



June 2009

FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INC

FOMI Newsletter 39

P O Box 54101, Mana, Porirua

Special points of interest:

- Australasian Top 25 Award
- DOC Award Submission
- Shore Plover on Mainland
- President's Annual Report
- Committee

President's Editorial

Well, members, it's been quite an eventful three months for FOMI since our last Newsletter.

Things are moving apace on the island. The last of the bulk planting has already begun, seven Whitakers skinks have been captured by the FOMI funded contractor at Pukerua Bay for eventual release on the island, the last cohort of juvenile shoreplovers were found to have avian pox and returned to Mt Bruce to recover, and Sue Caldwell has been appointed the new Field Centre Manager on Mana. (Congratulations, Sue).

There have been also a couple of significant developments on the mainland that will affect Mana and the future of FOMI.

Firstly, the work on the island over the past thirty years or so has been acknowledged as one of the top ecological restoration sites in Australasia by the Global Ecological Restoration Network (with only eight being selected in New Zealand). Colin Miskelly from DOC put together a really good application and oversaw the development of an even better website on the project. Unfortunately, the selection (and those of the other New Zealand projects) did not get the media coverage it merited, except for the local freebies, which recognised the importance of a local project getting international recognition. Colin's application was based on the seabird projects, which are leading-edge, and the amount of community input over a long period of time.

Thank you everybody. While the selection won't make any practical difference to our operations, the added credibility may make fundraising easier.

Secondly, we held our AGM. While attendance by our membership was disappointingly low, despite a very good and interesting guest speaker, the discussion after my President's Report, which can be read elsewhere in the report, more than made up for it. I'm not going to reiterate why this was the case, except to mention that I was unanimously directed to raise our concerns with the Minister of Conservation.

I haven't done that yet. After some delicate and sometimes fraught discussions with senior Conservancy management, I think that we now have a way forward that will restore the partnership to what was envisaged when FOMI was established. Much work still needs to be done in that regard, and it won't be easy, but at least both parties are approaching the task with positive intent and goodwill.

The FOMI/DOC partnership, like any important relationship (like marriage) requires effort and communication if it to be a harmonious and productive one. Differences will arise from time to time, and one party or the other will be on occasion be aggrieved by the actions and/or attitudes of the other. These will lead to the strength of the relationship being tested and its value questioned. This has happened this time, and while it all could have gone horribly pear-shaped, I think that we are all now better placed to move forward together.

Your Committee is collectively determined to give it its best shot.

Furniture Wanted

Those of you who are or have been regular day visitors to Mana Island, and especially the overnights, will have made some comments about the standard of the lounge furniture available for volunteers in the Lockwood. Not even up to Salvation Army minimum standards.

Should any of you be disposing of "pre-loved furniture" and want a good home on paradise you could donate it to FOMI. Allan would be happy to receive any donations, email him on "owlet@xtra.co.nz"

Thanks to Graham Warren of Mana for his donation of 2 chairs.

Mana Island voted one of the Top 25 Australasian Restoration Sites.

(Extract from the DoC Press release 23 March 2009)

Mana Island and ZEALANDIA, the focus of world-leading conservation initiatives, are among the top 25 ecological restoration sites in Australia and New Zealand,

They are among eight New Zealand sites selected by a cross-Tasman panel of eminent ecologists in a competition run by the international Global Restoration Network. The contest was part of the preparation for a major ecological restoration conference being held in Perth in August. Mana Island was selected for the complexity and diversity of restoration activities, dating back to 1986, and the high level of community involvement. The restoration plan for the island was written by Department of Conservation analyst Dr Colin Miskelly. "This is a huge accolade for the many volunteers from the Friends of Mana Island, Forest and Bird Society, and other community groups who raised funds, planted trees, fed seabirds, built nest-boxes and undertook innumerable other tasks," Dr Miskelly said.

He said the panel was particularly impressed with the pioneering efforts made to restore seabirds to the island, which included volunteers hand-feeding sardine or krill smoothies to 704 fluffy chicks over a 10-year period. "Many of these chicks have returned, and we now have diving petrels and fairy prions breeding on the island."

Extract from Colin Miskelly's Submission

Mana Island ecological restoration

Mana Island is a 217 ha scientific reserve administered by the Department of Conservation (DOC), and lying 3 km off the Wellington west coast, New Zealand. The island was farmed for over 150 years before the last stock were removed in 1986. Forest was then confined to one steep-sided valley. The island has been free of all introduced mammals since mice were eradicated in 1989. An ongoing planting programme totalling over half a million trees was started in 1987, and has created a swathe of low forest and open shrublands. Community conservation groups, especially the Friends of Mana Island Society (FOMI), have contributed thousands of volunteer hours to tree planting, hand-feeding translocated seabird chicks, installing nest boxes, weeding, bird monitoring, and many other tasks. FOMI have also raised sponsorship funds for bird and lizard transfers, bird attraction and monitoring equipment, subsidised transport for tree planters, and other projects to assist the two resident DOC staff. Eight bird

species have been introduced, most notably three species of burrow-nesting seabirds, plus the island has the largest takahe population away from Fiordland, with over 40 birds. In addition to about 50 species of trees and shrubs, ten species of threatened non-woody plants have been planted on the island. A small wetland restored in 1999 has a resident population of threatened brown teal descended from captive-reared birds released in 2001. The island is the stronghold of the Cook Strait giant weta, goldstripe gecko and McGregor's skink, all of which had resident populations which narrowly survived the mouse plagues of the late 1980s. Mana Island's diverse lizard community of ten species includes four that have been introduced. Two large flightless weevils have also been introduced. The restoration programme aims to recreate an ecosystem typical of a Cook Strait Island, including dense seabird colonies, diverse and abundant reptile and invertebrate populations, and coastal forest, shrubland and wetland inhabited by native birds.





Shore Plovers on the Mainland

We have some eagle eyed members in Plimmerton. Sue emailed me on 5th May and then again on the 6 June with the photos attached. I understand that there have been sightings of Yellow Crowned Kakariki in Plimmerton too. If you do see any migrants from Mana Island please let us know. Ed.

Dear Brian

I'm delighted to report that I observed a male shore plover in the same area (just south of the Plimmerton Fire Station) as I saw the one in December. My partner, Wayne Sharman, and I were walking our dog this evening and I hopped down to the beach from the road to pick up some plastic bottle rubbish on the beach and it landed not far in front of me. I yelled at Wayne and he joined me and we

both identified the little bird and noted that it had rings around both legs. I will carry my camera around with me in future for some photographic evidence!!

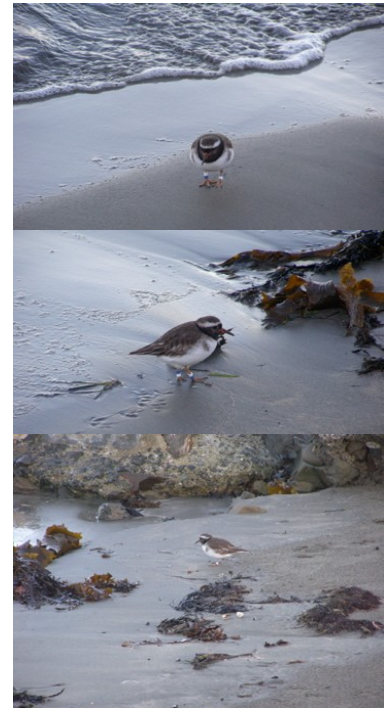
It was a strange evening with the birds on the beach tonight. No sign of the usual terns but hundreds of grey gulls (no blackbacks at all) gathered together on the rocks just north of the fire station.

Cheers

Sue Rose
66 Motuhara Road
Plimmerton

Hi Brian - look what I saw this morning - same place as usual

Sue



PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the great honour to present the tenth Annual Report for the Friends of Mana Island Inc (known to us all as "FOMI".) I am doubly honoured because I also delivered the first Annual Report.

I can remember at that time that we were all filled with an uneasy combination of apprehension and enthusiasm. Apprehension because we had only taken the first tentative steps towards setting up a viable conservation group and we still had much to do to match the efforts and successes of previous community volunteers on the island over the previous decade. Enthusiasm because we had the chance to become a real partner with the Department and to make a real and significant contribution to the restoration of a place we all loved: Mana Island.

It is easy to understate FOMI's achievements since its formation. Each Annual Report has focussed on the past year's efforts and set out your Committee's intentions for the forthcoming 12 months. The big picture can get lost. It was only when Colin Miskelly of DOC chronicled what has been done on the island since restoration started that I appreciated how much has been achieved. Most of those achievements would not have happened without the active involvement of the community, and FOMI has been at the forefront of that effort since its inception.

Essentially, FOMI exists to assist DOC restore the natural values of Mana Island. This subordinate, "junior partner" role is one I am quite comfortable with. After all, DOC are custodians of the island on behalf of the nation. In practice, DOC turns to FOMI to help resource (by providing funding and labour) those things it would like to do. This interdependency is not a bad thing, and both DOC and the members of FOMI benefit from it.

In my opinion, Mana Island, the restoration effort on the island, FOMI's relationship with DOC and FOMI itself, have all reached a crucial stage in their histories. There are signs that the island itself has also reached the "tipping point" in its progress from farm to ecological showpiece. Keruru and tui, both keystone species needed to ensure the development of a 'natural' forest ecosystem, have been seen for increasingly extended periods. Crawl under the canopy and you will see seedlings of kohekohe and tawa starting to push through.

Most of the structure of a self-sustaining island ecosystem is already in place and many of the actions recommended in the Mana Island Ecological Restoration Plan have already been implemented or are in progress. Few large scale, high profile and relatively expensive projects remain.

What then is the future of FOMI? I'm not sure. We have tried to engage

with DOC on this over the past year but, in truth, we have made little progress. A Memorandum of Understanding has been drafted articulating the objectives and protocols underpinning the future relationship, but that has been held in abeyance pending the settlement of Ngati Toa's Treaty claim. DOC has committed to a revision of the Ecological Restoration Plan but we haven't seen anything yet. Nothing has been done to arrange an agreed workshop on the infrastructural needs of the island. In the meantime, a planned translocation of bell-birds and whiteheads in 2009 will be delayed because of an apparent breakdown in communications within DOC.

All very frustrating.

Because of this, and the lack of any guidance from DOC, the Committee has had to set its own objectives in order to add value to DOC's activities on the island. The work done this year reflects these objectives.

Our principal objective is to assist DOC achieve the outcomes set out in the restoration plan, and FOMI made some important contributions this year. We have also have a secondary objective of assisting the Department with urgent or minor capital or maintenance items that it would like to do but can't afford. Again, we have a couple of examples this year.

We saw the completion of the fluttering shearwater chick translocations –



PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2009 (continued)

a major project which involved the third (and probably) last of the burrowing petrel transmitters. Thanks particularly to Barry Dent who managed FOMI's involvement in this project. I would also like to acknowledge the generous financial support of the Mana Community Trust and the Community Trust of Wellington towards this project and the earlier fairy prion translocations.

It's great to see that both diving petrels and fairy prions are returning to the island. As DOC are understandably having difficulty in establishing the numbers of returnees, the Committee will shortly consider a request from DOC to employ a "petrel dog" to sniff them out during the next nesting season. If funding permits, and providing DOC can get the necessary approvals and paperwork completed, FOMI will fund sound systems for both white faced storm petrels and flesh-footed shearwaters – species that were probably on Mana in pre-human times. The storm petrel system will probably be the first because Mana Island, with its extensive plateau, would have been its Cook Strait stronghold. Providing our preconditions are met, this will be installed when the system's solar panel, already purchased by FOMI, is released from a research project by an American PhD student measuring the effects of the nutrient inflows of the reintroduced seabirds on the island's productivity. We are in the third year of another major project: the transfer of captive-bred shore plover from the National Wildlife Centre. So far this season, five chicks have fledged compared to only one last year. All the cash costs, including that of a second aviary, have been met by FOMI, and the ubiquitous and hardworking Barry Dent has marshalled a team of volunteers to help feed and monitor the birds. Thanks to the support of the Mana Community Trust, National Wildlife Trust and Birdlife International (through Forest and Bird), we have enough funding for the remainder of this project.

The same can't be said of another important project which began this year. Your Committee has committed almost seven thousand dollars annually for the next three years to employ a contractor to capture enough Whitakers skinks from their last tiny mainland refuge at Pukerua Bay to form a

self-sustaining colony on Mana. So far, FOMI is funding this project itself, although funding proposals for the final two years will be submitted once we get more up-to-date costings from DOC. The first season of the project has been very successful, with four animals being caught. This compares with only two individuals having previously been collected since February 2005.

This year has been a very important one for the long running forest restoration project with the 8,000 seedlings planted last year bringing the total to over 500,000 trees - a truly mammoth effort. This is more than double the number planted on Tiritiri Matangi – the Auckland equivalent of Mana. Although thousands of volunteers have played their part in this project over the past twenty years, I would like to single one out for special mention. Allan Corry has been collecting seeds for propagation on the island for a long time without fuss or fanfare. Thank you Allan.

Julia White is continuing with her co-ordination of a small group visiting the island regularly to care for the rare plant species re-introduced to Mana, and Darlene Adams is managing a similar weeding group.

Your Committee responded positively to an urgent request from DOC to fund an emergency repair and upgrade to one of the sea-bird sound systems right at the start of the breeding season. Although it could be argued that this should have been more appropriately funded by the Department, the normally tight DOC budget meant that this would not have happened. We couldn't afford to jeopardise the breeding season. Allan Sheppard from the Committee initiated and project managed the installation of a remote monitoring system for the water supply on the island. This will enable the island staff to more easily and reliably ensure that the water supplies for the nursery and firefighting are maintained at secure levels. The Ron D. And E. Greenwood Environmental Trust supported this project. And, of course, Denis Fairfax has continued on with his oral history.

All in all, quite a busy year. None of this would have been possible without the Committee working diligently behind the scenes, undertaking the secretarial duties, paying

the bills, organising the volunteers, editing the Newsletters and so on. Because we work as a team, I don't want to single anybody out for special mention, apart from Brian Paget. Brian was instrumental in setting up FOMI a decade ago and has been on the Committee, in various capacities ever since. In many respects, he has been the glue that has held us together and I have appreciated his wisdom and good advice. Every year sees its comings and goings and last year was no exception. Grant Timlin severed his professional relationships with the island and DOC but hopefully not his personal one with FOMI. He made a huge contribution during his stay on Mana, and I will miss those early morning chats. Sue Caldwell has taken over from Grant until DOC can make a permanent appointment to the position. She has worked well with FOMI during her time on the island and I look forward to this continuing.

Jo Greenman has resigned from the Committee because of her commitments as DOC's Field Centre Manager on Mātū/Somes. Fortunately for us, she has agreed to continue her outstanding work as FOMI's volunteer coordinator.

On the wider front, you will all know that Ngati Toa and the Crown have signed an agreement in principle on the iwi's Treaty claim. Ngati Toa's special relationship with the island is acknowledged in both FOMI's constitution and in the draft Memorandum of Understanding. Nothing in this regard changes with the settlement. Ngati Toa, DOC and the Friends have worked well together on projects in the past and I am sure we will continue to do so. After all, Mana Island is a special place to all of us and the three parties all want the best for the island.

What of the future?

Basically, that's over to DOC. FOMI will be there to assist as and where it can. However, frustration and enthusiasm cannot co-exist. DOC management will therefore have to regard the relationship with the respect it deserves and act accordingly if FOMI is to continue to provide the level of support it has over the past 10 years.

Your Committee this year is :

Colin Ryder President, Brian Paget Vice President, Darlene Adams Secretary, Barry Dent Treasurer and a Committee of Brian Bell, Jason Christensen, Ian Cooksley (DoC Rep), Tama Coker (Iwi Rep), and Allan Sheppard.

One vacancy exists. Do you feel like volunteering your energy and wisdom?

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

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Editor: Brian Paget

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