



FOMI Newsletter

June 2016

FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INC

FOMI Newsletter 66

P O Box 54101, Mana, Porirua, 5247

Special points of interest:

- Presidents Report
- Floral Diversity Enhancement Project
- Lizard Monitoring at Pukerua Bay
- Guide and Interpretation Project Report
- Your Executive
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President's Report

As your incoming president I would like to start by recognising the tremendous work done by our outgoing President, Brian Paget. Brian was one of the original group involved in the setting up of FOMI serving on the Executive for many years including two periods as President. His leadership, dedication and many hours of voluntary input have made a major contribution to the promotion and enhancement of the scientific reserve on Mana Island. This was recognised at the AGM on behalf of FOMI members in bestowing Life Membership on Brian. I'm sure we all wish him and Kate all the very best in their move to Alfredton over the hill in the Wairarapa. Brian intends maintaining his FOMI links and has volunteered to continue editing this Newsletter.

It seems ages ago that we had the AGM (16 March) and I would like to thank the many volunteers for their work and the Executive for their contributions over the past year and during the evening. Also a big thank you to Graeme Blick, LINZ Antarctic project leader for his enthralling presentation "From Mt Erebus to the South Pole". His survey work over three decades made for some very interesting anecdotes about the frozen continent and the people who go down there.

I am pleased to say that we have a great mix of experienced hands and new faces on the Executive. Linda Kerkmeester (Vice President), Dick Fernyhough (Treasurer), Julie Harrison (Secretary) and Executive members Jason Christensen and Dale Shirtliff with Darlene Adams (membership) and Hannah Kyle-Parker (volunteers organiser) continuing their roles, the latter two while not attending Executive meetings. We also have two ex officio members with Nathan Te Rei (Ngati Toa) and Jeff Hall (DOC Ranger). We have regular contact with Jeff on the island, but to date minimal contact with Ngati Toa, however we are hopeful this is about to change for the better (see below).

At this point in time Mana Island's fauna and flora is at a take-off point. All the years of hard work are now bearing fruit and the next period is one where we will see a blossoming of the conservation values on Mana. As an Executive we intend to continue the conservation work and to make this more accessible to the wider community through increased opportunities for visits to the island through a guided tour programme.

Now that we have a reliable transport service from Paremata to Mana with Eliot Falconer's 30 passenger launch this opens up opportunities for greater public access. Over the last year Jason has been working hard to develop a guided tour programme for Mana, which is just about ready to go. There are now over 20 special interest stopping points around the island each depicting an aspect of the history and conservation of Mana. We have nine trained guides available to lead parties around Mana and are currently working on a programme of guided visits, likely to be about one per month, weather dependent as usual. Details of how this will work will be published on the web site. This heralds in a new era of increased public access which has always been one of FOMI's objectives.

Another significant advance has been a meeting of the three partners in Mana Island. This is something we have been trying to achieve for a long time and it took place at Ngati Toa's Titahi Bay headquarters on 1 June with Matt Barnet and Jeff Hall (DOC), Leana Barriball and Raewyn Klenner (Ngati Toa), and Linda Kerkmeester, Dick Fernyhough and me (FOMI) in attendance. The main objectives of this meeting were to exchange views on a way forward to and agree on a process to revisit the strategy for Mana Island now that Ngati Toa has completed the Treaty settlement process. A key outcome was that DOC will produce a draft Management Agreement for Ngati Toa (and FOMI) to consider in view of their aspirations for the island. No timetable was set for the process at this stage.

In the next newsletter there will be more about projects

Cheers

Brian Bell, President

Floral Diversity Enhancement Project 8 – 10 April 2016 from Linda Kerkmeester

This trip was the 2nd attempt to get to the island after the 10-12 March trip was cancelled due to high winds. At that time Colin Ogle (ex DoC botanist) was to attend but Jason was unavailable. The trip last weekend did go ahead on this occasion with Jason able to attend but not Colin. So the full contingent of Jason Christenson, Matt Ward (Botanist) Lisa Clapcott and Linda Kerkmeester made up the working party.

The purpose of the trip was for Matt to complete some of his field survey work to enable him to complete his report (making up Stage 2 of this project). Also Jason was to investigate the wetland and advise on what improvements could be made given that it has been silting up since his time as Ranger from 1995-2005. Jason was involved in the initial construction of the wetland in 1999 so knows the in's and out's (literally) of the water flows through the wetland to the sea. Having both Matt and Jason on this trip meant that Matt could incorporate some of Jason's findings into his report with actions for improving the planting and habitat value of the wetland.

Day 1

In the morning Matt, Jason and Lisa headed up to the top of the island and southern cliff area searching for some of the rare and threatened plants that had been recorded in earlier botanical surveys but had not been seen recently. None were found, but some rare plants were found to be reproducing which was a good sign. Linda meanwhile was assisting Dale on supervising the volunteers on the Muehlenbeckia removal in the lower Aston Valley.

The afternoon was dedicated to the wetland investigation with Jason (accompanied by Matt, Lisa and Linda) starting at House Valley where there had previously been a deep pond, now dried up. Jason discovered the reason for the lack of water was due to a large 'blow-out' of the dam - up to 2m deep and 2m wide - which was likely to have started as a small blow-out in a storm event that gradually got worse over the years, resulting in the extensive silt build-up in the downstream pond below House 3. Jason advised that if the dam could be repaired using rocks and silt taken from the lower pond then the pond levels could be reinstated.

The team then headed up to the top of the other main catchment at South Valley and worked their way down to Lower Weta Valley. The upper pond was dry but the culvert was clear. Jason suggested the reason for the lack of water was due to the uptake by plants since the valley was revegetated so not much could be done there. The lower pond at the start of Tirowhanga track was silted up and was covered in exotic weeds which had sprung up over summer (mainly fireweed and inkweed with some Poroporo). The outlet to the pond was blocked with silt and debris. It appeared that lack of maintenance over the years since Jason's tenure (when ponds were regularly maintained) with insufficient handover between island managers has been the main reason for the silt build-up in the wetlands. At 6pm the team headed back with a view to continue our wetland investigations next day.

Day 2

Jason continued his investigation of the wetland system, finding similar levels of silt build-up and weed infestation of the ponds. The planting around the ponds was relatively intact (flax, sedges and some shrubs) but was infested with *Calystegia* (*convolvulus*) in places. It appeared that many of the smaller sedges (*Carex*) that had been planted had not survived – mainly due to Pukeko and Takahe predation. Matt will provide comment in his report on species that could be replanted once weeds are under control.

The team also discussed the advantages of a 'wetland walk' to guide visitors around the wetland and provide some easier maintenance access in a manner that does not interfere with wildlife breeding seasons. Jason and Linda plotted out a potential route that generally follows high ground but with minimal requirements for boardwalks and one small bridge across a drain. This would need to be discussed further with DoC and Ngatitōa if this was to be progressed.

Further work on the wetland could include localized piling up of mudcakes to create small islands in the wetland which could then be planted with species that are beneficial to wildlife – *Carex*, marsh ribbonwood, *Coprosma*. This would avoid the need to use machinery and minimize the amount of labour required in removing silt to lower the ponds. Regular checking of the inlets and outlets will also be required. In the meantime, Jason suggested monitoring of the water levels and duck numbers over the coming winter to determine where edge planting could occur and nesting sites to be avoided. In the coming spring/early summer target the *Calystegia* in the wetland by pulling vines off the native plants. Then next season brush any new growing leaves with Banvine.

In the afternoon the team went up to view the earlier work done in Weta Valley on the Muehlenbeckia clearing to comment on its effectiveness and implications for further work. The team were impressed with the amount of work undertaken and emphasized the need to plant as soon as possible to avoid further weed infestation of cleared areas. Lisa suggested digging up seedlings from surrounding areas (eg. Five-finger, kanuka, mahoe, ngaio). Check the nursery for some plants that could also be suitable such as Titoki. It was noted that some native trees were showing signs of translocation of herbicides from gel used by volunteers. This needs to be carefully supervised so gel application is minimized. All agreed to continue some further work on Muehlenbeckia vines would be beneficial in selective spots and that the effects are monitored.

Seed collection was discussed as there will need to be some further planting of the wetland areas and Muehlenbeckia cleared areas. Many of the species are available on the island and can be propagated at the nursery as another task for volunteers.

Lizard Monitoring at Pukerua Bay: January - March 2016 from Don G Newman



Background

A brief history of lizard monitoring at Pukerua Bay, first conducted in 1982, is provided in the 2015 summary report (attached). For this year (2016) a joint Friends of Mana Island (FOMI) and Department of Conservation (DOC) decision was taken to continue monitoring, but at a reduced level (fewer traps) and using mostly 4 litre plastic pails as pitfall traps as opposed to 4 litre paint tins. The main advantage of using plastic pails being they do not rust in the salt environment. As was the case last year (2015), objectives this season were to take any individuals of Whitaker's skink found into captivity, and to report on the current status of all lizard populations at the site.

Methods

Eight plastic subterranean traps installed in previous years (the Karaka Hill trapping line) were used along with 49 plastic pail traps newly set up to run from Karaka Hill south-westward towards Wairaka Point (the Wairaka trapping line), that is 57 traps in total.

Trapping was confined to week days only, the traps being opened on Monday and checked at 24 hour intervals. Opening and closing traps involved either removing, or replacing a stick in traps that when in place allowed any lizards that fell in to climb out. Traps were baited with pieces of tinned pear.

Trapping was done on days when FOMI volunteers were available - over 16 nights in January, 11 nights in February and 15 nights in March. FOMI members principally involved were Dale Shirtliff, Ned Bruno, Gillian Candler, Robin Chesterfield, Barbara Clark, Jim Cox and Helen Griffiths.

A record was kept of weather conditions (minimum and maximum temperatures and rainfall during the 24 hours prior to days the traps were open). Records came from the nearest Met Service weather station, namely Mana Island.

The identity of lizards caught was recorded prior to their being released alongside their trap of capture.

Results

Over 42 nights (2394 trap nights: number of traps multiplied by the number of trapping nights) 1342 lizards were caught, 216 geckos and 1126 skinks (950 northern grass skinks, 122 glossy brown skinks and 54 copper skinks). No Whitaker's skinks were captured.

Geckos made up 16.1% of all captures and skinks 83.9% (northern grass skinks: 70.8%, glossy brown skinks: 9.1% and copper skinks: 4.0%).

Weather conditions were generally warm and dry. No rain fell during the 24 hours prior to checking traps on 29 of the 42 sampling occasions. Median rainfall on the days prior to trapping was 0.0mm (range: 0 - 18.6mm); median minimum temperature: 15°C (range: 8 - 18°C) and median maximum temperature: 20°C (range: 14 - 24°C). Median rather than mean values are reported because weather data did not appear normally distributed.

Discussion

Whereas geckos predominated in 2015 catches, this year skinks, particularly northern grass skinks, were most frequently caught.

Why the difference? With the exception of the old Karaka Hill line, different trap types and sites were used. However, at Karaka Hill the same eight subterranean traps at the same sites were utilized.

At Karaka Hill geckos did not predominate; each year northern grass skinks made up the greatest numbers caught (although gecko captures were fewer in 2016 than 2015). Given that weather conditions were similar, which they were - see last year's report, this suggests that sites and traps used this year favoured skinks, especially northern grass skinks, rather than geckos. Geckos may more readily escape from plastic than tin traps; geckos were twice seen to climb out of plastic traps. To check if site is a factor, next season plastic traps could be set at locations where large numbers of geckos were recorded during 2015, that is in the vicinity of the old Core Area trap line.

While again no Whitaker's skinks were caught, the status of all other lizard species at Pukerua Bay appeared healthy, although numbers of glossy brown skinks may have declined.

Points for Discussion

2017 monitoring

Remove all Wairaka line traps.

Public interference of traps happened again this season.
It is therefore best to remove traps when they are not in use.

The Karaka Hill subterranean traps can remain in place (to act as a reference for future trapping), but need to be checked about once a month to ensure the lizard escape sticks they contain are not removed (no trap interference).

A new trap line should be established to run from the Karaka Hill site to the vicinity of the old Core Area trap line. The line should consist of approximately 50 traps (plastic pails).

Any Whitaker's skinks caught should be taken into captivity.

Editors note: Tables and a paragraph have been removed from the original report.



Guide and Interpretation Project Report for YE 2015 by Jason Christensen

2015 has been a great year for the project in my view. This is the second year that we have had the project running. I feel we have made some great progress in some areas of the project and others not as much but is all still a work in progress.

Project Highlights

In March saw a workshop and Guide training day on the Island with six Guides. This was a great day which was well received and a large number of improvements recommendations came out of the workshop. The workshop finalised what we all thought were the right number of points of interest for the visitors to talk/view about on the guided tour. Consultation with DoC and Ngati Toa on the recommendations and question's is still ongoing but very close to having the guides notes completed for the 2016 guiding season.

The guide maps have been completed and look great.

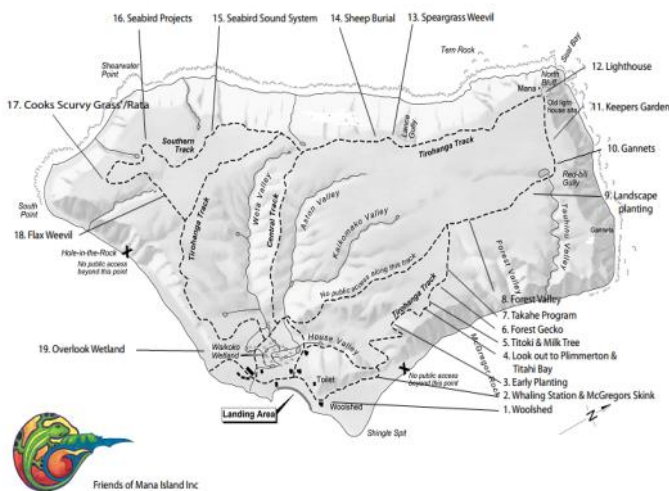
The FOMI committee approved to accept SWAZI apparel for their subsidised / sponsored jackets for the Mana Island guides. I am pleased to say that they look great and work very well as on our first Guiding day with them they got tested for their water repelling properties and passed the test. The committee decided to ask the guides to help contribute \$100 per jacket to reduce the amount that FOMI paid for the Jackets. Guide badges have been produced and work well.

A new T shirt producer has been located and new T shirts will be produced in 2016.

We are still waiting on DoC for final conformation about which signs they will fund and which ones they are wanting us to fund. I hope this will be completed in 2016.

Next stages

2016 will see some hard copies of the guide notes and photo graphs flip charts to help out with the information highway. Once this is completed the Mana Island history will be updated to 2016 on the website. I am hoping that the sign upgrade will be completed during the year to add to the visitor experience. The self guided trail will be started with all of the above information and hopefully will be ready for the 2017 visitor season subject to DoC and Ngati Toa approval.



Your Executive for the 2016/17 year is:

President-Brian Bell, Vice President-Linda Kerkmeester, Secretary-Julie Harrison, Treasurer-Dick Fernyhough, and Jason Christensen, Dale Shirliff, John McKoy; Philippa Doig, Rob Stone or his representative (DoC Rep), Nathan Te Rei, (IWI representative) and co-opted Membership Officer, Darlene Adams and Work Party Co-ordinator Hannah Kyle-Parker

To contact any of the above email them at contactus@manaisland.org.nz

Editor: Brian Paget

Hon. Solicitor: Roger Hayman, Hon: Auditor: Ian Hoare

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