



Newsletter No. 69

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Friends of Mana Island NEWS

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From FOMI's President, Brian Bell

Your Executive was delighted with the turnout of members at the AGM – 51 must be a record number! I put this down to the interest in FOMI's increased activities and DOC Ranger Chris Bell's talk about Mana Island's role in saving the takahe from extinction. It is a great story and was engagingly told – thank you Chris.

In the President's 2016-17 report, circulated before the AGM, I drew attention to DOC's draft Wellington Conservation Management Strategy and how it failed to adequately acknowledge the huge contribution being made by conservation groups like FOMI. Furthermore, the draft did not mention DOC's intended strategy of passing on increased responsibility to manage the conservation estate to volunteer community groups. I asked for feedback from members but, having not received any, I am assuming everyone is happy with the stance your Executive is taking. FOMI will make a submission along the lines outlined.

Last year I issued an invitation for Lou Sanson, DOC's Director-General, to visit Mana Island and see for himself the work which has been done by volunteers over the years. The hook to make this happen was the release on 25 March of more Ngahere geckos from GBC Winstone's Belmont quarry, a project managed by EcoGecko with support from FOMI and Wellington Zoo. It was a great day with local iwi also involved. (See story in this newsletter.) Lou was very impressed with the restoration of Mana and took on board our concerns about our relationship with DOC. Expect to see developments over the coming months from this meeting of minds.

Very soon we will have the consultant's report assessing the proposal for a Mana Island visitor/education and biosecurity centre near Paremata bridge. FOMI and Plimmerton Rotary commissioned this work to gauge community interest in making the centre a reality, a dream of past President Brian Paget. Unfortunately, there is no champion to take the idea forward and the approval in principle by Porirua City Council and DOC did not turn into tangible support. This, plus community concerns about a change in the use of the site, has meant the project is not viable. However, we are discussing with DOC the use of the recreation room attached to the Lockwood house on Mana Island. DOC now has funding to repair the foundations and make the room available again. FOMI member Miguel Braga is a structural engineer who will work with DOC to find a cost-effective solution. Watch this space. Elsewhere in this newsletter see reports from other members of our very active Executive team.



Brian Bell (right) with Lou Sanson and 7-year-old Kylah Kamana (Taranaki Whanui) about to release a Ngahere gecko. (Photo: Lee Barry, DOC.)

Catch up on informative reports from the AGM

If you missed the AGM, you can read the reports on our website – the President’s report, FOMI’s Performance Report outlining work undertaken in 2016, and our draft Strategic Plan which sets out future plans. (Look under the News tab on our website - www.manaisland.org.nz)

Ngahere geckos released on Mana Island by *Philippa Sargent, FOMI Executive*

Eight Ngahere geckos hitched a ride to Mana Island with a boatload of enthusiastic supporters recently. The occasion was the second release of the native lizards on the island from the GBC Winstone quarry in Belmont, Lower Hutt.

The geckos travelled in individual cotton bags placed inside a wooden box which EcoGecko consultants cradled on the trip over.

Once on the island, representatives from the various groups took turns to release a gecko into the special large enclosure which was built by our FOMI volunteers. It provides a temporary safe refuge for the geckos to settle in and establish a self-sustaining population.

Some of the geckos loved the limelight and even posed for the cameras!

After lunch we heard short speeches acknowledging the involvement of the different groups – GBC Winstone, FOMI, DOC, Ngāti Toa, Taranaki Whānui, EcoGecko and Wellington Zoo. Some takahe threatened to steal the show by grazing on the lawn behind Lou Sanson and Brian Bell when they were speaking.

The Ngahere geckos join 28 others previously rehomed to the island as part of a plan to collect and transfer as many as possible from future development areas of Belmont Quarry.

Checks since the first release of the geckos show that most of the new residents are in good condition and may already be breeding. The geckos are generally found on trunks and larger branches of trees. Occasionally they are found nearer to the ground in shrubs and ferns or in creviced clay banks.

They spend most of their life in the canopy and are mainly nocturnal so are rarely seen. This release was a special opportunity to see them close-up.



Linda Kerkmeester, FOMI Vice President holding a Ngahere gecko just before releasing it.

DOC lizard courses use FOMI pitfall trap line for training by Dale Shirtliff, FOMI Executive

Word has got out about the success of protection efforts by Friends of Mana Island volunteers for the lizard population at Pukerua Bay. The combination of a thriving population and at least four different lizard species in the area led to the site being chosen for two DOC workshops held last month.

Course members learnt lizard monitoring techniques, capture, handling and measurement. It's great to see our efforts are being recognised and I feel vindicated in continuing with this work. Also, our volunteers are becoming skilled at lizard handling, skills which are in demand on Mana Island.

For the last four years, FOMI volunteers have been trapping weasels, rats, hedgehogs and stoats at the Pukerua Bay Scientific Reserve and the adjacent Raroa Reserve using 46 DOC 200 traps. As a result, there is a thriving lizard population, compared with adjacent areas.

Some years ago, the rare Whitaker's skink was found in the Pukerua Bay Scientific Reserve. The skinks were caught in pitfall traps and taken to Dennis Keall who, under DOC guidance, has been breeding these lizards with a view to setting up a colony on Mana Island once a viable population has been reached. Each summer our trained volunteers attempt to catch more Whitaker's skinks.

Our volunteers, the same people who do the pest trapping, visit the pitfall traps daily during their nominated week – lifting the lids on the pitfall traps, recording and releasing their catches, and replacing the tinned pear bait.

While we haven't found Whitaker's skinks in recent years, we do find really good numbers of other skinks – grass skink (common skink), brown skink and copper skinks. The common gecko (raukawa) are also found. Our records are posted on the DOC database by retired DOC scientist Don Newman.

Because there are aggressive skinks like McGregor's skinks on Mana Island, it has been decided that a transfer of Whitaker's skinks will go to Matiu Somes Island instead.



Two copper skinks found in one pitfall trap.



Our team on the day – Helen Griffiths, Don Newman and Jim Cox.

Mana Island's DOC ranger, Chris Bell, tells us what's happening on the island

I'm constantly being commiserated with on such a wretched summer on Mana Island, which seems strange as when I think back it feels like a fairly unbroken series of amazing days. Then I look back on all the boating cancellations, the green hills and the brimming ponds and realise it must have been a horror!

It's certainly been a very full summer, with visits from the Kiwi Conservation Club and Birds NZ since the New Year. It's wonderful to see lots of enthusiastic and knowledgeable young people being inspired by Mana and the density and diversity of life on the island.

Another special event this summer was catching and banding sooty shearwater adults during their incubation phase in January, with scientist Graeme Taylor building on around 30 years' study of these birds, the longest continuous study of sooty shearwaters in New Zealand. Right now, the chicks are getting big and will be banded soon before they disperse to the four corners of the globe!

Also in January, the fluttering shearwater chicks were banded, with a total of 14 fledging from Mana Island this year. This is lower than usual and reflects periods of heavy rain and perhaps a poor feeding year at sea. Even so, this species has had great breeding for the last few years on Mana and is continuing to thrive.

An update on some Mana Island takahe that recently fledged into the outside world is a mix of good news and bad news. Three young Mana-hatched males, Brodie, Jamieson and Eddie, were exported in the early summer to different homes. Of these Brodie was successfully partnered at Cape Sanctuary (Hawke's Bay) and has already managed to rear a chick of his own; Jamieson has been partnered up at Burwood Bush (Fiordland) and will move with his partner to Goulard Downs (Kahurangi National Park) in August; but sadly Eddie died at his new home of Tawharanui Regional Park (north of Auckland), and the cause is still unknown.

This has been a great year for takahe on Mana Island, with five chicks surviving so far. Former ranger, Jeff Hall, arrived in mid-March to band and vaccinate these chicks, and was in his element back on his old stomping ground! All five chicks will be transferred to Burwood Bush in April to be fostered to waiting pairs before heading to their final home in the Kahurangi National Park. This will be the first time in conservation history that an unfenced population will be re-established on the mainland outside of Fiordland! It will be sad to say goodbye, but they have big adventures ahead of them.



Jeff Hall and Mara Bell banding takahe on Mana Island. ((Photos by Chris Bell.)

Your chance to name a takahe chick

It's time to put on your creative thinking caps! FOMI has been given the opportunity to name one (possibly two) of the takahe chicks on Mana Island. We are looking for your help. The chicks haven't been sexed yet, so the field is wide open in terms of names.

If the name you suggest is chosen you can choose between a free guided trip to the island or a Friends of Mana Island tee-shirt as your prize.

Email your ideas to fomi@manaisland.org.nz or post on our Facebook page, with a reason why you think your suggestion is a good name for a takahe.



Hurry, entries close Saturday 8 April.

FOMI celebrates 20th anniversary next year

Next year FOMI will be celebrating 20 years of work on the restoration of Mana Island. It will be an opportunity to look back on the achievements to date, promote the work currently underway, and recognise our volunteers both past and present. The FOMI Executive team is putting together some exciting ideas for the anniversary, so stay tuned for further details.

Calling for a videographer - In the meantime, if anyone has a particular skill in making videos, we would be very keen to hear from you. One idea is to mount a display which could feature a short video showing current activities on the island. If you think you could help with this please email fomi@manaisland.org.nz.

Guided trips extended into autumn by *Philippa Doig, FOMI Executive*

Part of the reason for the existence of Friends of Mana Island is to encourage visitors to share the experience of visiting our special island. We have projects underway and projects in preparation that visitors can see and appreciate for themselves, as well as a peep into a very different predator-free offshore world.

New in the season 2016-2017 (thanks to Jason Christensen) is a pool of trained guides who carry a special guide book with photos, and a self-guided brochure which is available in the woolshed. Both the guides and the self-guided brochure explain the numbered posts on the island marking points of interest.

Guides take their group on a walk to the top of the island, with fantastic views to Cook Strait and back to the North Island. Visitors are shown the various points of interest, sometimes historical, sometimes current projects.



Visitors at the site of the old lighthouse on Mana Island's northern end.

Sometimes we see the two live gannets enjoying the company of the concrete ones at the north end of the island or a giant Cook Strait weta in the tussock. Plus of the course the takahe who often make an appearance.

This summer season FOMI has organised 10 trips and has 11 more planned, right through to June. Feedback from visitors has been amazing with many emailing after their trip to say how much they enjoyed it!

For more information and bookings - email guidedtrips.manaisland@gmail.com or look on the FOMI website under Visitors.

Upcoming dates (check back on the website as sometimes more places become available): Sat 8 April (full); Sat 22 April (3 places); Sun 23 April (full); Sat 6 May (8 places); Sun 7 May (full); Sat 20 May (20 places); Sun 21 May (14 places); Sat 10 June (full); Sun 11 June (20 places).

FOMI guide tee-shirts for sale

Our guides regularly receive compliments about their Friends of Mana Island tee-shirts. We are delighted to offer these tee-shirts for sale. They are made from pure cotton, with the logo having a vinyl finish for durability. Available in both men's and women's styles (the shape of the neck differs – men's is crew, women's is slight scoop). See our website for photos (linked from the home page).

Sizes: M, L, XL (sizes are slightly on the small side, so we do recommend going up a size). **Cost:** \$25 (plus \$5 postage if required).

Order by email: guidedtrips.manaisland@gmail.com with your size, address for posting, or phone number (if picking up from Plimmerton).

