



Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – December 2011

Not many folk have to drive ultra slow down their driveway to avoid running over endangered birds but that is just part of the deal on Limestone Island. It's the silly season alright and there are NZ dotterel and variable oyster catcher (VOC) chicks literally spilling out all over the place. Just down on the beach/sand barge area below our house there are three newly hatched VOC nests totalling a whopping eight chicks and their respective parents, plus two other pairs sitting on nests and a pair of NZ dotterel adults plus their three chicks. Yep, that's 11 chicks, 12 adults and 6 eggs all within about a 75m radius - not to mention the herons, terns and shags. They are doing an excellent job, keeping vigilant against gulls and harriers looking for a quick feed. In fact, the high density of birds down there will actually increase their nesting success as each bird has to spend less time keeping an eye out for predators and they will be spotted earlier in their offensive. Many beaks make light work. But it's not just the birds being festive this December.



A pregnant female Pacific gecko fresh from a feed of flax nectar

Fauna

As has been mentioned there are lots of chicks of all sorts of species on the island.

- At last count there were 13 known VOC nests on the go at the same time, including four on the sandspit. Ten years ago 3-5 nests was normal. There is no doubt that our fledglings will be populating shorelines around Whangarei. I was lucky enough to catch two of the nests hatching...what a sight.



A VOC chick hatches to join its sibling then ducks for cover under mum's wing

- Three dotterel chicks on the sandbarge. They have been feeding right up and around the manager's house lawn. The dotterel pairs on the sandspit have not got away a nest yet but have been trying hard.
- In the buffer we have two NZ dotterel nests on Rat Island. One has successfully fledged chicks and the other is still on eggs. There are also chicks on Knight Island. There are several pairs of VOC on Knight including at least three chicks.
- I undertook a Caspian tern survey for OSNZ with Sue and Don Davy. We located between 70-75 adults and over 20 chicks and fledglings of various ages. No doubt some of the young were out and about learning to feed. OSNZ are scouting sites and piloting the survey method and will do an official survey in the next few years.
- With moths on the window one cannot help going for a gecko hunt. Astute readers will have noticed that the Pacific gecko located in the flax was gravid! That is the first record of their breeding on the island. Hip hip, hoorah.

Kiwi

- Glen and Baldrick are obviously making a bid to be the most prolific kiwi on the island. Shortly after hopping off his first nest, Glen is back on another one. Good on you buddy.
- Sir Ed is still sitting and I have isolated his nest under some dead flax leaves. I've seen better nests but I guess it's doing the trick. Good luck Sir Ed.
- We had a new addition to the island all the way from the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre. Paul Cornille from DOC brought the kiwi chick over for release and Whangarei Heads School were lucky enough to see the bird off into the wild. It was already 600 grams so when he doubles his weight he will be good to go back to the mainland.
- Pete Graham and Emma Craig from DOC showed Waipu primary a captive kiwi chick and talked to them about the dangers of dog to kiwi.
- Thanks to the rain we have had of late, the ground has softened up nicely. The kiwi will find it much easier to probe and should put on weight quickly.

Predator control

- Still no captures of pests on the island, and quiet in the buffer. We are still catching quite a few mice on Knight Island, which is indicative of low rat numbers.
- James Brooks has been over on Onemama Pt trapping possums to protect this excellent piece of coastal broadleaf forest. It has been a great source of seed in the past so deserves our attention. James caught 16 possums and reckons there are still quite a few more. He usually catches rats on the mainland but didn't catch any, which is a good sign. Thank to James for his hard work, Andy Wiseman for allowing us access to his property, and to Freddy Tito for blessing James on his travels.
- A number of Onerahi residents have expressed their interest in trapping in their backyards. We will be looking at running a trapping afternoon on the island in January to set something up before the autumn rush.

Visitors

The island has been crawling with them of late, with lots of independent visitors.

- Tikipunga High School had two days on the island.
- Waipu Primary had two excellent days on the island and Pete and Emma showed them the kiwi from the Recovery Centre.
- Kevin Summerlee brought across a Rotary group from Argentina.
- The Royal Forest and Bird Whangarei branch came out to the island to check out the birdlife and had a look at their memorial seats.
- A keen bunch from NAC Insurance came out volunteering and cut back overgrowing vegetation on the hill track.
- Smart Energy had an afternoon picnic .
- Paula Wilson and Hilary Aikman from DOC came out with their respective whanau for a day of treasure hunting.
- Auckland Uni had a group looking at education opportunities.
- Murray and co. from Parkcare weedeating the tracks.
- Whangarei Heads Primary visited learning about birds and saw a kiwi as well!
- The Wednesday wollies had a great turn out and we visited Motuataua (Rabbit Island) getting stuck into weeds – mainly mothplant and pampas. We also cleaned up the shoreline so it is looking pristine now.

General

- In addition to trapping possums on Onemama, James has been working on the knoll (formerly known as the weedy knoll) by the manager's house. We sprayed out all the weeds and James has mulched the area and planted up heaps of flax and pohutakawa. It's starting to look great.
- More periwinkle spraying around at the ruins. We are starting to see it decreasing in its extent now, and individual plants are becoming few and far between.

- We have located and destroyed a few wild ginger plants that have no doubt been brought to the island with starlings.
- We ran a successful Neighbours Day at Onerahi and got some fresh interest in the island and trapping at Onerahi.
- I gave a presentation to GBC on the progress of the island which was warmly received.
- All the fire extinguishers serviced and some replaced.
- New dinghy had its first service.
- Lots of mowing and spraying fenceline and baitstations.

Upcoming

We won't be running the volunteer day in January so will catch you all in February. In the meantime, please come and enjoy the island over summer. The beach below the house is perfect for a picnic and great in an easterly when the Ocean beaches are too windy. While you are here you can help us by keeping an eye out for any fire risks and making sure the island is dog free. If you spot something give us a call on 436 0923.

Have a safe and happy Christmas.

Hei konei ra

Ben, Jo and Penny Kohe



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