



FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INCORPORATED

PO BOX 54 101, MANA 5247

Newsletter Number 30

February 2007

Hi Folks

Wouldn't you know it. Back at work and summer arrives. I hope you all made the most of what was a fairly mediocre holiday break, weather wise.

Grant Timlim has now been confirmed as the Field Centre Supervisor and Sue Caldwell as the Assistant Ranger, accompanied by partner Frank and baby Piripi. Grant is no stranger to Mana Island and we are all delighted to hear of his appointment. We also give a big welcome to Sue and family.

January was a really busy time on our Island, host to 91 birds for bed and breakfast in their luxurious condo's on the South West of Mana. The volunteers have worked assiduously for the past five weeks in a well scheduled and organised series of exchanges, all co-ordinated with military precision by Barry Dent, our Project Manager for this transfer. His report starts on page two.

It was a pleasure to meet briefly with Holly Freifield, from Hawaii, who spent the first week of the release of the Fluttering Shearwater on the Island, learning the ropes, so to speak, and extracting as much information as possible from Helen Gummer, our contractor. She did front up to an interview with the Kapi-Mana News, which I hope you all saw, published on 30 January.

We do have a commitment in March to have an AGM for the election of Officers and this year is really important for FOMI as a number of existing Officers will be standing down, including your President and Treasurer. The period ahead will be challenging for FOMI as the volunteer opportunities reduce in number, now that the 20 year planting programme is virtually at an end.

It will be important that these shoes are filled with exciting new talent in order to continue the fine record FOMI have achieved over the past seven years or so and open up new avenues for volunteer input and support for DoC. I look forward to your attendance.

So that is it for now as I believe the last of our Flutterers have now flown the coop.

Cheers

Brian

Situations Vacant

President

Treasurer

Committee member

If you have an interest in any of the above voluntary positions, please contact any committee member or email

Brian@caduceus.co.nz

Help!

Open Day

Visit Mana Island for a day **WITHOUT WORKING!**

See back page for details

Friends of Mana Island Inc

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday 27 March 2007

Mana Cruising Club

Ngatitoo Domain, Pascoe Avenue

Mana

7.30pm

Guest Speaker: Helen Gummer

Contractor for the Feeding Programme for the Fluttering Shearwater transfer

Fluttering Shearwater Transfer *report by Barry Dent*

The fluttering shearwater transfer, now in its second year, is one of our most exciting projects and is expected to contribute greatly to ecosystem restoration on Mana. If you have ever been to one of the unmodified seabird islands, you will know just how important burrowing seabirds are. The seabirds are in mind-boggling numbers in some of these places, and all their burrowing and addition of nutrients has a big effect. Their burrows provide places for tuatara, lizards and invertebrates to live, the soil disturbance alters the type of trees that can grow, and nutrients make everything more fertile.

Some islands you can't even walk around because the ground is so full of collapsible burrows. Imagine how different the top of Mana would be with soft soil full of seabird burrows, tuatara, and a hardy forest providing shelter and shade.

Fluttering shearwaters like to nest in the colony where they were born, so they would only self-introduce to Mana if their home colony got too big or they ended up there by accident. We are trying to assist self-introduction by having speaker systems booming out into the strait every night, and we are also trying to transfer the birds there. Trouble is if you catch adults and transfer them, they will fly back home. So we transfer chicks and act as surrogate parents. Next problem, the chicks probably require a while to imprint on Mana before they consider it to be where they were born and hence eventually fly back there to breed. And big losses at sea mean large numbers of chicks to give a viable returning population. So, we have to have lots of people feeding lots of chicks for a long time, which is expensive.

This year's work began with construction of a new colony of artificial burrows, prepared during winter by Helen Gummer (our contractor and fellow FOMI member), a team of volunteers and, much needed on a miserable wet day, by Hugh Gardiner the recently departed DoC Island Manager. Then on 4 January this year 91 fluttering shearwater chicks of extremely high quality were caught by a DoC

team on Long Island and transported by helicopter to Mana. After a moving welcome from Ngati Toa, the chicks settled well into their wooden burrows. Teams of volunteers then assisted Helen to care for the chicks until they fledged and flew out to sea. This involved feeding the chicks a mixture of blended sardines (totalling 1400 tins) and water, daily from syringes by crop tube, wing length measurements, weighing, assessments of down coverage, and in one case a day trip to Palmerston North for (successful) treatment at Massey University's Vet Clinic. Carefully developed feeding and care protocols have contributed to an excellent result this year. All 91 birds had left by 10 February, with an average weight of 400 grams and a wing length of 218 mm. This is right up there with literature recommendations for chicks most likely to survive and return in 5-7 years' time as adults. The chicks spent a pleasing average of 7 days on Mana after first leaving their burrows, before flying off. This emergence period is likely to be very important for the imprinting process. A handful of birds wandered prematurely and are likely to have had fledging compromised. There is not much of a pattern to this so it seems impossible to avoid with this species.



Photo David Cornick



Photo David Cornick

Barry at the burrows



Photo Barry Dent

Holly returns a chick to its burrow after the daily feed.

(cont over)

Fluttering Shearwater Transfer continued

Next year will be the third and final transfer of fluttering Shearwater chicks and fundraising is now under way. We are grateful to DoC (Lynn Adams, Grant Timlin, Wayne Boness, Nio Mana and the team at the Waikanae Area Office) for their considerable contribution of staff time at the source colony, running boat transport, and logistical support. We are always delighted to have Helen Gummer running the project on Mana. Thank you to Nick Quayle (Quayle Construction Ltd) for assisting with burrow design and timber transport. And Lastly a big thank you to the volunteers who helped with burrow Installation and/or chick feeding: Jan Barnes, Ros Batcheler, David Cornick, Alan Corry, Barry Dent, Claudia Duncan, Andy Falshaw, Siobain Finlow-Bates, Holly Freifeld, Sue Freitag, Frances Gazley, Helen Griffiths, Tony Griffiths, Annette Harvey, Kelvin Hunt, Sheelagh Leary, Merrin Pearse, Paul Quinn and Julia White.



A rare calm moment - this one preferred fingers to sardines.

AN OCCASIONAL SERIES by Colin Ryder

RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS FOR MANA ISLAND

This is the introduction to an occasional series about some of the rare and endangered plants that have been transferred to Mana Island. It is an "occasional series" because I will add to it only when I feel the urge. I will make no apologies. I am not a botanist and I am a great believer in plagiarism (in the right context, of course).

Both the Department and the Friends of Mana Island have generated much well-deserved favourable publicity in recent years about the successful translocations of birds, reptiles and even a couple of invertebrates to Mana Island. However, many of New Zealand's unique species of flora are also under threat. The difference is that this situation and the plights of individual species do not usually generate the public or political attention they merit.

According to the Department of Conservation, about 34% of the New Zealand's indigenous vascular flora of about 2070 to 2315 taxa are identified as being threatened or naturally uncommon. In the Wellington Conservancy, 173 nationally threatened and 254 regionally threatened indigenous vascular plant species have been recorded. Big numbers. And they don't include mosses, lichens, fungi, liverworts and the like, which are way below the radar.

There are a number of protection tools available to the Department and the other conservation agencies and the Wellington Conservancy has its own Plant Conservation Strategy. In-situ protection is probably the best but is not always the most practical. That's why translocations to safe havens like Mana Island are important.

Mana Island offers a number of advantages as a home for threatened plants. No browsers. No rodents chomping on seeds. A wide range of habitats - a spit, a wetland, cliffs, shoreline and emerging forests. In time, the seabird colonies will create the highly fertile conditions essential for a wide assortment of niche habitat plants now in dire straits nation-wide.

Unfortunately, plants on Mana Island are still threatened by competition from weeds and introduced grasses, disease and fire. The island also lacks a number of habitats for important and threatened plant communities such as dune systems, salt marshes and estuaries.

All up, though, the Mana Island Restoration Plan lists some 74 threatened plants that could be candidates for planting on the island. Of these, 23 are identified as being high priority. How many candidate species have been planted since restoration began in the mid 1980s? Yes, you guessed it. Twenty-three!! And four of these have been introduced in the last few months. Only 11 of the so-called "high priority" species have been planted. Less than half. It's time to pull our fingers out and get on with it. (*See page 4*)

RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS FOR MANA ISLAND

By Colin Ryder

***Muehlenbeckia astonii* (Shrubby tororaro)**

This is one of a handful of threatened plants favoured with its own Recovery Plan. In 1999, there were about 2,600 individual plants growing in the wild at 37 sites. Of these, some 2,500 were growing on Kaitorete Spit near Lake Ellesmere in Canterbury. Worryingly, there is virtually no recruitment because of browsing and competition for the seedlings from weeds. Isolation makes the production of fertile seeds problematical because all plants are single sex.

M.astonii is a divaricating shrub with wiry orange-red, interleaved and zigzag branchlets and small lime-green heart shaped leaves. It can grow up to 4 metres high and live for more than 80 years. With the other four related species of *Muehlenbeckia* it is an important (and in some cases, the only) host for many endemic invertebrates, particularly moths. In turn, these insects, together with the small sugary fruits of their hosts, provide a significant food source for many birds and lizards.

Because it has a deep complex root system, it will thrive in dry conditions, which would be too difficult for most broadleaved systems; most plants in the North Island have been located in loose gravel. Furthermore, when the population on the Wellington South Coast was hit by fire several years ago, this root system enabled most of the burnt plants to recover.

M.astonii is a "Category A" priority species for conservation attention and is classified as being "Nationally Vulnerable" and "Regionally Critical." Fortunately, it has been recently recognised for its horticultural values. For example, with the Department of Conservation's encouragement, it is now being used for road plantings in Wellington and Hutt City. These are proving to be very valuable insurance stocks.

Last year, 100 *M.astonii* seedlings were propagated by the Wellington Branch, Forest & Bird Home Nursery Group have been planted on the Island. Another tray of smaller seedlings supplied by Robyn Smith will be grown in the Island Nursery to await their place in the sun.

Interestingly, a DOC study at Turakirae Head in 1998 to 2000 proved that even a one-off weeding led to a statistically significant improvement to survivorship and growth rates for this species.

A little, but important, job for FOMI, perhaps?

Wanted Wanted Wanted

President

Treasurer

Committee member

Coordinator for the History Committee

Subscriptions

Your attendance at the AGM

See back page for details

Wanted Wanted Wanted

Welcome to two new Rangers!

We congratulate Grant who has been confirmed as Field Centre Supervisor and we welcome Sue Caldwell as Assistant Ranger. Sue, and partner Frank and baby Piripi are now living on the Island. Sue has worked for the Kapiti Area in the past and more recently as a Biodiversity Assets Ranger in Stratford. Frank sailed their boat down from Waiheke Island to Mana just before Christmas.

Kiwi Ingenuity

Boxthorn on Mana Island is a constant headache. This noxious scrub springs up in all sorts of awkward and inaccessible situations. It is particularly bad on the steep north-west corner. In the past DoC have tried various methods of getting rid of it, often resorting to spraying from the air — a costly business.

Trevor Thompson was contracted to work on Mana earlier this year and, thinking outside the square, he decided to try out a rather different method of eradication. Shoot it!

One hundred percent his own idea, Trevor buys paint balls (as used in war games) which he then laboriously empties of paint and re-fills with herbicide.

His aim is to hit the boxthorn so that the ball shatters and releases the herbicide in a mist of spray. It usually takes about ten shots to fully cover the unwanted plant.

This method minimises the collateral damage to native species as only the target gets hit and the surrounding plants are not affected.

So far this has been successful and the boxthorn appears to die within about three weeks.



Weeds

Clare Duston and Grant have completed a thorough search of the Island for invasive weeds. The large flocks of starlings which come to roost each evening bring bellies full of mainland seeds of all descriptions. In order to maintain an endemic ecosystem, it is important to prevent any of these alien seedlings establishing, so the removal of weeds is high on the agenda. All weed sites have been marked by GPS and a very interesting map of weed distribution has been produced. This will help to monitor yearly trends as well as easily locate persistent weed sites such as gorse.

Shore Plover

A few weeks ago, Shaun O'Connor from the Threatened Species Management Unit visited Mana Island in order to assess the suitability of the place for the reintroduction of the Shore Plover, a tiny colourful shore bird now found only on the Chatham Islands but once widespread on mainland New Zealand. A number of chicks have been bred at the National Wildlife Centre at Mount Bruce and will soon be ready for transfer so it is hoped that the habitat on Mana will be seen to be suitable for these little fellows.

Pied Shags are roosting in the *Macrocarpa* trees near the wool shed.

Wood Pigeon — we now have a resident!

Brown teal have produced a couple of clutches of chicks.

Kakariki are abundant and some have been spotted feeding chicks.

An automatic weather station has been installed by the MET Service on top of Mana Island. This will transmit data relating to wind speed and direction, temperature, humidity and rainfall.

Notice Board

T Shirts

Half Price Specials!

Pay your subs promptly and these t-shirts can be yours for half price \$10 each plus \$3 freight.



Normal price \$20 each plus \$3 freight

Sizes S to XXL

Order from tshirts@manaisland.org.nz

Alternatively send your order with remittance to
PO Box 54 101, Mana 5247

Supply your name and physical address for delivery

Take a day out on Mana Island

Open Day

Visit Mana Island for a day
WITHOUT WORKING!

Saturday 24th March
(cancellation day Sunday 25th)

\$45 per person

To confirm your place on the boat
send a cheque and your contact details to

Paul Quinn
16 Kokako Road
Otaihanga
Kapiti 5036

Or contact Paul on 04 902 4321

FOMI members will be given the first opportunity for places. If the boat is not full, publicity will go out to the general public on radio.

Volunteer Opportunities

If you are interested in doing some work on Mana Island, please contact Kelvin Hunt

kelvin.hunt@police.govt.nz

or

kindregards@paradise.net.nz

Tel 238 3194 (wk) or 235 6261 (hm)

New Publication

***Kiwi: The People's Bird* by Neville Peat**

In a new book, *Kiwi: The People's Bird*, leading natural history writer Neville Peat tells the story of the nation-wide community efforts to protect this remarkable creature, and explores its biological oddities and symbolic status.

Subs Subs Subs

Subscriptions are due now.
Please pay early and take up the offer of a T shirt at half price.

Wanted

Someone with an interest in local history to oversee the
History Committee
For more details contact
Brian@caduceus.co.nz

We need your help

Please contact Brian@caduceus.co.nz or any of the Committee below if you would be willing to give some of your time. We are looking for a new

President

Treasurer

Committee member

Don't forget AGM

Tuesday 27 March
7.30pm

Your Committee

Brian Paget (President), Doreen Douglas (Vice President/Newsletter), Darlene Adams (Secretary), Jan Barnes (Treasurer), Kelvin Hunt (Volunteer Coordinator), Barry Dent (Projects), Paul Quinn, Aka Arthur (Kamatua), Tama Coker (Iwi Representative), Jason Christensen (DoC), Ian Cooksley (DoC)

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