care to assist, we would be delighted with donations for this project. One big cost is the sardines for feeding the chicks. If anyone cares to donate some tins of Brunswick sardines in soya oil, they can be dropped off at Kamo Physiotherapy Clinic, 445 Kamo Rd, Classics Bookshop in Bank St., Storytime in the Strand, or call Gerry Brackenbury at 437 7532 to arrange collection.

Colin Bishop, our ranger for three years, also flew the nest in January, taking a position with the Department of Conservation in Invercargill.

We were very sad to see him leave, for the island has prospered under his stewardship, but delighted for him to be able to continue his career in such a way. He was in Whangarei recently and was able to make a quick trip to the island to catch up on what has been happening since he left. We are delighted to hear that he and Rose are now engaged - congratulations to you both, and wonder if feeding petrel chicks together can be now recommended as a way to romance!

As most of our members know, our new rangers Peter & Cathy Mitchell have been on the island all year, and we are again lucky to have such skilled and committed rangers. They have continued the work and development of the island superbly, and Cathy's skills as a veterinarian have meant that she has quickly been able to do a lot of the handling and testing required in the care of our kiwi, petrels and other species which may be introduced on to the island.

Tree planting went very well, and was finished earlier than normal, in part due to the weather, enthusiastic planters, and weekly planting days. As anyone who has been on the island this spring will attest, the plants have done superbly this year.

## Fire Danger

Fire continues to be an issue for those involved in the island, for if we had 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. The rangers 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 (Fire Service), dial 027 479 8177 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 for as long as you can.

## Friends of Matakohe Limestone Island Contacts

### Chairperson

Pam Stevens 436 0246 [stevens@igrin.co.nz](mailto:stevens@igrin.co.nz)

### Secretary

Iain Reid 432 2807 [reidmneurfamily@xtra.co.nz](mailto:reidmneurfamily@xtra.co.nz)

### Island Rangers

Pete and Cathy Mitchell 436 0923 [mitchfam@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mitchfam@xtra.co.nz)

### Committee

Olly Ball 432 3727 [ollyball@clear.net.nz](mailto:ollyball@clear.net.nz)  
 John Barber 433 9647 [jkbarber@bordernet.co.nz](mailto:jkbarber@bordernet.co.nz)  
 Gerry Brackenbury 437 7532 [brackenbury@xtra.co.nz](mailto:brackenbury@xtra.co.nz)  
 David Coleman 435 5366 [davidjc@wdc.govt.nz](mailto:davidjc@wdc.govt.nz)  
 Ngaio Davis 435 0872 [ngaiodavis@freenet.co.nz](mailto:ngaiodavis@freenet.co.nz)  
 Lyn Davison 435 3037 [lynd2@xtra.co.nz](mailto:lynd2@xtra.co.nz)  
 Rosemary Drake 433 2522 [rosemary@drakenz.com](mailto:rosemary@drakenz.com)  
 Winnie Hei Hei 430 0382

### Deputy Chairperson

Sheryl Mai 438 9094 [sheryl.mai@xtra.co.nz](mailto:sheryl.mai@xtra.co.nz)

### Treasurer

Sandy Page 434 4217 [pagey@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pagey@xtra.co.nz)

Dwane Kokich 436 0596 [dwane@macrocom.co.nz](mailto:dwane@macrocom.co.nz)  
 Marge Maddren 437 6545  
 Joan Maingay 434 3427 [jmaingay@paradise.co.nz](mailto:jmaingay@paradise.co.nz)  
 Michelle Martin 436 3544 [mich.martin@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mich.martin@xtra.co.nz)  
 Ken Massey 436 5638 [kenm@nrc.govt.nz](mailto:kenm@nrc.govt.nz)  
 Taipari Munro 436 1792 [tmunro@northland.ac.nz](mailto:tmunro@northland.ac.nz)  
 Te Ihi Tito 433 2202  
 John Ward 437 0946 [john.ward@xtra.co.nz](mailto:john.ward@xtra.co.nz)  
 Jane Winton 437 6652 [janewinton@xtra.co.nz](mailto:janewinton@xtra.co.nz)

## Funding application success

We recently received approval for funding from the Northland Regional Council (NRC) Environment Fund for animal pest control. Maintaining and monitoring our predator free status takes a lot of resources, both human and financial. Peter has upgraded and constantly maintains our now well-established systems. Golden Bay Cement sponsorship underpins our rangers and their activities on the island, but we constantly need supplementary funds. This years NRC funding is especially aimed at improving our systems on the surrounding mangrove and mainland areas so that the dreaded stoats and rats do not even make it off the mainland. Todd Hamilton from the Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum reminded us at a recent kiwi transfer that a pregnant stoat on the island can produce up to 14 babies (called kits) and they are pregnant before they leave the nest! We don't want any of them anywhere near our kiwi or other resident birds.



Last years grant from the NRC Environment fund was used to maximum benefit with a huge digger on the island for the day. We managed to make and improve four wetland areas and in addition we now have some well hidden water tanks on top of the hill which can be used for stock and bird watering systems. It has also vastly improved the shower pressure in the Ranger cottage so our hard working rangers are cleaner than ever before!

## PIPIT or ground lark

On Matakoho/Limestone Island we are lucky enough to have New Zealand pipit or Pihoihoi. Pihoihoi is a Maori reproach meaning "stop that noise" as they have a reputation for being noisy and untuneful "hoihoi tahi koutou!". Whioi or whistler is another name these birds are known by. The Maori proverb for the bird is He whioi tonginga rau. "The pipit pecks its food a hundred times a day." There is a saying that a greedy man is gluttonous like a whioi.



They are now only found sparsely, but throughout New Zealand. They are brown above with dark brown streaks, white with tawny tinge below. They have a band of brown across the eye, spots on the breast. They feed on insects and small invertebrates which is thought to be one of the reasons for its rapid decline. They may have been affected by the increase in the use of pesticides as they often prefer open grassland. Unlike the skylark, which is still quite plentiful as it feeds on seeds and spends its time much higher. The resident pipits on the island can often be heard, if not seen, as you pass by the pa site.

Reference Maori Bird Lore -  
Murdoch Riley

## Lizards and Geckos

by Gerry Brackenbury

Throughout the world there are around 4000 lizard species, and they come in all shapes and sizes. The largest is the Komodo dragon, a truly terrifying creature, while in New Zealand we can claim to have had one of the world's largest gecko, Duvaucel's gecko, named after a French naturalist.

We have around 60 native species of gecko and skink in New Zealand, and without exception, they are all under threat of predators and habitat loss. Many are reduced to surviving on our offshore islands, including Matakoho/Limestone Island.

Lizards are part of the reptile fauna that dominated the earth in pre-historic times. The best known are the dinosaurs, the "terrible lizards" and they lived on what became New Zealand. As New Zealand broke away from Gondwanaland it carried a unique cargo with it, including geckos, along with tuatara, the nikau palm and giant weta. The two main family of gecko (green and brown) can trace their lineage back 80 million years. Skinks arrived a little more recently, perhaps via New Caledonia, island-hopping as the islands rose and fell beneath the sea.

Geckos and skinks are truly beautiful and fascinating creatures, yet science was slow in discovering their charms. What other animal can clean its eye with its tongue!

The largest gecko known to man is now extinct and the only specimen from New Zealand resides in a French museum. Very little is known about it, but it sure as hell must have put the wind up early Maori! Before the arrival of man to these shores, lizards would have been everywhere. As already mentioned, there are two main groups of gecko, brown, that tend to live close to the ground as well as trees, and are nocturnal; and green, that are active during the day and have prehensile tails to help get

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## Funders and Sponsors

We are grateful to the following organisations and businesses that have provided funding and support to our project over the years, we could not have achieved anywhere near the level of success to date without them. Please return the favour and choose to do business with our supporters where possible!

### Funders

ASB Trust

- Biodiversity Funding
- Golden Bay Cement
- Pub Charities
- Whangarei District Council
- Whangarei Harbour Restoration Trust
- Whangarei Native Forest and Bird Protection Society
- Northland Regional Council Environmental Fund
- Northland Information Centre for the Environment
- Forest and Bird Northland Branch
- National Parks and Conservation Trust
- World Wildlife for Nature Fund
- BNZ Save the Kiwi
- Kiwi Recovery Trust
- TrustPower
- Meridian

### Supporters

- CHH Project Crimson
- Dick and Lorna Searle
- Guides
- Kevin Price Plumber
- Northpower
- Onerahi Primary School
- Prince of Wales Trust
- Richardson Stevens
- Solwind
- Tawapou Coastal Natives
- Department of Conservation
- Whangarei Boys High School
- Youth Hostel Association
- Green Fingers Growing Mix
- Conservation Corps
- Fish and Game
- Harbour Marine
- Marine North
- Onerahi Lions
- Phoenix Boats
- Rentokil
- Rosvalls
- Stuart Ferris Builders
- Sunshine Homes

## Breaking News!!!!

### Great news – we have another new island-born kiwi!

Glen and Baldrick are the proud parents of a new chick which has been named 'Wilson' by the Golden Bay Cement team. Glen and Baldrick have been breeding on the island for a number of years now. Baldrick laid two eggs way back in August, and Glen has been diligently sitting on them all this time. Unfortunately one of the eggs did not hatch, despite being fertile – this has happened to a number of mainland eggs as well this year. However young Wilson is a survivor and a welcome addition to our family of island-born kiwi.

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around the trees they live in.

Skinks also come in two groups, and again, one likes daylight and the other is nocturnal. We have one native species of skink on our island, the smallest species called the Copper Skink. We believe another species of skink has made a home on Matakohē/Limestone Island, the Rainbow Skink from Australia.

We would like to have a lot more lizard species on the island, and several society members are working hard to make this happen.

## Neighbours Afternoon

In October FOMLI hosted neighbours of Matakohē/Limestone Island to afternoon tea at the Onerahi Yacht Club. Approximately 80 people came and enjoyed a presentation that covered many of the activities on the island from Kiwi and petrel, to history and living on the island.



And in answer to the most frequently asked question "what are those lines for?" – they are part of the predator control grid system of traps and bait stations all over the island, not the agricultural lines that are important historically which can be seen at certain times of the day.

It was a great afternoon, thoroughly enjoyed by all and we received positive feedback from our closest neighbours. We may even do it again one day!



Wilson with Ian Bedford from Golden Bay Cement