



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – February 2011

At the start of this month we passed our one year anniversary on the island. That first year flew by unbelievably fast and we are looking forward to another one even more action packed. This January-February was a totally different kettle of fish compared to our first. The total rainfall in the last four weeks was more than we had all summer last year. All the rain has, of course, been great for the plants. Lots of moisture, as well as warmth and sunshine means you can almost see the trees growing.

But of course the rain has had its drawbacks as well. Two weekends of very heavy rain in a row was more than some of the steeper sections of the island could cope with. On the evening of 29 January we had 230mm over a period of 12 hours. The already saturated soils got heavier and heavier until they gave way and ended up at the bottom of the island. All in all we had four major slips. The most inconvenient of these was, of course, the one that ended up on top of the junction between the School track and the Hill track. It relocated truck loads of soil, as well as trees and large shrubs.

A call for help was sent out and our wonderful volunteers swung into action. After Ben and James had moved the fence line and cleared a new route for the track, the working bee gang stepped in and shifted loads of dirt and levelled the new track. They also transplanted small flax and prepared and spread seed collected by the Wednesday wollies. Only a week after the slip the track was open again. An impressive effort by all – many, many thanks.

Special thanks must also go to Debbie and Ian from Topsail restaurant who, very generously, put on a beautiful lunch for the hard workers after the working bee to celebrate a job well done. Delicious.



The track junction after the slip



Open again thanks to a lot of hard work

Fauna

- The banded rail, who have been keeping a low profile over the last few months during the nesting season, have come out of seclusion, straight into the tomatoes in the garden. They can be heard and seen around the island, often with a chick in tow.
- Cicada related eye injuries are once again a real risk - hearing damage too on the very hot days we have been experiencing. The frogs are also a common find around the wetland areas, with another cohort of tadpoles in the ponds that are full again.
- Mowgli's two chicks fledged successfully bringing her tally to a very respectable four for the season.
- The three dotterel chicks down on the sand barge were fortunately old enough and mobile enough to survive the stormy weather and compounding king tides. They are very close to fledging now.
- The oyster catchers down around the sand barge are now very big babies indeed, looking very similar to their parents apart from the white on their chests and their grey instead of orange legs.
- Ben has been out working into the wee hours looking for forest geckos. He has so far managed to find a number of green geckos and even some Pacific geckos, but no forests as yet so the hunt goes on.

Kiwi

- Over the last month we have had a kiwi celebrity on the island. This one year old bird was found at Riponui by the DOC kiwi team, with his head seemingly on upside down. He was whisked off to the Wildlife Health Centre at Massey University and was treated for a number of different concerns. It seemed that a possible inner ear infection might have caused his bizarre problem. Once they got him 'straightened out' he was flown, in his very own seat, to Whangarei airport and then brought over to the island by Emma from DOC. Because his case is so unique, this bird has featured on the 6 o'clock news, online, in papers in Auckland and Whangarei and will be on the TV series 'Wild Vets'.
- Matakohē-Limestone was chosen as a 'soft-release' site for him because its small size and resident rangers mean we can keep a close eye on him and check him regularly. Once we are happy that he is re-adjusting to life in the wild and putting on weight he will be taken back to Riponui.
- Despite his ordeal, or perhaps because of it, this funny wee bird still has a lot of spirit and a very convincing snap and growl. One thing he doesn't have yet though is a name. DOC is running a naming competition for him so if you have a suggestion you can email it to Northlandkiwi@doc.govt.nz



The currently nameless topsy-turvy kiwi

- Kahui whetu had her six-monthly biometrics and transmitter switch this month. She was hanging around one of her favourite haunts near the Edge house ruin. She was in lovely condition, weighing in at 2650g and feeling nice and fat. No sign of another egg yet; and Sir Ed's egg timer transmitter was still saying non-incubating, so no second clutch yet. We are hopeful that they still might have another, especially with the summer conditions so easy.

Flora ... well, weeds really

- This last month we have been getting stuck into some of the weeds on Motuotaua (Rabbit Island), the island to the south west of Matakoho between us and Onemama. It is a beautiful little island in its own right and an important part of our island biosecurity. We are trying to keep it free of nasty weeds to protect the regenerating bush and prevent the island from becoming a source of weed seeds for Matakoho. The biggest problem out there used to be pampas, but thanks to funding from the DOC Biodiversity Condition Fund this is now largely gone. The next issue to tackle is moth plant. Moth plant produces large pods that split and disperse hundreds of fine, wind-dispersed seeds that can easily blow over onto the island. Motuotaua has been treated a couple of times before by contractors and this month we had some volunteers head over and do some follow-up work. First we had eight fantastic students who are taking part in the Hillary Challenge program. They spent a half day pulling seedlings and cutting and treating the big gnarly vines. Then James our regular vollie spent a whole day tackling bigger vines in the denser steeper part of the island. Together they have pulled thousands of seedlings and stopped hundred of pods from developing to maturity. Awesome thank you guys.
- The Wednesday wollies also tackled some weeds this month – wattles around the oak tree and north quarry. These wattle seedlings are the legacy of the brush wattle shelterbelt planted to protect the old manager's house from quarry explosion debris. The shelterbelt was not very effective at stopping flying rocks but the trees were wildly successful. Even though the hedge was removed some time ago hundreds of seedlings still come up every year from the long lived seed bank. The wollies pulled seedlings from 2cm tall to saplings 2m tall. The aim of the game is to prevent them from reaching seeding age and adding any more seed to the 'bank'.



Adult Moth plant on Motuotaua (Rabbit Island)

Predator Control

- Meeses, or rather, Mice! This month we caught not just one but two mice in rat traps up on the ridge line. This is similar timing to when we trapped a mouse last year so it may be a sign of high densities on the neighbouring islands (they are everywhere on Knight island at the moment) causing increased invasion, or a usually undetectable resident population at its peak density. In response we have switched all our rat traps over to peanut butter bait and are running the tracking tunnels to see if we turn up any more sign.
- And a rat! We also caught a Norway rat on the island, our second in two months. Once again, from what we could tell, it had an empty tummy.
- In the buffer we caught a weasel and a stoat at Onemama, a Norway rat on Knight Island and, unusually, a ship rat on Motuotaua (Rabbit island). This last capture plus the one on the island suggest that the summer peak densities must be quite high on the mainland at the moment, leading to more rats braving the ocean swim.
- We also had another unusual predator on the island this month; a possum. However, this one was already dead when he got here, washing up on the north coast. Although it was very fresh looking we don't think he was a failed swimmer, but was likely chucked in the water dead somewhere up the harbour.
- The A-M baiting is all complete; James did the southern side and the Hillary Challenge group did the North side. Great to get this done, especially if there are a few mice around.

Visitors

- Lots of families making the most of the end of January sunshine as school holidays draw to a close.
- The Oscar Family Link Holiday Programme brought over a boatload of kids to explore the island.
- A huge, happy, herd of "Hash House Harriers" came over for an evening run and picnic dinner on a lovely summer's evening. They take both their running and their 'after-match' festivities very seriously!
- The M.V Waipapa was back again, only the day after the working bee had cleared the slip and re-opened the tracks.
- Emma Craig from DOC, with Jaques from Wild Vets, doing kiwi delivery and filming.
- Tim and Carol were over minding the island for us for a weekend this month and while they were here they did some seed delivery, a beach clean up and Tim also fixed the garage door.

General

- Fire training with DOC for Jo and Ben
- Mowing.....and Murray from Park Care to keep the tracks looking good.
- Ben has been in his element in the last week, heading down to the SRARNZ conference in the deep south. This is an annual gathering of the 'Society for Research on Amphibians and Reptiles in New Zealand', so Ben could talk about lizards to his heart's content without fear of boring his audience.

Upcoming

- **Volunteer Wednesday – 2nd March.** Pickup at 9am at the jetty, returning after lunch approximately 2pm. See you there.
- Check out the TV series 'North', Sunday nights at 7pm on TV ONE. Marcus Lush has started his travels in the Manukau and is doing a loop up the west coast of the north and down the east, so Limestone should feature a few episodes down the track.

Hei konei ra
Jo and Ben



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