



Newsletter No. 70

July 2017

Friends of Mana Island NEWS

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From FOMI's President, Brian Bell

There's been a lot of work going on behind the scenes over the past few months as we look to get some new projects underway. Here are three I'd like to tell you about.

Fernbird translocation work. Seven FOMI members made a trip up to Rotokare Reserve in Taranaki in May to meet Simon Collins, Sanctuary Manager of the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, talk about the proposed fernbird translocation, and see the habitat. It was a great day and we established a good connection. Our sponsor, OMV, is also a major sponsor of Rotokare. We had a session around the table getting to know each other, the aspirations of both organisations and, in particular, to discuss the proposed fernbird translocation to Mana Island.



An elusive fernbird

We wandered through the reserve around the lake edge hoping to see some fernbirds. We heard their calls and one person in our group caught a fleeting glimpse of a fernbird as it fluttered along close to the ground.

Rotokare Reserve is a beautiful serene place with mature native bush and a pristine lake. The local volunteers have done an incredible job in making it visitor friendly. It is a highly recommended stopover off the road between Whanganui and New Plymouth inland from Eltham. Most impressive is the 8km pest-free security fence and double gated entry system.

This trip was followed up by an early morning visit to Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve also in May to find out how their initial fernbird translocation from Rotokare Reserve is working. They seem happy with things so far. Again, we heard but didn't see fernbirds. Depending on the success of this translocation, Pauatahanui will have a second go next year.



Rotokare Scenic Reserve

As a result of these two meetings and the advice of Kevin Parker, our project manager for the translocation, it seems there is only a small chance our first translocation of 40 birds will take place in April-June 2018, however, we are waiting for written confirmation of this. They don't think Rotokare will sustain two translocations in one year, but if the second follow-up translocation to Pauatahanui doesn't go ahead for some reason then that may open the door for us.

White-faced storm petrel proposal. We continue to work on getting the formal white-faced storm petrel translocation proposal process sorted. The key change to the initial proposal is a move to source chicks from Burgess Island rather than Maria Island in the Hauraki Gulf. However, as we get deeper into the proposal process the feasibility of Burgess is becoming less and less attractive and we are considering another alternative. It's early days yet and I hope to report by September that the first stage of this translocation will go ahead in February 2018.



White-faced storm petrel

Partnership meeting with DOC and Ngati Toa.

Recently we got together with our partners DOC and Ngati Toa to discuss our mutual aspirations for Mana Island and ensure we are all moving together effectively. It was a really worthwhile meeting coordinated by FOMI executive member Jason Christensen who prepared an agenda covering topics ranging from our respective strategic directions, to buildings and facilities on the island. We also did a walk around the wetland area discussing the proposed restoration work.



Representatives from DOC, Ngati Toa and FOMI at the recent partnership meeting on Mana Island.

It was a great opportunity for us to review the progress that has been made and look ahead to how we can work together on future activities. We went away with several action points for each of our groups to work on and the really positive feeling that we are working constructively together for the benefit of the island.

New season of guided trips start in August by Philippa Doig, FOMI Executive

We have had some stunning trips out to Mana Island over the last few months. We have enjoyed the company of multi-generational family groups celebrating a significant birthday, tramping groups, Forest and Bird groups, and a visitor who came from Christchurch especially to visit the island!

Perhaps the most frequent story is from someone whose house has overlooked Mana Island for many years and is setting foot for the first time on a piece of land that they feel has been a part of their lives forever.

The wildlife projects are proliferating and developing so there is always something new and interesting to discuss with visitors.



FOMI guide Jason Christensen (centre with book) explains the seabird burrows to visitors on a guided trip.

The volunteer guides are doing a great job, but it is always a treat to have an unexpected expert in the party with specialised knowledge to add.

Some visitors are choosing to wander the island independently rather than joining the reasonably strenuous walk along the top of the island, and they may well see more birdlife away from the large guided group.

Check out our website for visitor opportunities for the new season running from August 2017 – June 2018.

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

Full weekend of jobs on June working bee

Eighteen volunteers enjoyed a weekend on the island in June for a busy FOMI working bee led by Linda Kerkmeester and Richard Grasse. The group included a five-strong lizard monitoring team, and two specialists – Colin Miskelly and Graeme Taylor.

On Saturday a variety of tasks were completed including installing 20 nesting boxes for the sooty shearwater led by Graeme, a flax planting trial related to weevil damage led by Colin (see separate item page 4), Ngahere gecko monitoring, and an engineering survey of the recreation room.

On Sunday, having completed the main tasks, all hands were available to help with weeding in the wetland, potting up Mana Island flax, and planting nursery stock including swamp ribbonwood, kowhai, kahikatea and matai.

The weather was calm all weekend, including both evenings when small groups went out with ranger Chris Bell to monitor fluttering shearwater and spot diving petrel. The lizard team did night-time monitoring of Ngahere gecko and also relocated 120 weta found in the gecko enclosure. There was also some successful night spotting of rowi kiwi, as well as common gecko and a few Cook's Strait giant weta.

And of course, some fabulous meals followed by delicious home-baked cakes! A big thank you to everyone who volunteered on the trip.

If you would like to volunteer on a FOMI working bee, keep an eye out for the emails calling for volunteers. If you are a member you will receive these automatically. We have working bees over the next few months.



The team working on the flax weevil trial.



Volunteers installing new seabird nesting boxes.

Flax planting trial looks at weevil damage

In 2004 the flax weevil was introduced to Mana Island from Maud Island in the Marlborough Sounds as part of the restoration plan for Mana. The weevil is a threatened Cook Strait macroinvertebrate and the introduction to Mana was to help ensure the survival of the species.

It rapidly established itself on Mana with large patches of mature flax now dying as a result. The weevils feed only on native flaxes with the adults eating the foliage and the larvae feeding on the roots.

This is of concern as the flax on Mana Island provides the almost exclusive habitat for the goldstripe geckos (for which Mana Island is the world stronghold). The flax provides an important nectar source for bellbirds, tui and at least two species of gecko.

At the June FOMI volunteer working bee, 200 flaxes were planted on Mana Island as part of a trial around the effects of the flax weevil. The flax plants had been grown from seed collected from Maud Island where the flax weevil originated.

Scientist Colin Miskelly is leading the flax weevil study, with the planting trial designed to assess whether flaxes sourced from Maud Island are more resistant to weevil damage than Mana Island flax.

Colin has two hypotheses for the super-abundance of flax weevils on Mana. One relates to the type of flax and whether the Maud Island flax is more resistant to flax weevil damage. The other is about the potential lack of a natural bio-control agent that affects the weevil larvae - which was left behind when the adult weevils were translocated.

He has produced a very valuable report (on our website under [Projects](#)) about the trial which includes recommendations for monitoring the plantings, and a data sheet for recording plant presence and health. This will be included in FOMI working bee tasks for the next few years. The plants have been labelled and marked using GPS mapping.

Our thanks to Colin for this important piece of research, to Allflex who supplied the tags for labelling the sites, and to the volunteers who planted and labelled the flaxes.



Flax damage from the flax weevil.



The flax weevil larvae.



Flax planted by volunteers, with plant protector, and tagged posts marking locations.



TAKAHE NEWS

Names chosen for takahe chicks

Our *Name a Takahe* Competition attracted a brilliant list of names (37 altogether). After much deliberation, the FOMI executive decided the two female takahe chicks would be christened Moana and Kikorangi.

Congratulations to our winners. In submitting the name Moana, Melina Curtis said - 'takahe are such beautiful birds! What a treasure. I think she should be called Moana because Moana is adventurous, brave and beautiful'. Kaye Reardon suggested Kikorangi meaning blue.

The chicks are currently being looked after at Burwood Takahe Centre before going to their permanent home. Thanks to everyone who entered! The winners received a trip to Mana Island and a FOMI tee-shirt.

A new home for the takahe named FOMI

A takahe from Mana Island has recently been welcomed to her new home at Pukaha Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre.

The 13-year old bird named FOMI (after Friends of Mana Island) has been paired with a new mate called Natural who is the resident male at the centre. FOMI is a direct descendant of one of the original eight takahe relocated to Mana in 1988 from Pukaha and Te Anau Wildlife Centre.

It is not expected that FOMI and 16-year old Natural will breed because of their ages, however the birds can live for 20 years or more at secure sites. With an estimated 300 takahe remaining in existence, they are a critically endangered species.

Citizen Science in action on Mana Island, by John McKoy, FOMI Executive

Did you know that 'Citizen Science' is happening on Mana Island? In fact, it's been going for quite a while and there are plans afoot to increase the work using volunteers.

Citizen Science describes scientific investigations where volunteers collect data about biodiversity and the environment to enhance our knowledge of the natural world.

It is now recognised not only as an important method of data collection, but also as a means for enhancing public understanding of science. Another benefit is that it strengthens links between professional scientists and community members.

Although Citizen Science is a relatively new term, this kind of activity is well known to FOMI. The concept includes community groups, such as FOMI, undertaking restoration projects that also monitor environmental change ('grassroots citizen science').



Rewanui Bush Park provides inspiration for citizen science projects.

Since FOMI was established almost 20 years ago with the objective of restoring the Mana Island as a Cook Strait indigenous ecosystem, volunteers (=citizens) have been very actively engaged in restoration activities and in monitoring the progress of the restoration.

However, reductions in scientific resources available to DOC have meant that some planned monitoring activities have not been able to be completed when planned or as thoroughly as necessary. This is especially so for some species that have been reintroduced to the island.

The FOMI executive has agreed that it would be great to enhance the monitoring activities on Mana. Consequently, we are planning to work more closely with scientists to design and carry out monitoring of key species using volunteers.

We have been consolidating the available information as this will be a starting point for reviewing the type of monitoring that we could usefully achieve. We have also taken advantage of the experience of other groups, such as the NZ Landcare Trust, who have been involved with restoration projects and who have developed practical methods for monitoring progress.

A great deal of inspiration has come from visits to Rotokare Sanctuary in Taranaki, workshops organised by the NZ Landcare Trust, Rewanui Bush Park in the Wairarapa, Pukaha Mount Bruce, and Water Action Initiative NZ.

An island home for Whitakers's skinks? by Dale Shirliff, FOMI Executive

For a while now Friends of Mana Island volunteers have been attempting to trap Whitaker's Skinks on the mainland at Pukerua Bay.

The aim has been to catch them and hand them over to Dennis Keall, a lizard breeder. He is attempting to produce sufficient Whitaker's skinks to start a colony on one of our local islands. It's a slow process. Our team hasn't caught any Whitaker's in recent years and Dennis' breeding stock is quite small.

We live in hope that numbers will eventually allow us to start a colony on a pest-free island. Unfortunately as Mana Island has McGregor's skinks they may prove too much

competition. Matiu Somes doesn't have sunny scree slopes to replicate the conditions at Pukerua Bay.

So, a team, including DOC scientists Lynn Adams, Rod Hitchmough and Don Newman, breeder Dennis, DOC representative Brent Tandy and myself are planning to check for suitable sites on Kapiti Island. I will keep you informed of progress.



A team checking a possible site for Whitaker's skinks on Matiu Somes island.

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