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President's Editorial

Hi

Your Committee spends a fair amount of time at each of its meetings discussing the current difficulties members and the general public face in visiting Mana Island.

As we keep telling you, and DOC are quite happy to confirm, many of the conservation gains on Mana have happened because of the efforts, sweat and time of thousands of volunteers – ordinary people like you and me who shared an interest in the island and a willingness to make a contribution towards its restoration. For many of us, our trips to the island have led to a passion for the place, and an even greater level of involvement. After all, why else would we have joined FOMI?

In many cases, and certainly with the larger projects such as the mouse eradication and the planting of more than half a million seedlings, we have relied on getting large boatloads of volunteers onto the island.

Unfortunately, we now have the situation that unless you know somebody with a boat or are a keen kayaker, the only way you can get to the island is on the island boat, with its very limited carrying capacity.

The Committee is concerned that there is a risk of members and the wider community losing their physical and emotional links to the island. Once this happens, then the sustainability of FOMI itself as a viable organisation, adding value to the island, must be under threat.

What can we do about it? Nothing much at the moment. We're exploring a number of options but none of them is ideal. We've even talked about the pro and cons of hiring a helicopter. Probably not much more expensive than hiring a boat, which has to stick around all day while the volunteers do their stuff. No more interesting landings and the number of those frustrating cancellations will drop markedly. However, not a good look for a small group like ours.

Do you have any ideas? Know somebody with a big enough boat and the appropriate marine tickets who might be interested? If so, let us know ASAP.

Colin Ryder, President (and fossil)

What will we be doing over the next five years

Contributed by Colin Ryder

I mentioned in our February 2010 Newsletter (Issue No.41) that Collin Miskelly was to undertake a revision of the *Mana Island Ecological Restoration Plan* to provide us with the foundation for a long term strategy for future work on the island.

Well, after some good work from Colin (not that we would expect anything else) , several drafts and a couple of workshops, we now both have a revised plan and a some strategic directions.

I won't go into detail about the details of the revised plan as hopefully the Department will be publishing it on its website before too long, but suffice it to say that Colin recommended 24 tasks needed to continue with the ecological restoration of Mana Island.

These ranged from “translocating the flax weevils on Mana to the vicinity of Waikoko wetland” (which would take all of two to three hours and a shoebox) to “developing and maintaining management partnerships with Ngati Toa as tangata whenua and FOMI”. It was agreed that the maintenance of the island infrastructure on the island would be Doc's first priority as far as their resources were concerned. The next priority for both parties would be orderly completion of the tasks already committed. The major projects underway are the shoreplover translocation and the planned translocation of Whitakers skinks, once we have caught and bred enough to provide the nucleus of a self-sustaining population on the island. Fortunately, we have funding already in place for the shore-plovers and thanks to the generosity of the Community Trust of Wellington, we now have a committed funding line for the remainder of the multi-year Whitakers skink project. What does this mean? What it means is that we now plan a sensible restoration strategy for the next five years based on Colin's recommendations.

We have agreed that the four major workstreams over this period should be:

- Increasing the floral diversity of the island through the introduction of eco-sourced plants (including threatened plants and tree ferns) into appropriate microhabitats. The seabirds project. The next round of monitoring results will determine what will be involved with this project but it could include further translocations.
- Developing and implementing a restoration model for the wetland.
- Monitoring the outcomes of earlier restoration projects. Because these will mainly be species-specific, relatively inexpensive and difficult to source outside funding for, these will be preferentially funded by FOMI, from your donations and subscriptions, folks.

We can still look at those interesting one-one projects as opportunities arise and resources allow.

DOC have now gone off to start the processes needed to develop these projects further so we can agree some priorities and timelines that are sensible for both parties.

I am quite excited. FOMI and its members will be able to continue to make important contributions to the restoration of the island and it should be fun. We will keep you posted as the projects are developed.

Introduction of Bellbird and Whitehead to Mana



You will recall that we released some 43 bellbirds from Kapiti to Mana Islands in July and as Barry Dent reports, monitoring has been largely frustrated by the weather. Barry also reports that the playback tapes are of primarily male song. Anecdotal reports from the Island would seem to indicate that all is well. We received the following email from Dianne Brunton which I thought would be of interest to the membership.
Ed.

Dear Mana Committee,

I am a researcher at Massey University (based in Auckland) who has worked on Bellbirds for a number of years and along with a number of postgraduates I have been looking at bellbird dispersal, song, breeding ecology, and most recently genetics. I was recently looking through the Mana newsletter in search of information on the recent bellbird translocations. And I was wondering how the monitoring of bellbirds had gone on Mana? I have used a female song playback technique for detecting bellbirds at low densities and this is particular useful for detecting the slightly more cryptic females.

I would be very interested to hear how the translocation went as we have found that females disperse up to 5 times more than males and that bellbirds are extremely good flyers and capable of long distance movements across large bodies of water (including the Cook Strait) something many other NZ birds are not capable of. We have also found that once habitat is restored (pest controlled) bellbirds will very quickly re-establish themselves. Shauna Baillie is a PhD student of mine who has sampled bellbirds from around NZ and looked at their genetics and the relationships between the populations in NZ, she has found genetic connections between what we thought were very isolated populations and evidence of a lot of movement. I find this a very exciting result and one which paints a very optimistic outlook for the future of bellbird around the country. Shauna will be presenting her findings at the NZ Ecol Soc meetings next week in Dunedin, she has been doing the genetics work in the Ritchie lab at Victoria University and is currently based Wellington. We can make available a draft of these results - they are about to be submitted for publication.

I look forward to hearing back.

Cheers

Dianne

Assoc. Prof. Dianne Brunton
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Whitaker's Skink Project

FOMI has raised sufficient funding from Mana & Wellington Community Trusts to further this project into next year.

Eric Stone from DoC tabled his report at the October Meeting and outlined the progress on the planned work for this year. The 3 areas identified and committed were:

1. Pitfall trapping in Pukerua Bay for enriching and increasing the captive population.
2. pitfall monitoring on Mana Island and at Pukerua Bay to establish suitability of proposed release sites.
3. Building an additional eight bay skink cage.

Eric also reported that There is a change in plans for monitoring on Mana Island. Rather than employ an outside contractor to do the work, we have an opportunity to use Zena Kavas, who is a teacher from Taita College who has received a Royal Society Fellowship to do lizard work on Mana Island. She is keen to help with the Whitaker's skink project and her fellowship can accommodate this work.



Summary of recommended tasks to continue the ecological restoration of Mana Island

Extracted from the review by Colin Miskelly dated June 2010

1. Develop and maintain management partnership with Ngati Toa as tangata whenua.
2. Develop and maintain management partnerships with Friends of Mana Island Inc.
3. Continue suppression of priority weed species in all habitats.
4. Continue measures to minimise the fire risk.
5. Carry out pest mammal surveillance, contingency and audit requirements as identified in the island biosecurity plan.
6. Continue efforts to restore and attract burrow-nesting seabirds.
7. Develop and implement a restoration model for Waikoko wetland.
8. Increase the floral diversity of forests and wetlands through the introduction of eco-sourced plants (including threatened plants and tree ferns) into appropriate microhabitats.
9. Investigate methods to increase the diversity of invertebrate communities as forests mature.
10. Develop a threatened plant action plan.
11. Complete translocations of shore plover, whiteheads, bellbirds and rowi.
12. Monitor and confirm establishment of tui and kereru, and maintain records of sightings of other vagrant and colonising species (e.g. kaka and red-crowned parakeets).
13. Assess the need for and practicality of further fairy prion chick transfers to Mana Island.
14. Restore and maintain decoy gannet colony.
15. Survey for banded rail and crakes around wetlands.
16. Seek support for translocations of Chatham Island snipe.
17. Develop more efficient methods to survey for green geckos.
18. Monitor and confirm establishment of Wellington green gecko and speckled skink and any future reptile translocations.
19. Complete translocations for tuatara, Whitaker's skink and robust skink.
20. Monitor population spread and contact zones for McGregor's skink, spotted skink and speckled skink.
21. Assess the suitability of Waikeko wetland for the introduction of brown mudfish and introduce if suitable.
22. Monitor and confirm establishment of Wellington speargrass weevils.
23. Translocate flax weevils on Mana to the vicinity of Waikeko wetland.
24. Develop interpretative methods and materials to ensure that visitors (both actual and virtual) gain an appreciation of ecological restoration and conservation management on Mana Island.



As you can see there is still plenty to do on our Island besides just watching the trees grow and enjoy the current resident species.

A meeting between the interested parties was arranged in October 2010 to identify the priorities and practicalities moving forward, and in particular, from FOMI's point of view, to identify the input requirements necessary to continue to raise funds in order to carry out these objectives.

Restoration of Mana Island has been running for just over 20 years now, and FOMI's contribution around half that time.

There is a long way to go and a lot to do and a review in another 10 years will probably throw up an equally exciting list of things still to be done.

Your support is vital.

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, Rob Stone or his representative (DoC Rep), Tama Coker (Iwi Rep), and Allan Sheppard.

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

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