



Newsletter No. 68
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Friends of Mana Island NEWS

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From FOMI's President, Brian Bell

Heaps happening on Mana Island – it's been a busy and fruitful first year for me as President. The two big things for me over the last few months are the new projects approved for funding and the project to progress a business case for a proposed Visitor Centre.

I am delighted to say that our major sponsor OMV New Zealand Limited has approved funding of \$117,000 for three new translocation projects over the next four years.

The first of these is already underway with a seabird dog survey of burrowing seabird nests. This is a precursor to the second funded project - a translocation of White Faced Storm Petrels from the Hauraki Gulf to Mana Island.

The survey was conducted by Jo Sim with her dog Rua and took place in November. Together they located and marked wild nests of existing storm petrels, fluttering shearwaters, sooty shearwaters, fairy prions and diving petrels.

A big surprise was the large number of little blue penguin nests discovered along the east coast of Mana Island, mainly hidden in the piles of storm driven driftwood above the high tide zone. (See next story for photo.) According to DOC's Graeme Taylor, this could turn out to be the largest colony of little blue penguins in the Wellington region.

The storm petrel translocation will be a testing one as it has only been done on a trial basis to date. The approved project will see 40 chicks translocated in February 2018, with another 100 in each of 2019 and 2020.



Brian at the hole in the rock (SE corner of Mana) while guiding a Ngati Toa youth group in October.

The third project is the translocation of 40 adult fernbirds from Lake Rotokare Wildlife Reserve (inland Taranaki) to Mana Island around April 2018.

Both these translocations require full proposals approved by DOC with the consent of iwi at both ends of the translocation. This process can take up to a year, which is why 2018 is the earliest these translocations can take place. Ngati Toa have already approved both translocations in concept.

Over many years our past President, Brian Paget, had a dream of a visitor/education/biosecurity centre for the Porirua Whaitua, encompassing Mana Island at the western side, all the way to the Tararuas to the east and including Whitireia Park, the Porirua Harbour, Taupo Wetland and the Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve.

FOMI, along with Plimmerton Rotary, is promoting the concept based on a site on the north-east side of the Paremata Bridge with concept drawings donated by architects novak+middleton. We are testing the water to see if the demand for its use would justify the capital and operating costs. A consultant has been contracted, with sponsorship from Trust House, to assess the business case.

Early in November a meeting of potential stakeholders was held to assess their interest and support. Most organisations needed to consult with their membership before committing. We expect to know before Christmas whether the concept will fly.

Other happenings: teams of FOMI volunteers have been busy on Mana Island under the leadership of Dale Shirtliff and Linda Kerkmeester; Jason Christensen's new Guide Manual has been published, and the guided trip programme managed by Philippa Doig is now underway; John McKoy has a new monitoring programme under way; and we have co-opted Philippa Sargent on to the Executive to focus on communications. Julie Harrison has resigned from the Executive due to other commitments and we thank her for her involvement these past three years.

The FOMI Executive wishes all our members and partners DOC and Ngati Toa a safe and happy holiday season with prospects of an exciting new year ahead.

Rua the dog sniffs out seabird burrows on Mana



As Brian outlined in his report above, Jo Sim and her dog Rua were searching for seabird burrows and nesting sites, as a precursor to the translocation of white faced storm petrels to Mana Island. Dale Shirtliff from FOMI accompanied them during the weekend work, and took this photo along the bluff tops on the western coast of the island.

Dale says it was really hot work and Jo used water from the petrel shed tank to cool off Rua who wore a muzzle while working. He says it was fascinating to see Jo and Rua working together.

“Rua indicated by pausing and staring with eyes fixed firmly ahead. This prompted Jo to encourage Rua to proceed. What followed was the dog and handler finding their way through the undergrowth and sometimes over the edge of bluffs to find the source of the scent, hopefully a burrow entrance.”

New self-guiding brochure available

Almost 14 years after the idea was first talked about at a FOMI executive meeting, Mana Island now has a self-guiding brochure available for visitors.

Jason Christensen produced the brochure, which covers the same sites as the guided trips which FOMI runs. The self-guiding brochure is a very small version of the guided walks and is designed to give visitors a brief introduction to the island. For more information visitors can book a guided walk or visit our website. The self-guiding brochure is available in the woolshed, together with a map.



Working bees tick off lots of jobs on the island by Dale Shirtliff

Five working bees have been run this year - in April, June, August, October and November - led by myself and Linda Kerkmeester.

A huge range of jobs was carried out – from assembling sooty shearwater burrows, removing inkweed in the wetlands (and lots of other weeds), light-welling slower growing trees, weeding, painting and ‘guano’ spraying at the gannet colony, to potting on flax in the nurser, removing the dreaded muehlenbeckia – and lots more.

Throughout, there has been a great response from our volunteers. They bring a range of skills, a readiness to ‘rough it,’ great company and tasty food to share. This year we have shared our evening meals and accommodation with the gecko monitoring groups – one big happy party.

The next work trip will be around March 2017.



Our November working bee team, with ranger Chris Bell, at the end of a busy weekend. (Photo by Allan Sheppard)

Pitfall trap lizard work at Pukerua Bay continues

A small group of our trapping volunteers recently weeded the site where pitfall traps will be laid later this month. We are still trying to catch any remaining Whitaker’s Skinks.

While the chance of having success finding Whitaker’s is waning, we are catching lots of skinks and geckos and the data collected is being recorded in DOC’s database. Our mustelid trapping in the area ensures that we have a thriving lizard population.

Pitfall trapping will take place between January and March next year. Our volunteers are becoming skilled at handling and identifying lizards.

Participation in this work opens up the possibility of lizard work in two projects on Mana Island.

We definitely need more volunteers – contact Dale at dale.shirtliff@xtra.co.nz if you would like to become involved.

Mana Island's DOC ranger, Chris Bell, reports on his first three months on the island

Three months into rangering on Mana Island and I thought it was high time to report on some of the details of Mana life that I'm privileged to see living on the island!

Aside from FOMI working bees and guided tours (achieving great work and introducing many New Zealanders to the island for the first time), I've been amazed how few casual visitors there are to the island, just a handful of kayakers and braver boaties. There have been visits from the Hutt Valley Photography Club and recently a party of geochashers, and very exciting was Ngati Toa's first Taiaha Wananga on Mana Island in two centuries. It was great to hear the shouts of young Rangitahi practicing ancient martial arts on a site of such cultural significance to the iwi.

Like most places around the Wellington region, Mana Island was given a big jolt by November's earthquake, but luckily no damage was done (though three of us on the island spent the night up on high ground, opportunistically banding a few diving petrels). The floods that came the next day caused some slips and some impressive, if brief, flooding. The intense rainfall took a toll on the fluttering shearwater colony which looks set to fledge fewer chicks than in recent years, though many eggs have hatched and chicks are growing quickly. Such a wet spring has no doubt pleased the pateke however, with the wetland still holding a lot of water, and duckling broods looking very healthy.

All eight pairs of takahe have attempted to breed. Sadly two pairs have failed for reasons unknown, but five pairs have a chick, and one pair is still incubating. This month a young Mana-bred male named Jamieson was flown south (via Air New Zealand) to join the Fiordland population at Burwood Bush, with a new wife already lined up. Good news came from Cape Sanctuary - another young Mana Island male named Brodie, who left in August, has already successfully bred with a new mate and is raising a chick...a fast mover!

With so much hard work from FOMI and partners bearing fruit at the moment, and much more on the horizon, it feels like a very exciting time to be on Mana Island!

More guided trips on offer this summer

This spring/summer we have increased the number of guided day trips we are offering to Mana Island, running one a month until Christmas, and two per month from January to April. They are proving very popular. The day involves a return boat trip to the island and a guided walk around the island to see the scientific and restoration projects underway. The boat leaves Mana Marina at 9.00 am and returns about 4.00 pm. It costs \$50 for FOMI members, \$60 for non-members.

Upcoming dates with spaces: 29 January (10 places); 12 February (4 places); 4 March (22 places); 19 Mar (27 places); 8 April (18 places); 23 Apr (28 places).

For information/booking - email guidedtrips.manaisland@gmail.com



This Cook Strait Giant Weta took a shine to one of the visitors on a recent guided trip to the island.

FOMI tee-shirts now available

We are delighted to be able to offer Friends of Mana Island tee-shirts to our members and other interested people. 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 [photos on our website](#).

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).



Gannet population 'doubles'

The transfer of the concrete gannets from the south-west side of Mana to the north-east is bearing fruit.

We now have two regular male visitors, Nigel who has made a nest, plus another male Norman who has joined him in another part of the colony. They were recently spotted together in Norman's bachelor pad.

FOMI volunteers have been busy weeding the colony, and spraying white paint as 'guano'. The latest innovation is that half of the concrete gannets have been repainted in a trial to see if a brighter neck colour (from dull yellow to orange) makes a difference in attracting females. The richer colour is said to be a sign that the birds are ready to mate.



See if you can spot Nigel and Norman in this photo. Clue - Norman is sitting down.

A visitor's experience of a recent guided trip to Mana Island

“What a superb day we had on Mana Island! It was especially interesting as my family were part of a tree-planting party in the early days in 1986 and this was my first return visit. I couldn't believe the changes that have taken place since then and the whole island green with bush and vegetation. We saw birds everywhere - kakariki, bellbirds, tui, fan tails ... And even two gannets near the concrete ones! I was really impressed by all the work that has been done over the years to turn the island into the amazing nature reserve it is now.

Our guides Jan and Julie looked after us well and were able to answer all our questions. We were lucky to have ranger Chris with us too for most of the day. I thought he was particularly good at engaging the children with interesting facts and information - especially about skinks and geckos.

My friend and I had a wonderful day (amazing weather included) and will definitely be recommending the trip. So glad we went - please pass on appreciation and thanks to all concerned.” – *Sally*

FOMI receives letter of congratulations from DOC



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29 November 2016

Brian Bell
President
Friends of Mana Island Inc
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PORIRUA

Dear Brian

Funding for Friends of Mana Island Conservation Projects

I was delighted to hear that the Friends of Mana Island (FOMI) has secured funding from OMV for Mana Island conservation projects.

I'd like to congratulate you on this achievement and acknowledge the tremendous contribution FOMI continues to make to conservation.

Mana Island's predator-free status and flourishing diversity of native wildlife is testament to the dedication and expertise of FOMI in leading restoration projects, as well as the strength of partnership between business, the community, the Department, and iwi. The planned seabird surveys, and fernbird and white-face storm petrel translocations will further enhance the island's high conservation value.

I wish you the best of luck and look forward to hearing how your projects progress.

Yours sincerely

Reg Kemper
Director Operations Lower North Island

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