**Pigeon Post August 2015**

With winter rolling by and spring and summer coming into view, it is time to reflect on some of the islands winter goings on and get excited about another busy spring and summer ahead.

One big project set in motion this winter was the translocation of another gecko species to Mana. As part of extending Wellington's Belmont Quarry, Winstone Aggregates were granted a Wildlife Authority to collect and transfer as many forest geckos as possible to Mana Island. 23 Ngahere (Forest) geckos from an area marked for extension at Belmont Quarry to Mana Island in July. More geckos will be added as Winstones begins the quarry extension.

The project to 'rehome' the geckos was a success due to the support of Winstones, EcoGecko Consultants, Taranaki Whānui, Ngāti Toa, Friends of Mana Island, Wellington Zoo and DOC. Hutt Valley iwi Taranaki Whānui supported Winstones to gift the geckos into the care of Ngāti Toa on Mana Island. A welcome ceremony recognised that mokomoko/ lizards are taonga species for Māori and are to be treated with care.

Before the lizards could be introduced a 0.5 ha enclosure was erected around ideal habitat on the island. The enclosure is seen as the best chance to ‘anchor’ the released animals to the site giving them the best chance of establishing a breeding population.

As with many species translocations this is a long term project that will involve monitoring to ensure the geckos have begun breeding before the enclosure is opened allowing them to disperse. Monitoring of their success and dispersal will be by Ngati Toa and Friends of Mana with assistance from Ecogecko consultants.

Mana has become quite a stronghold for a number of rare and endangered lizards. The introduction of these Ngahere geckos means there are now 11 species of lizard on the island. Anyone that has been for a wander around out here on a sunny day would have heard and seen skinks scurrying off and turned over logs to find geckos in hiding.

(see pictures of Ngahere gecko release)

Friends of Mana Island have been busy over the winter months with a few working bee trips over weekends. They’ve been giving the island vegetation a helping hand with light welling (opening up areas of canopy) to encourage the growth of what will become the future canopy trees on the island, planting kahikatea in the wetland and undertaking weed control. A future lowland forest dominated by Kohekohe, Kahikatea, Matai, and Totara and Nikau that will bear plentiful fruit for the likes of Kereru and Kaka one day.

During a reasonably dry spell recently I was able to get the tractor out of hibernation and mow the tracks up top around the island. With spring almost upon us this will become a more regular job from here on out. Don’t quote me on this; but the weather gods are indicating we’re in for a long hot summer, so when the mowing tails off the fire risk on the island will duly ramp up.

When the wild weather settles down and summer progresses I hope you’ll take the time to come across and see how your landmark has been evolving, although the Takahe and Giant Weta appreciate the mown tracks for easy grazing, they are also there for you to enjoy exploring the place.

See you out there,

Ka Kite

The Islanders.