



September 2016

FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INC

FOMI Newsletter 67

P O Box 54101, Mana, Porirua, 5247

Special points of interest:

- Presidents Report
- Fluttering Shearwater and Fairy Prion monitoring
- Gannet encounters
- Island visit and working bee report
- Your Executive
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President's Report

Last Sunday your Executive, along with past Presidents Brian Paget and Colin Ryder, met for the day to formulate FOMI's strategy for the next five years. Before getting into the strategy we reconfirmed FOMI's vision for Mana, reviewed our important relationships with DOC and Ngati Toa, and reviewed work done over the last five years.

DOC recently sent us a draft Management Agreement over which we had some real concerns as it seemed to downgrade our relationship to one of a 'supplier of services' rather than the partnership arrangement that we value so highly. Subsequent to hearing our feedback, DOC has put this Agreement on hold while it negotiates a high level agreement with Ngati Toa to cover the whole of Ngati Toa mana whenua (lower North Island and upper South Island). To facilitate this DOC is funding a contracted Treaty Settlements Ranger position in Ngati Toa with the primary aim of getting the agreement in place, which could take a year or more. This means our agreement with DOC goes on the back burner. That said, it is clear that the nature of DOC's role and that of volunteers across the whole of NZ's conservation estate is changing.

In a recent article in the DomPost (September 15, 2016), DOC head Lou Sanson said that DOC can't prescribe the solution to the management of the DOC estate – it has to be achieved by engaging with communities and business, instilling the sense that DOC land "is our land". By our activities since FOMI was formed in 1998 we have amply demonstrated our sense of ownership of Mana Island.

Since the last review of progress in 2010 FOMI has done an amazing amount of work and many of the tasks set back then have been accomplished. As those who have been to Mana recently will agree, the island's biodiversity is taking off and the bird song is something else! Looking ahead, we have identified a number of exciting projects that will build on the fantastic work done to date. Key aspects of the strategy will be to place increased emphasis on recording progress using a Citizen Science approach, making increased use of information technology to communicate our success measures while providing better opportunities for members and the public to visit Mana Island.

Many of you will have seen the articles in the DomPost and Kapi Mana on our lonely lovelorn gannet Nigel ("Love Concretes All"). The media are intoxicated by quirky wildlife stories and this is a great way of publicizing FOMI. We are currently in discussions with national and international media on this great little story.

This year guided visits are set to treble. Thanks to Jason Christensen we now have in place a revamped interpretive trail and trained Guides who have been issued with a comprehensive set of operating procedures and interpretive information.

Details of the work going on is set out in other parts of the newsletter and the outputs of the strategy meeting will be revealed in future editions once we have discussed them with our partners and agreed priorities.

At the end of August we farewelled Jeff Hall, DOC Ranger on Mana Island. We have enjoyed an excellent working relationship with Jeff during his three years on Mana and we wish him well in his new position as Ranger on Maitu/Somes Island. Chris Bell (no relation) is filling in for the next six months as DOC goes through the process of employing someone permanent in the position.

Cheers,

Brian Bell, President

Fluttering shearwater and fairy prion monitoring 2016 from Dale Shirtliff

This article is based on and quoted from Helen Gummer's report for Friends of Mana Island.

Helen's 6 day annual monitoring trip began on Friday 19th August. This coincided with our FOMI weekend working bee. Helen was assisted by volunteer Mel Wilmott for nights 1 and 2 and myself nights 3 – 6. Helen has worked on this project for a number of years as a contractor to FOMI. The project's huge success is due to Helen's continued outstanding direction and management, and of course FOMI's support.

The objectives of Helen's trip were to identify fluttering shearwater adults visiting two artificial colony sites on the southern end of Mana Island at the start of the 2016/17 breeding season, in order to determine return rates of birds translocated there between 2006–2008, to identify any Mana-raised chicks returning to the sites, and to determine if new immigrants have been attracted into the sites.

Returning fairy prions were included in the monitoring programme, to assist Colin Miskelly with his on-going study at the Northern (diving petrel/fairy prion) colony site, by identifying pairings at known active burrows (all adult prions translocated in 2002–2004 are likely to have now been recovered). Mana-raised chicks returning to the site and new immigrants attracted into the site were also looked for.

The monitoring night took the following pattern. Early evening meal. At 7.30pm we walked up the Tirohanga Track and onto Southern Track to the fluttering shearwater colony, with head torches, for an 8pm start. All 101 man-made burrows were visited. 'When birds were found in burrows, we identified band numbers and marked the crowns with Twink to distinguish birds already handled from those not yet identified. Monitoring of burrows with established pairs that had been partnered for several years was reduced to a level that minimised disturbance but enabled some gathering of information on behaviour. All other burrows were checked to be sure there were no other birds associating with the burrow.'

We then moved on to the 'Northern' site (really about 400 metres away and on the south west of the island) and repeated this effort in the tauhinu covered, original fairy prion site. The 'petrel' shed provided shelter and a dry seat until our next round began, roughly an hour after beginning. This work continued with the final round beginning around 1am.

Burrows predicted to have a fluttering shearwater breeding attempt this coming season were marked so the DOC ranger can monitor breeding attempts, successes and failures from September.

Helen, Mel and Dale spent the afternoons on burrow maintenance at both colony sites, with tasks including trimming of grass around burrow lids and also clearing the gravel from burrow entry pipes because birds had dug new nest scrapes over winter. Fresh gravel had been replaced (to prevent burrow flooding) in April.

The grass was significantly longer and more lush around burrows of breeding status, a really good indication of how fertile the soil is becoming at these sites. This is a result of the guano deposited.

Monitoring Conclusions

A summary of Helen's conclusions on this year's monitoring –

Sixty adult fluttering shearwaters have been identified in 2016 so far on Mana Island. There were some notable captures and finds this year: three Mana-raised fluttering shearwater chicks were caught as adults for the first time (we have now captured five Mana-raised birds in total so far); another first-time adult recovery of a 2007 translocated chick (bringing the known survival of the 2007 cohort of 91 translocated chicks to 44%); another first-time adult recovery of a 2008 translocated chick (bringing the known survival of the 2008 cohort of 94 translocated chicks to 23%); a new fluttering shearwater burrow at the Northern colony site.

Helen believes there will be up to 30 breeding attempts which ideally will produce 30 chicks. 25 chicks fledged from the colony earlier this year, 20 in 2015.

Five breeding pairs of fairy prions were found over this week at the original (Northern) prion breeding colony.

The endangered flax weevil which decimated the flax near the prion site has now reached the fluttering shearwater site. In the past flax has been removed because it grew over burrow entrances. There should not be a problem with this now, however an absence of flax will affect the shelter it currently provides the colony.

Helen and Dale returned on the DOC boat on Thursday 24th. Jeff Hall, after 4 years as Mana Island ranger made his final trip off the island too. Jeff has been an invaluable supporter and contributor to the monitoring and maintenance programmes at these colonies.

Photos by Helen & Dale



: **Gannet encounters** from Helen Gray

Some FOMI volunteer tasks are more attractive than others, so Philippa and I felt privileged to be hiking up to the NE corner to weed the concrete gannet colonies on a sunny day in August. We'd heard that a single male gannet that used to visit the colony sites, referred to as Nigel No Mates, hadn't been seen for a while. On arrival we spotted a fresh nest mound built of soft earth packed around plant material, a hopeful sign that some breeding activity was happening.

While taking an elevenses break after clearing the eastern site, we were startled by a low-flying gannet (presumably Nigel) squawking above us! While we held our breaths and fervently hoped that our presence wouldn't drive him away forever, he glided slowly over the colony several times before disappearing over the hill. Nigel's visit renewed our sense of purpose as we sprayed paint 'guano' over the weeded site; at the start of the breeding season, it seemed important to have the colonies looking fresh and active.

We moved the gear up to the top colonies, and hadn't been weeding long when again we heard the squawk of a gannet, and turned to see him landing five metres away. Cameras at the ready we crept around a knoll to get a shot before being seen, however he stood quite at ease amongst his concrete cousins while we came closer and photographed. He was alongside a concrete bird, gently moving his bill down the bill of his 'mate'. It was heart-breaking to watch this tender attention given to a lump of concrete. I read later that this courtship behaviour is called 'fencing', but of course the female would usually respond!

Back at the Lockwood that night we shared our excitement and pictures with some caution, not wanting to arouse too much jealousy from those who'd spent hours weeding in the mud.

The next day we were clearing a site above the cliff when at 11am we heard the familiar gannet landing cry and saw him heading straight for us at high speed. Thankfully he pulled up short three metres away – we didn't fancy being attacked by such a large bird with an extremely strong-looking bill, especially not on the edge of an 80-metre drop! But in fact he seemed quite companionable, standing watching us for five minutes, seemingly more interested in us than the concrete birds. He did some 'sky pointing' before taking off and circling above the colonies for a while. That was the last we saw of him that weekend, but we did see pairs of gannets feeding at sea, and hoped that one day they will follow Nigel's interest in the colonies and decide to settle there.



Mana Island Visit and Working Bee Report 19—25 August 2016 by Dale Shirtliff

This trip coincided with Jeff Hall's last few days on Mana – he has been appointed ranger on Matiu Somes. We met Chris Bell, interim ranger, who will look after Mana for the next 6 months until a permanent appointment is made.

12 volunteers participated on this fine weather weekend. As usual we stayed in the Lockwood building – unfortunately the hot water supply was out. It has been fixed since.

Separate to our group were 4 from EcoGecko, led by Trent Bell. They stayed at house 3. Their quest to find Ngahere geckos in the fenced enclosure produced disappointing results though Trent was able to show our working bee group one as we passed on our round the island walk Saturday evening.

Helen Gummer and Colin Miskelly were on the island too, monitoring returning fluttering shearwaters, fairy prions and diving petrels. 60 shearwaters, 5 pairs of prions and 26 petrels were recovered. Some numbers are yet to be confirmed. These are outstanding results.

Tasks covered by our hard working volunteers included –

- Lightwelled tree recheck – 1 year after initial release.
- Further pruning, measurement, recording....
- Guano paint spraying and weeding at the gannet site
- Assembly of 20 wooden sooty shearwater burrows
- Dismantling and removal of the wetland hide
- Freeing up blocked culverts and trackside ditches
- Removal of muehlenbeckia, release of carex and planting of kahikatea in Weta Valley
- Removal of karaka, karo, tree lucerne
- Plant nursery work

As can be seen there were a diverse range of tasks and they were completed with enthusiasm, dedication and good humour. Dale and Linda led the group again. Rangers Jeff and Chris provided support and direction. Chris was impressed by the effort and achievements of the group. Brian Bell was an active and appreciative member of our team.

Dale and Helen stayed on the island to complete the shearwater monitoring. Volunteer Richard Grasse spent the week continuing the weeding. Jeff, Helen, Richard and Dale came off the island Thursday 25th by DOC boat.

This was another very productive working bee. It was great to see a number of returning volunteers and the new, keen ones. This was the first time we shared evening meals with Trent and the EcoGecko group.



Photos by Heather Mackenzie taken on a work party

On the Saturday evening walk - at the lighthouse site. Our full working bee team.
Back row – Jamie Milnes, Dale Shirtliff, Cathy Haddock, Bruce Collett, Linda Kerkmeester.
Seated – Richard Grasse, Brian Bell, Philippa Sargent, Peter Simpson, Philippa Doig

Your Executive for the 2016/17 year is:

President-Brian Bell, Vice President-Linda Kerkmeester, Secretary-Julie Harrison, Treasurer-Dick Fernyhough, and Jason Christensen, Dale Shirtliff, John McKoy; Philippa Doig, Rob Stone or his representative (DoC Rep), Nathan Te Rei, (IWI representative) and co-opted Membership Officer, Darlene Adams and Work Party Co-ordinator Hannah Kyle-Parker

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