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FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INC

FOMI Newsletter 61

P O Box 54101, Mana, Porirua, 5247

Special points of interest:

- Annual Report
- Gannet & Fairy Prion Report
- Work Party Report
- Fluttering Shearwater Report
- Whitaker's Skink Report
- Gecko & Interpretation Report
- Enhancement of Floral Diversity
- Your Committee
- Sponsored by Adcold Refrigeration and Contracting

President's Annual Report for 2014

As usual the 16th Annual report covers the past calendar year and ignores the first couple of months of this year which have been the culmination of the past year's work and effort.

So what did we do in 2014, to name but a few:

- Survey of existing planting and report on Floral Diversity.
- Preparation of Fairy Prion release site and Fabrication and installation of artificial burrows.
- Planning for the translocation of Fairy Prion in 2015 & 2016.
- Repairs and maintenance of our Mobile Field Station.
- Monitoring of returning burrowing seabirds and banding of chicks.
- Relocation of and refurbishment of the concrete Gannet colony.
- Weeding and general maintenance.
- Plant nursery work including re-potting and planting.
- Shore Plover recovery and maintenance of the Mt Bruce captive breeding facility.
- Monitoring predator traps in the Pukerua Bay Whitaker's Skink site.
- Setting up Pitfall traps for Whitaker's Skinks.
- Arranging and guiding trips for sponsors and members during the year.

In summary I can say that this year is a giant step up from the previous couple of years as we came to terms with the changes within DOC and the emphasis now placed on the Partnership concept.

We have grasped the nettle and decided to get on with the host of opportunities to add to the restoration projects for our Island.

This could not have been achieved without the support and effort of our Committee and the co-option of Darlene as our interface with members and Sue to manage our work trips. The major effort on the ground has been from our Project Managers, Jason Christensen, Brian Bell, Linda Kerkmeester and Dale Shirtliff with support from yours truly, Julie Harrison and our magnificent bean counter, Dick Fernyhough.

All in all I rate this year as the maturing of FOMI to a force to be reckoned with, a feat recognised in that fantastic book "Paradise Saved".

You will get to hear more about the detail of the projects from their Managers at our AGM, which I hope you will attend.

A great year which I expect will be followed by an even better one.

Thank you all for your support.

Brian Paget

President.

Footnote: For those who could not attend the AGM the reports from our Project Managers will be published in this and future Newsletters for your information.

It was pleasing to have over 30 at the AGM and to note that we have over 90 paid up Members, of which 40% are Family Members.



Gannet and Fairy Prion Reports to the FOMI AGM by Brian Bell, Project Manager

Gannet relocation

- Still no sightings of real gannets at the site at the NE corner of the island. This site is being maintained with ongoing weeding and refreshment of false guano.
- A further site on a ledge about 15 m long and 2 m wide 60 m to the SE and 20 m lower has now been set up with 20 concrete gannets. There have been no sightings of real gannets here either. It is intended to move one of the speakers closer to this site.
- A possible 4th site at the south end of the island may be investigated if the current 2 sites remain unsuccessful in attracting gannets to nest.

Fairy Prion supplementary translocation

- A project managed by FOMI with a collection team led by Colin Miskelly and chick feeding team led by Helen Gummer.
- Preparations for the translocation of Fairy Prions (*titiwainui*) began in mid-2013 culminating in the departure by helicopter of a team of 5 chick collection volunteers from Pukerua Bay for Takapourewa/ Stephens Island on 18 January 2015.
- The team was met by the 2 rangers on the island who also assisted in the collection. The helicopter then made a return trip to French Pass to pick up 2 Ngati Koata representatives.
- A total of 1,655 burrows were inspected over 18-20 January to find 392 accessible chicks from which 120 met the weight, wing length and health criteria established in the previous 2002-2004 translocations. Of these 100 chicks of unknown sex and estimated <12 days from fledging were transferred by helicopter to Mana Island on 22 January.
- The team was met by a large welcoming party with representatives of Ngati Toa, our sponsors including major sponsor OMV, DOC led by Associate Minister of Conservation Nicky Wagner, Porirua Mayor, Regional Council, Rotary, the media and FOMI.
- Chicks were weighed and measured on arrival and immediately transferred to their new artificial burrows installed on a slope above the SW facing cliff about 78 m above sea level. A team of 12 volunteers on rotation weighed, measured and fed the chicks daily on a diet of tinned sardines, soy oil, water and vitamin/mineral.
- All 100 chicks are presumed to have fledged successfully after 2 to 11 nights from arrival.
- Articles have appeared in the DominionPost and Whitby News.
- A further 100 chicks are to be translocated in January 2016 to complete this project.
- A detailed report on the project may be found on the FOMI web site.
- Thanks to the many people who were involved in this highly successful venture.

Colin Miskelly, Curator of terrestrial vertebrates, TePapa

Our guest speaker at the AGM took us for a Tiki Tour of Stephens Island/Takapourewa, off the northern tip of D'Urville Island, and its defining introduced feature is its lighthouse. The lighthouse keeper families and their pets inadvertently decimated the island's wildlife. The Stephen's Island Wren – now Lyle's Wren - was killed to extinction by the lighthouse cats. The South Island Kokako and South Island piopio also went extinct there. Other birds were there until the 1890s, but are now extinct there (not on the mainland).

The island is famous as the tuatara island – there are 30 to 50 thousand tuatara there as well as the endemic Hamilton's Frog. There is a tuatara fence to keep tuatara away from the frogs. The fairy prion colony consists of 1.8 million pairs and is of national significance. Falcons are on the island (adult pair + offspring). They teach chicks how to eat fairy prions. Seven species of lizards are found there, including the common gecko (Raukua or Cook Strait gecko), striped gecko, Marlborough green geckos, and speckled skink.

Mana and Stephens both have natural populations of the Cook Strait giant weta, extinct on the mainland, as well as cave weta, tree weta, flax weevils (same as on Mana), and Ngaio weevils (only on Stephens).



Photos by Colin Miskelly

Work Party Report, Sue Chesterfield, Volunteer Officer



Work Party coordinator role:

- Communicate with Island staff and FOMI committee projects
- Preparing requests for volunteer opportunities and forwarding these onto the Membership Officer for distribution.
- Taking all bookings for the volunteer trips.
- Sending out the relevant information to the volunteers in the lead-up to their trip.

Documents emailed to all volunteers:

- Information for Volunteers
- Map of Mana Island
- Mana Marina directions and car parking
- H & S plan – read before trip, sign as read once on Mana Is
- Rodent Control

Work Parties are arranged according to work that needs to be done on the Island. As we move forward with the Floral Diversity plans some work such as seed collection and preparation for projects, may be done on the mainland.

A total of Four Work Parties have been co funded by DOC and FOMI. In 2014 there were 2 work parties, November 7th-9th and December 5th-7. The March work party is tomorrow. 14 volunteers are booked. The next and last Work Party from this funding, will be early May.

The volunteers are highly motivated and flexible and work very hard. Its a challenge to estimate how long each job will take and how many volunteers for each job. We have decided to plan more jobs as groups of workers vary, as we are aware, volunteers don't like to be idle !

Work done was:

- Karo eradication
- Moving gannet colony and spreading guano
- Mechanical check of caravan
- Caravan thoroughly cleaned inside
- Mechanical check of tractor, repairs identified, spare parts ordered
- Thorough clean of shelves, fridges, drawers in Lockwood
- Tidy up of shed
- Plants in nursery weeded
- Dismantled the shore plover enclosure which was a very physical job as the steel perimeter was buried into the ground and rusted together- it is now stored in the lockwood shed.
- A bonus = assisted releasing 12 green gecko's onto the island.
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The work party March tomorrow tasks are:

- Light welling- there are now areas of 'self regeneration' of wharangi, kokekoke etc . Some of the planted species coprosma, nagio etc are several meters high and shadowing the new top story. Volunteers will bring tools for this job, if they have them.
- Sanding, painting, cleaning signs in and around wool shed.
- Clear nightshade from paths.
- Interpretation/welcome sign cleaning and cutting back vegetation.

Summary:

12 volunteers can do a lot of work over 2 days, each day doing 5-6 hours = 100 / 120 hours over the weekend. They are always keen and thoroughly enjoy being fully employed. To make sure the volunteers can achieve satisfaction its ideal to have several jobs and Team Leaders who describe and demonstrate the job for each group.

From an organisational point of view and a need to provide the volunteers with the right tools to do a quality job and feel they have achieved, FOMI/DOC combine as Team Leaders and work along side the volunteers.



Fluttering Shearwater Whitaker's Skink Report, Dale Shirtliff, Project Manager



Fluttering Shearwater

The successful fairy prion transfer this year follows on from similar transfers of fluttering shearwaters in January of 2006, 2007 and 2008. These transfers were also executed with great care and attention to detail. A total of 211 of fluttering shearwater chicks fledged.

For one week each August the returning adult flutterers are monitored by Helen Gummer and a volunteer. The birds return at night and are found in the man-made burrows. Burrow number, leg band number and the weight of each bird is recorded. Past breeding pairs and potential new breeding pairs are noted.

After this, Jeff (ranger) keeps tabs on the colony noting eggs laid and later successful hatching. In late December Helen and volunteers band the chicks before they fledge. The birds will begin to return after about 4 years.

Last August, 45 adult birds were identified. 21 eggs hatched with 20 chicks surviving and fledging. This is the best breeding result so far. This project is a huge success and an excellent achievement for FOMI.

Whitaker's Skink

If the right environment can be found on Mana Island, the highly endangered Whitaker's skinks will be transferred to a suitable site there.

Since 5th January this year Friends of Mana Island volunteers, led by ex DoC scientist Don Newman, have been attempting to trap any remaining Whitaker's skinks at their source site, the Pukerua Bay Scientific Reserve. The lizard population of the reserve is very healthy thanks to the mustelid trapping this same volunteer team has been doing for over 2 years.

A summary of Don's figures to Friday 13th March: over 26 nights, using up to 93 traps on any one occasion, 1501 lizards have been caught of which 877 were geckos and 624 skinks (499 northern grass skinks, 76 glossy brown skinks, and 49 copper skinks).

While no more Whitaker's skinks have been found our group of volunteers are now trained in handling skinks and geckos and in trapping lizards using pitfall traps. These skills will be useful later on Mana Island.

Dennis Keall and Jacqui Macintosh are successfully breeding Whitaker's skinks caught in other years. FOMI funded a new high-tech cage each for Dennis and Jacqui this year.

Health and Safety

Health and safety documents covering all volunteer activities have been written and are presented to volunteers before they carry out any work. These documents are reviewed frequently.



Photos by
David
Cornick



Gecko and Interpretation Report, Jason Christensen, Project Manager



Gecko Projects:

The first I will talk about is the Forest Gecko project which only started in December. The project is fully sponsored by Winston Aggregates. As part of Winstone quarry expansion in Belmont they need to clear some bush off the new area to be extracted. The whole project is a 30 year project but the proposed Gecko project is permitted for 5 years. The Forest Gecko is to be collected from the site by the contractor EcoGecko (Trent Bell) and will be released in to an enclosure pen to be constructed on Mana. To date they have collected 11 Forest Gecko.

We will know more after this weekend about a enclosure site as the team are visiting the island to sort out a suitable site. We will be looking for volunteers to help with the digging for the enclosure and at this stage the size is 0.5 hectares. I understand the enclosure is coming from England or the USA so keep an eye out for the dates for the work party but will be end of May start of June. The release is planned for June 2015.

Wellington green gecko have also had another transfer of a number which were released late last year. It is hoped to transfer more in December and perhaps into the same enclosure as the Forest Gecko. Let hope they find some at the quarry site to help boost the numbers.

Visitor Interpretation

Over the year we have had one meeting with Doc and we have another scheduled tomorrow. This project is over looking the whole visitor experience from signage on the Island and interpretation. On Saturday will see a workshop run by myself with those of you who put your names up at the last AGM to be Guides for the visitor trips. I will be training the Guides and getting feed back from them on what other things we need to interpretative or do better to give our visitors a great experience. The project is a work in progress. If any of you are keen to guide in the future let me know so we can schedule you in for the next training session.

General Business

I just wanted to make a special thanks to Darlene our Membership officer for what she has been doing for FOMI. If there is any other way that we can enhance or improve what we do for our member please let us know.

I also want to let you know to check out our Facebook page which is up and running thanks to Julie so please send in anything that you might have to put onto that. And like us! Please.

I also wanted to say that FOMI were given the opportunity for a Teenager to attend Birds NZ or the old OSNZ on a workshop/training week in the school holiday on Mana Island. Unfortunately no one from the membership put their hand up. The Committee decided to sponsor a teenager from Ngati Toa to go since they had more keen to go than they were given space for. We will await their report.



Photos by Linda Kerkmeester



Enhancement of Floral Diversity for Mana Island, Linda Kerkmeester. Project Manager

PURPOSE OF PROJECT

The main purpose of this project was to build on the restoration planting that began in earnest back in 1987 when Mana Island was named a scientific reserve under the management of the Department of Conservation. Planting by volunteers reached its zenith in 2008 when a total of 500,000 plants had been planted. It is now time to take stock and decide on the next steps towards achieving the goal to restore the island back to its natural state prior to human contact.

While we have planted half a million plants, we still have a way to go in obtaining the full ecological spectrum to support a wide range of wildlife from birds and insects to lizards, skinks and giant weta to name a few. We also have an ongoing interest from a wide range of people who are keen and willing to volunteer their time and energy towards achieving this goal. In a nutshell, the floral diversity project is about clarifying exactly where we have got to so we can establish where we need to go from here and work out the next steps of how to get there. As well as restoring the island to its full capacity in terms of plant and wildlife communities, it will make sure that volunteer's efforts are effective and meaningful with a clear purpose in mind.

FLORAL DIVERSITY CONTRACT

Last year (2014) FOMI were successful in their application to the Wellington Community Trust to contract Lisa Clapcott and Richard Gill, both experienced conservation workers who had worked on Mana Island in their previous DoC roles. Their mission was to review and sort the various records kept on the planting programme over the years so they could make some clear recommendations for FOMI to focus our efforts to increase the species that were scarce or missing now that the main colonising plants are well established on the island. The overall restoration plan for the island does not seek to plant more areas as unlike Kapiti Island, it is not the intention for the entire island to be covered in bush, but rather to leave open grassland for species that require it (e.g. Takahe, giant weta, many seabirds) and enriches the bush that is already thriving and regenerating on its own.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The report identified several areas for further work to enhance the floral diversity. These were structured under three main themes:

General floral diversity – achieving greater species diversity with a list of many non-woody plants such as ferns and climbers. This also requires speeding up the emergent secondary canopy species such as the podocarps (Rimu, Miro, Totara) to grow up through the primary canopy of colonisers (such as pittosporum, kanuka, ngaio and five-finger) where their growth is currently suppressed by lack of light

Threatened plants – using Mana as a repository for plants that are threatened or scarce on the mainland. Some are already planted but it's a matter of finding them and encouraging more to grow and thrive on their own

Wetland health – achieving a wetland community that can support a greater diversity of wildlife that needs freshwater habitat. The existing wetland is silting up – we are not sure why and we need to find out more before we can put efforts into replanting this area

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

In the short term, this project has identified several actions that we can do now, with volunteers over the next year or two. Some of these projects include:

'Lightwelling' of emerging canopy species – finding young trees such as rimu, kahikatea, kohekohe and miro and cutting gaps in the overhead canopy to let more light through

Collecting seed for more of these trees to be propagated and planted from existing bush remnants on the mainland

De-silting some areas of the wetland to allow more water to pond and provide freshwater habitat

In the longer term, we have some more work to do in subsequent stages of the project to create clear tasks and work programmes for the future. We look forward to some further botanical studies to identify the plants that are missing or that we need more of to restore the island to its full ecological capacity.

Your Committee for the 2015/16 year is:

Brian Paget, President; Brian Bell, Vice President; Julie Harrison, Secretary; Dick Fernyhough, Treasurer and a Committee of Sue Chesterfield, Jason Christensen, Linda Kerkmeester, Dale Shirliff, Rob Stone or his representative (DoC Rep), Reina Solomon, (IWI representative) and co-opted Membership Officer, Darlene Adams.

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

Editor: Brian Paget

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