



FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INCORPORATED

PO BOX 54 101, MANA 5247

Newsletter Number 33

December 2007

Hi

Winter is here or is it spring? Certainly the weather has been unpredictable, unseasonable and recently very warm, but no doubt very good for growth on the Island.

As you will all be aware by now, planting is almost at a standstill, and that will be so for years to come. Infill and endangered species planting is all that is happening this winter, by small groups of enthusiastic volunteers who are able to spend several days on the Island at a time, all very worthwhile and highly productive. The rest of us will have to content ourselves with watching all the stuff grow.

We have been successful in obtaining funds for the last of the Fluttering Shearwater releases of 100 birds programmed for January next year. On your behalf I went along to the funding distribution from the Mana Community Trust and collected our cheque. It should be noted that the Mana Community Trust have supported our projects for some years now, in particular the planting programme, our Mobile Field Station (the caravan) and the release of burrowing sea birds. We are grateful for their continuing support.

The recent release of Shore Plovers is another exciting programme which is scheduled to run over the next year or so. Already there are signs that they have spread their wings to the mainland, and some are regularly sighted south of Titahi Bay. The objective, of course, is to establish a breeding colony on the Island. I guess that spring will tell.

Watch out for our planned trips for small groups, your input is highly valued. We do plan to have some Summer events so you will be able to monitor progress. More details early next year.

In the meantime enjoy the Christmas break.

Cheers

Brian

Your Committee

Brian Paget (President)
Doreen Douglas (Vice President/Newsletter)
Darlene Adams (Secretary)
Barry Dent (Treasurer)
Kelvin Hunt (Volunteer Coordinator)
Paul Quinn
Jo Greenman
Jason Christensen
Ian Cooksley (DoC)
Tama Coker (Iwi Representative)

Sadly the committee is saying goodbye to Paul Quinn who is moving to the Waikato where he hopes to get involved with the Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust. Thanks for your hard work Paul and the best of luck for the future.

Idea for Christmas!



Mana Island T Shirts

\$20 each plus \$3 freight

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PO Box 54 101, Mana 5247

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News from the Island from Grant, Sue, Frank and Piripi

As the days get longer, the dawn chorus begins very early. The first birds on Mana to start singing are the robins - usually just before 5am! A few tui are out too, exploiting the flax nectar now that the kowhai has finished flowering. And of course there are lots of yellow-crowned kakariki. There are two clutches of brown teal (pateke) chicks on the wetland ponds, one clutch of four and another of three.

There are about a dozen Shore Plover still here although one flew back to Mt Bruce National Wildlife Centre (Goodness knows how it found its way back there — it was brought here in a box in the back of a ute so had no chance to read or remember road signs) and recently a couple have taken up residence at Petone Beach. They may breed here this year although there is no sign of it yet.

The Takahe have finished beating the life out of each other and settled into the serious business of

reproduction. Goodness knows they need to take it seriously, they are after all close to extinction with only about three hundred left on the planet and we have almost forty of them here on Mana. Our most famous pair, Fomi and Sir Ed, proudly produced two chicks recently, so they at least are taking the threat of extinction seriously.

Last week Dr Colin Miskelly came over for a night to assess the translocated seabird colonies [see page 4]. He found, amongst other things, eleven fairy prions ashore, some with eggs. This indicates some success with this species at last. The final transfer of fluttering shearwater chicks will take place in January 2008 and is all set to go, with 200kg of sardines waiting for the blender.

We have had a few groups of volunteers over here helping us straighten out the historic woolshed [see photos on page 5] and give the place a tidy up. The woolshed now has a couple of display cabinets

with some of the artifacts from the past displayed. The earliest shipment of wool from NZ was clipped and shipped from that shed.

One volunteer Jack Elphick, made a mammoth effort recently — he stayed for two weeks and pricked out and bagged up more than 3000 plants in preparation for next winter's planting.

The temporary weed team, Vince and Eric have come to the end of their stint. They have been searching the island for boxthorn, gorse, broom and other nasties brought over by the starlings. Using a GPS, they have produced a map of weed distribution on the Island so that the folks in the glass towers can contemplate and decide how much money to give us for next year's project.

Our threatened plant care group has been over again, weeding around the plots of *Coprosma acerosa*, *Muehlenbeckia astonii*, and other rare plants. Things are looking good.

RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS FOR MANA ISLAND by Colin Ryder

Discaria toumatau (Matagouri)

Matagouri. Cursed and reviled by the South Island high country pastoralists but regarded as an undervalued component of an important ecosystem by conservationists.

Matagouri has a tangled habit and its spines have rightly earned the species its New Zealand sobriquet; "Wild Irishman." (The Maoris used to use the dried thorns for tattooing so this is not a plant to be handled casually). In the South Island, it can grow up to 5 metres high and form dense thickets; impassable to man or beast. On the other hand, those very features have made it the foundation of shrub communities containing, in many cases, rare and endangered species. It is also the only host plant for a rare endemic moth, *Aroclita discaria* and a chafer beetle *Prodontria matagouriae*.

[Continued over]

Shore Plover

Shore plover are currently ranked as **nationally critical**, the highest possible threat ranking under Molloy et al (2002). Range is restricted to one natural population of c.130 individuals on Rangatira Island in the Chathams, a small population of 5 breeding pairs on Mangere Island in the Chathams, a population of c. 100 birds on Portland Island in ECHB Conservancy, and a small (not yet established) population of c.10 birds recently transferred on Rarotoka (Foveaux Strait).



The focus of recovery effort has been on spreading the risk of extinction. This is being achieved by protecting the Chathams populations, establishing new populations on suitable islands in the Chathams (Mangere) and establishing a captive breeding/reintroduction programme to establish new populations on suitable islands around New Zealand.

The Portland population was considered self-sustaining in 2003, so captive breeding/release effort shifted to the next most suitable site, privately owned Rarotoka, with the first transfer in February 2006. Relationship issues with the landowners have stalled the captive breed for release programme, resulting in an agreement to continue releases of shore plover at the site starting with a trial of the less-intensive method of hard-release of juveniles cropped from Portland Island.

To fulfil the goal of the Shore Plover Recovery Plan, which requires self-sustaining populations at a total of five or more locations by 2011, another release site is needed urgently.

The recovery group has assessed potential sites nationally on a number of occasions as a 'desk-top' exercise. Mana Island was considered a high contender site in 1993 after a ground assessment concluded the island would provide good habitat for shore plover (Miskelly & Aikman 2003). However, at that time the size of the Black-backed gull (BBG) population presented an insurmountable problem, as BBGs are a significant predator of shore plover that would threaten their establishment.

Discaria toumatau (Matagouri) - continued from previous page

While it is mostly in the South Island, it is also found in the North Island from the North Waikato Heads south in sand dunes and some dry locations inland. In the Wellington region it is listed as being "In Serious Decline" and as a priority plant for introduction in the Mana Island Restoration Plant.

At first glance, introducing an endemic but similar species to Boxthorn, after years of a painstaking and expensive eradication programme, seems counter-intuitive. However, the local form of Matagouri is a prostrate scrambler; which won't crowd out other valuable species or endanger seabirds.

The nearest population is a small colony of 14 plants in Strathmore, Wellington. Gary James collected seeds from these plants and the Forest and Bird Home Nursery Group have propagated them, mainly for Matiu/Somes Island. (Seed collection is a bit tricky because the seeds are all dispersed on the one day. Gary solved this little conundrum by putting plastic bags over the plants to collect the seeds when they were ripe). Some surplus individuals were transferred to Mana Island for growing on in the nursery and planting out.

When most of us are tucked up in our beds fast asleep, some noble souls are out in the wilds—working! Here is a recent report on the Fairy Prions from Dr Colin Miskelly, Conservation Analyst for DoC

We have a colony!

I handled eleven fairy prions on Mana Island last night, seven of which were new (six 2004 transferees and an unbanded bird). And we still haven't identified the mate of the bird on an egg, and so at least 12 prions are present. While only one pair is known to have an egg, two other pairs may have (in deep or cryptic burrows).

Weather conditions were as appalling as usual to start with, with strong north-west winds that got worse during the evening. I arrived at 4:30 pm, and headed up to Lance's Gully to band diving petrel chicks (2), then to the main colony to check the 105 artificial burrows and band diving petrel chicks.

Burrow 16 still had a prion on an egg (the same bird as on 21 October). Five other burrows had prion feathers. The biggest surprise was a large diving petrel chick in a side chamber off burrow 55. I banded 6 diving petrels chicks to add to the 3 banded on 21-22 October. It was 9:00 pm by the time I finished and headed back to the Lockwood to cook a feed. My housemates were already in bed! I was back at the colony at 10:15 pm, and soon found prions in three of the burrows noted as having feathers, with pairs in two (though one bird moved between these two within 15 min, so only 3 birds). I also caught all 5 parent diving petrels that we didn't know the identity of (one was unbanded, as was another found under a flax clump on the cliff edge).

About midnight the wind suddenly stopped and it became calm and drizzly, with no moon—ideal petrel conditions. And the prions came. There were 2-3 birds in flight over the colony continuously, often calling. I handled 11 birds 19 times, as several birds moved between burrows.

There have now been 14 adult prions handled on Mana Island, and it is likely that 12-13 of them are still present. In addition to the mate yet to be identified in burrow 16, I caught one of the flax clump birds not seen since they raised a chick in 2005/06 (this pair were unbanded adults when first found on Mana, and may still have an undetected nest chamber under the mats of dead flax leaves).

The sudden influx of prions is mainly because of high recruitment from the 2004 cohort. The two new birds on 21 October and the six newly returned chicks last night were all from 2004. For some as-yet-unknown reason, most of the 2003 cohort returned to Takapourewa, but numbers are split evenly between both sites for the 2004 cohort.

A total of 34 transferred chicks has been recovered, 23 on Takapourewa, and 11 on Mana. Of the 40 chicks translocated in 2002, one has been recovered on Takapourewa, and one on Mana. Of the 100 chicks translocated in 2003, 13 have been recovered on Takapourewa and 2 on Mana. Of the 100 chicks translocated in 2004, 9 have been recovered on Takapourewa, and 8 on Mana.

And so the real mystery is what happened to the c10 missing 2003 chicks that should have come back to Mana?

There will still be birds recruiting to both sites (and undoubtedly others that have returned and not been caught). But I am now more confident that the overall project will achieve the goal of establishing a colony of fairy prions on Mana Island.

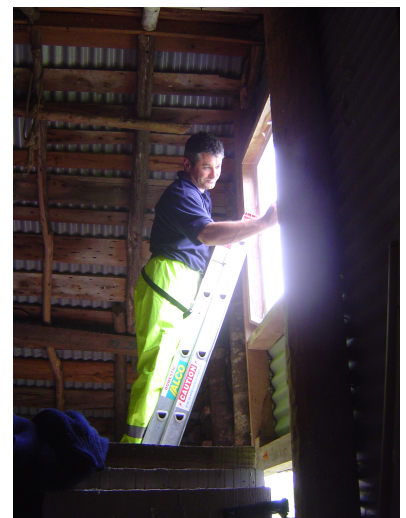
I never did get back to Lance's Gully after dark. I was a bit tired when I left the main colony at 2:15 am.



Volunteer Work

Top left to right -

*Water blasting the woolshed
Carting wood
Clearing tracks
Artefacts table
Preparing a display cabinet
Artefacts displayed
Painting bird boxes
Cleaning artefacts
Cleaning the old boat
Sweeping
Painting windows*



Denis Fairfax is continuing with his research into the history of Mana Island. He is currently amassing information on William Hendle who was the first lighthouse keeper on the Island.