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FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INC

FOMI Newsletter 40

P O Box 54101, Mana, Porirua

Special points of interest:

- Furniture Wanted
- Holly from Yale
- Shore Plover @ Plimmerton
- Whitaker's Skink
- Update from Sue, Field Centre Supervisor
- Planting Volunteers
- Committee

President's Editorial

I'm glad to report that FOMI's relationship with the Department of Conservation is now back on more of an even keel since I commented on it in the last Newsletter. We now seem to have a more transparent and business-like relationship. While it's still early days, it augers well for the future and your Committee is pursuing its tasks with renewed vigour and enthusiasm.

As evidence of this, we have committed our support for a number of projects over the next twelve months. Some of these are relatively small and one-off (like the engagement of a specialised petrel dog in the next few weeks to sniff out what and how many seabirds are now residing on Mana Island) while others are multi-year programmes (such as the five year Whitakers skink project, which will cost well over \$40,000). Despite the differences in cost and complexity, they are all important for conservation and the restoration of the island and its biodiversity. One or two of them will even prove to be of international significance. We'll report more fully on these projects at the appropriate time.

These projects all share a common feature. They all need one thing: money. Unfortunately, money is currently in short supply and high demand in the charity sector of the economy. It's in short supply because people have been husbanding their resources and focussing on their own necessities and most of the philanthropic trusts are getting lower returns on their investment portfolios and curtailing their disbursements. It's been in higher demand because many charities are under pressure from their clients suffering from the fallout of the recession. Given this environment, we have been fortunate to have received a grant of \$5,000 from the Mana Community Grants Foundation towards the forthcoming season's work on the Whitaker's skink and \$2,000 from the Hutt Mana Charitable Trust towards the cost of a prototype remote controlled acoustic system for the white faced storm petrel. I would like to thank both organisations for their very generous support.

We are, of course, actively seeking funding for all of these projects and we do have some internal funding as a backstop for a few of them. However, I am concerned that a project or two might fall off the bottom of the list.

Which brings me to the main point of the editorial.

The Friends has always had very generous support from its members and the community. However, over the ten years of FOMI's history, we have never made a direct appeal to our membership and the public for financial support towards a specific project. Depending on what happens to a number of funding applications we have lodged, we might do so for an exciting and important project within the next few months.

If such a request is made, I hope that you will give serious consideration to giving a donation. It will definitely enable you to help make a major contribution to the future of Mana Island

Colin Ryder
President

Furniture is still Wanted

Those of you who are or have been regular day visitors to Mana Island, and especially the overnighters, 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"

MANA ISLAND, SCIENCE, SEABIRDS AND HOLLY FROM YALE

Mana Island is best known as an ecological restoration success and because of its growing conservation values. However, it also has other important values: cultural, historic and not least as a scientific and educational resource. Consider its value from a scientific point of view. It's been substantially modified so the effects of any restoration programmes can be measured from what is almost a zero baseline. It's predator free so any changes will not be impacted or even jeopardised by those types of disturbances. It's only forty minutes from Wellington with its University, DOC scientists and scientific institutes. And last but not least, there's been a raft of relatively recent translocations, habitat restorations and the like which have proved fertile areas of study for researchers.

Not surprising, most of these researchers are local. In particular, there is a constant flow of post graduate students from Victoria University researching a particular aspect of the ecology of Mana for the reasons mentioned above. There was more about those in the last Newsletter.

Holly Jones is different. She hails all the way from the United States and is about halfway through a four year PhD in Forestry and Environmental Studies from one of the top and most famous educational institutes in the world: Yale University. This follows a Bachelor of Science degree in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology/Marine Biology from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Despite her youth, Holly has already had a number of articles published in several ecology journals and has received a surprisingly large number of prestigious awards and honours.

Not just a "lab bunny," Holly had had internships with Island Conservation (a fellow conservation group in the United States which has done some important work along the eastern United States and Mexico) and with the US U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Aleutian Islands off Alaska.

Altogether, a very intelligent and very impressive young lady. Why New Zealand and why Mana Island?

Well, Holly's research is on the recovery of island ecosystems following the cessation of a disturbance - rodent invasion. She says that the only other two places where she could undertake such studies were the Aleutians (think Auckland Islands, except colder) and Mexico (too dangerous for a single woman). Besides New Zealand reminds her of home and she has come across New Zealanders during the rat eradication on Anacapa Island; off California (and hadn't been put off).

As part of her research (which is sponsored by *National Geographic*), she will be visiting 22 offshore islands – ten this year alone. As you may imagine, this is a major logistical exercise.

She is particularly interested in if and how seabird restoration may help speed the recovery process, which explains the link to Mana Island.

She has liaised with DOC to install a monitoring system to measure how much time diving petrels spend ashore on Mana Island over a 12 month period. Holly's reason for seeking this information is to model diving petrel nutrient input (per bird per annum) and to combine this with population data that the Department has gathered since 1999 to model when there should be a measurable ecosystem response to seabird restoration. This is a question at the heart of why petrels are being restored to Mana Island, and should be of great interest to both the Friends of Mana Island and DOC. (And indeed elsewhere.)

A network of transponder sensors has been installed around burrow entrances and tiny transponders inserted under the neck skin of target pairs. Data is being collected automatically on a data logger (which requires occasional download to a laptop).

In addition to the nutrient input modelling, DOC sees value in this project in terms of developing sea-

bird monitoring methods (and specifically for diving petrels, to apply to the critically endangered Codfish Island population of South Georgian diving petrels), and to provide detail of diving petrel nest attendance that could guide survey and monitoring methodology. Rather than require Holly to purchase two deep-cycle batteries and to get Mana staff to recharge them and replace them on a weekly schedule, the FOMI Committee has decided to install a second set of solar panels costing some \$1200 more, which would free-up island staff. Once Holly's work is concluded, then the solar panel will be used, DOC approval and funding (about \$2,800) permitting, as part of a third petrel call system targeting flesh-footed shearwaters or white-faced storm petrels. (Probably the latter).



Holly has developed a real affinity with New Zealand – probably helped by the fact that she got engaged on a Yellow-eyed Penguin tour near Oamaru.

When she graduates she will either become a Conservation Ecologist for a group like Island Conservation or stay in academia as a Professor of Conservation Ecology, so she can mentor students.

Holly is doing some interesting and important research and FOMI is playing a small but useful part to facilitate it. It's good to see young people like Holly coming into the system and making a difference. Holly's research is supported by the National Geographic Society; who run a programme to help fund the endeavours of a number of outstanding post-graduate students.



Shore Plovers on the Mainland again!

Sue Rose is still out and about in Plimerton and snapped this bird at the beach on the 17th of this month and wondered whether it should be sitting on a nest on Mana Island?



Whitaker's skink (*Oligosoma whitakeri*) transfer from Pukerua Bay to Mana Island *Extract from DoC report*

Objective:

Transfer a population of Whitaker's skink from Pukerua Bay to Mana Island by 2013.

Background:

Pukerua Bay holds the last known remaining mainland population of Whitaker's skink. It is ranked as a "nationally vulnerable" species – category 3 (for comparisons sake the most threatened lizards currently on Mana Island are category 5 e.g. Spotted and Speckled skinks, Takahe are category 1).

There are three self-sustaining populations of Whitaker's skink on predator free islands located in Mercury Bay in the Coromandel. The North Island Skink Recovery Group recommended transferring a population of Whitaker's skink population from Pukerua Bay to Mana Island as part of the Recovery Plan.

Prior to last seasons trapping there were 16 Whitaker's skinks sourced from Pukerua Bay in captivity. It has been recommended that we may need 30-40 individuals of mixed sexes to be transferred.

Following tests on the genetic make up of the captive population it was found that the male from the original breeding pair was actually from

Mercury Islands. At a meeting between Area, Conservancy and RD&I staff in December 2008 options for the genetic makeup were discussed. It was decided that a hybrid population was acceptable, but should have a high percentage of Pukerua Bay genetics. The threshold for females for transfer is 75% genetic make up from Pukerua Bay and 87% for males. This would relate to a longer time span to have appropriate numbers for transfer and additional housing requirements in future years.

Pitfall trapping is the method used at Pukerua Bay to collect Whitaker's skink from Pukerua Bay. Prior to last trapping season, the last Whitaker's skink captured was in February 2008 and prior to this in February 2005. In the 08/09 season around 100 additional pitfall traps were installed in new locations, based on new information. This has resulted in our

most successful season in years, with 7 Whitakers captured and all from the new traps.

Why additional funding is being requested:

Based on the results from the past season we would like to continue to employ the same temporary staff member, Jacqui Macintosh to run the pitfall traps. We would also like to extend the period as the skinks were all captured at the beginning and end of the trapping season.

Due to the requirement to split populations and house more skinks, we will require additional cages. Jacqui is keen to house and breed skinks for transfer on her property at Pukerua bay. This would help ease the pressure of housing any new captures, and split the risk by having two separate captive populations.

Photo
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Updates from Sue Caldwell, Field Centre Supervisor

Planting/Propagation:

Finished planting the last of the titoki, and speargrass and some Coprosma acerosa also planted out. Seasons total was just over 10,500. Taupata: 3749, Kohuhu: 2630, Akiraho: 460, Whau: 57, Ti Toki: 550, Ngaio: 408, Kowhai: 318, Whauwhaupaku: 294, Kanuka: 1720, Rangiora: 34, Karamu: 1, Kawakawa: 2, Nikau: 64, Taramea: 160, Tarakupenga: 80. Many thanks to the volunteers who assisted, and also to Alan Corry and Kelvin Hunt for collecting thousands of seeds for Mana at mainland sites – mostly kohekohe, but also rewarewa, matai, hinau, and pigeonwood this season.

Shore plover:

Latest roll call was 23 birds. Breeding and nesting may well commence within the next month. The final two birds from this years cohort arrived ex. NWC last Friday (they have been in a brooder indoors since March) and are being held in the aviary for approx. two weeks before soft release.

Takahe:

The takahe have well and truly started their nesting for the year. Currently we are monitoring 8 nests, which is fairly normal, early days yet though. We are expecting the first eggs to hatch in about two weeks... watch this space.

We now have ten breeding females fitted with transmitters which will make monitoring breeding pairs a lot easier.

Bellbird/Whitehead Proposal:

A proposal is with the Department to transfer these birds from Kapiti Island to Mana Island. Once the costs are known then FOMI will be invited to fund and assist in the transfer.

Seabirds:

The second fluttering shearwater prospecting at the site (and caught/banded by Colin Miskelly last month) has been confirmed as female after feather dna analysis. This is the second adult female caught on Mana; both birds are around the burrow 100/speaker area. Steve Sawyer (Ecoworks) has been in touch and we are in the process of scheduling a set of dates for November to complete petrel dog work.

Saving Fuel:

Now the days are getting longer and sunshine hours are increasing, our new solar power system is really coming into its own. Generator use has decreased dramatically since the beginning of September. Last week we ran the generator for 10 hours total. Before we had the system in place it would be more like 10 hours per day.

Woolshed Protection:

Work is underway at the moment installing a sprinkler system in the woolshed. As we all know fire is a real hazard and it would be devastating to lose such a valuable piece of New Zealand history in such a situation. The exact date of construction of the wool shed is unknown, although evidence suggests that it was there during the 1870s. Mana Island was first farmed during the 1830s, so who knows it could actually be as old as that. Some say that the first sheep ever shorn in New Zealand was here on Mana Island; and if it wasn't I'm sure it would have been close second. One thing that is known for sure is that some of the first New Zealand wool exports came from that woolshed.

Volunteer Planting

For some members of FOMI the lack of volunteer work can be frustrating. You could use your energies on another worthwhile and mainland based project.

The "Friends of Maara Roa" are doing forest restoration and protection work on the north-western slopes of Belmont Regional Park, in and around the 40ha of Conservation Covenants in the Cannons Creek Valley. Access is from both the Takapu and Cannons Creek Entrances to the Park. (approx 25 minutes from central Wellington by car, in both cases.)

The Friends' Nursery has 4000 trees which will be ready for planting this year, and a further 2100 have been donated, continuing a plan to reduce fire hazards by dense planting to form "Green Firebreaks". The more rapidly these can be developed, the more success in protecting natural regeneration and the 35,000 trees we have planted since 2000. We also will do some micro-site planting of emergent species, and are developing a Nature Walk currently. We really need lots more people to keep up the good work and get this year's trees into the ground, and protected.

Tree Care (Monitoring and Releasing) working bees will be held on Saturdays 21st Feb, 21st March and 18th April, 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 pm, meeting at Brandon Intermediate School, Driver Crescent, Porirua City. From May onwards Tree Planting will start, fortnightly on Saturday mornings, and weekday opportunities to help are also going to be arranged.

For further details, contact Sylvia Jenkin at (04) 237.4760 or Neil Bellingham at (04) 235.5501.

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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