



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – March 2009

Autumn is definitely in the air this week and planting sites have been getting some attention as we gear up for a busier planting this year. In between the Gallant spraying and weed spraying we also fitted in a great week out on Whatupuke Island (Hen and Chicks) attempting, for the second time, to collect what are turning out to be very elusive Moko skinks! You will see below, kiwi hunting has also been high on the list with birds needed for special releases this month and next.

Kiwi

- NZ Landcare Trust Trustees met in Whangarei this month for their annual meeting, with a kiwi release planned at the Heads to coincide with their conference.
- Over three nights 15 kiwi were seen with seven of those being caught. One of these birds, Georgie, was big enough to return to the mainland. She was recaptured and released at Taurikura Ridge on May 8 with the Landcare trustees. Thank you to Freddie Tito for blessing Georgie as she headed off for her new life on the mainland.



Cathy weighing Kahui Whetu after Pete managed to catch her.

- Usually James Fraser and his dog, Percy, help us with these captures but it was great fun to go out just with the spot light and be able to nab some of the birds!
- Another one of the birds caught was a new Island-bred bird. It weighed 770gm so is one of the 2008-09 season chicks, with either Glen or Ahi Kaa as the potential father.
- Cathy subsequently found a larger bird, Pakotai, in a penguin box. She is currently running around with a transmitter on so she can be recaptured for a special BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust sponsors release day at the beginning of May.

Predator Control

- This month one stoat, a Norway rat and a mouse have all been caught on the island. A couple of the buffer zone islands are also busy with rodents indicating that it has been a good summer for them.
- The mouse was caught up on the ridge beside the Pa sign, in the same rat trap that caught a mouse last year. No others have been detected but Pete has ordered 12 more rat traps to increase trap density in this area.
- In the buffer zone two stoats and two Norway rats have been caught. Rodents are also present on Rabbit and Knight islands which are currently being serviced weekly until things settle down again.
- Thanks to **Rentokil** who have re-supplied the island with another 10 buckets of **Rid Rat** poison bait this month as part of our ongoing sponsorship package.
- Thanks also to the Wednesday volunteer team who helped Pete finish off the southern end bait stations. Predator control is a relentless job on the island but absolutely crucial to the long-term success of the project.

Lizards

- Many of you will remember that we went to the Chicks group of islands in November last year, with the plan of collecting Ornate and Moko skinks for translocation to Matakohē. We were successful with the Ornate capture and 29 were released on the island in December.
- We were not able to catch sufficient numbers of Moko skinks to enable the translocation to proceed at that stage. Richard Parrish (ex DOC), who was with us, felt that the poor weather may have been reducing our catches. With that in mind the trip this February was carried out.
- While the weather was certainly perfect, once again we did not catch enough Moko skinks to continue with the translocation. We are consulting with Richard, Massey University and DOC staff on our next approach. Options include catching over a wider area and alternative capture methods.



A beautiful juvenile Moko skink, hand caught on the ridge at Whatupuke.

- The trip was carried out in conjunction with DOC, and we were happy to be of assistance with the current work they are doing, containing a rat invasion on Whatupuke and Lady Alice Islands. We were part of a four-person team, rebaiting rat traps and checking - replacing tracking tunnel papers. The trip was a good fitness exercise tramping up and down the slopes of Whatupuke. The good news is that two rats were trapped in mid-January, but there has been no sign of rodents since. We are always amazed by the bird and lizard life on these islands and it is reassuring to know that this threat has been removed.
- Thank you to John Ward and Karen who not only island-sat while we were away but also got a whole lot of jobs done as well.

Visitors and Off Island Presentations

- Pete made a presentation to the Masonic group as part of their recent weekend activities and the following morning two barge loads visited the island including members from Auckland.
- The Sport Northland Trustees visited the island on a perfect Sunday having a look around and enjoying lunch in the new shelter.
- Pete also spoke at the regular monthly meeting for Senior Net and they are booked to visit the island next month.
- Several members of Royal Forest and Bird visited the island last week, spending a very productive couple of hours releasing trees at the Molly Stevens and Sylvia Pemberton memorial seats.

General

- Weed/preplant spraying has been high on the list of jobs this month with most of the planting sites now sprayed. Pampas has been the main weed target, with quite a lot of small plants popping up and the odd larger one making itself obvious with flower heads going up. Pete has been cutting off the heads before spraying so no seed is dispersed.
- The manager house ruins and the singlemens quarters have been sprayed with moss and mould killer to help preserve the concrete.
- Dwane Kokich continued to work on the web site re-establishing the Onerahi School page. Dwane might be missing in action in Croatia but has done a great job with the site while he has been away.
- Cathy has completed the draft copy of the final Petrel Report and also carried out the Argentine Ant survey this month. The Petrel report will be posted on the web site shortly and Cathy will also check out the ants in the next week or two under the microscope to identify them.
- The committee has asked Jo Ritchie to review her original Restoration Plan for the island written in 2000. The initial meeting has taken place and it will be very interesting to see the proposals for 'where to from here'.

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – will be Wednesday 1st April.** Pickup at 9am returning after lunch approximately 1.30pm. Pete is planning to check and mark the known moth plant sites on the island. Any plants found will be pulled or poisoned.
- **Planting Days.** Mark your diaries now – planting will begin on Sunday 31 May this year. This will be Year 20 (!) of planting on the island, so be sure to join in if you can.

Pete and Cathy



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