



Newsletter No. 71
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Friends of Mana Island NEWS

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From FOMI's President, Brian Bell

A recent highlight has been FOMI's winning of the Wellington Airport Community Award for Porirua City in the Heritage and Environment Category. We are delighted that our sister organisation Pest Free Plimmerton was runner-up. Congratulations.

For FOMI, getting this award is recognition of the huge amount of time and effort volunteers have put into the restoration of Mana Island over the years.



Porirua awards night, from left - Brian Paget (immediate past-president), Linda Kerkmeester (vice-president), Brian Bell (president), Philippa Sargent and John McKoy (FOMI exec members).

We are now in the running for the regional award to be presented at a gala dinner on 31 October. Recently we were filmed for a short 30-second video to introduce FOMI to the regional judges. This video will be showcased at the gala awards dinner as well.

This last year has been particularly active, which shows that even after 30 years of conservation effort there is still plenty to do. As spring arrives the island is blooming. We continue to make progress on the two major translocation projects.

Fernbirds. A draft of the formal proposal to DOC for the Fernbird translocation from Lake Rotokare to Mana has been prepared by Kevin Parker. He is the specialist commissioned to manage the technical aspects under FOMI's overall project management. We have support from the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust and now await the outcome of Pauatahanui's translocation before a decision is made for us to go ahead. Given that everything seems to be going well at Pauatahanui, we expect our translocation will take place in the autumn of 2019 at the earliest. In the unlikely event that things go wrong at Pauatahanui and their follow-up translocation of another 25 Fernbirds does not go ahead, our programme could be brought forward a year.

White-faced storm petrels. Work continues on this proposal with the aim of a February 2018 movement of chicks. Since the July newsletter our focus has again shifted and now, rather than going to Burgess Island in the Hauraki Gulf, we are looking at Rangatira Island in the Chathams group.



A fernbird.



White-faced storm petrel.

Surprisingly, the logistics of getting chicks favours the Chathams. Air Chatham Islands see no reason why they can't accommodate us. We have been in contact with DOC at the Chatham Islands who are interacting with local iwi on our behalf for their approval.

We are currently looking at how we can give something back in return for taking the chicks. Ideas at this stage include an educational kit on the translocation for children at each of the three primary schools on Rangatira Island and for children back here as well. The kit could include a video, poster, picture book and activity resources.

Back at Mana Island a prototype nesting box has been installed and 50 boxes have been cut out and assembled ready for installation in preparation for the chicks' arrival. Many thanks to Alison Lash who has done a great job as the carpenter.

New sights to see on guided trips by *Philippa Doig, FOMI Executive*

We are well underway with 20 trips planned for our 2017-2018 season – only one cancelled for weather so far! Last season we planned 22 trips and only cancelled six - a much higher success rate than we expected, given the difficulty of the stretch of water between the mainland and Mana Island.

This season we have some new guides and new developments on the island. On the top of the island there are carefully managed experimental plantings of a different flax variety, raised on Mana Island using seed from Maud Island. This flax will hopefully feed the flax weevil that was transferred to the island to save it. To date the flax weevil has eaten our existing flaxes overenthusiastically and even killed quite a few clumps.



FOMI guide Linda Kerkmeester with visitors at the top of the island.

You will also be able to see at close quarters on the flat land an example of a nesting box used for translocation of seabirds. You won't need to risk life and limb going on the cliff edges where the actual functioning nest boxes are sited.

We are working hard on planning a wetlands walk which will form part of the guided trips in the future.

The next translocation of seabirds to Mana Island will be white-faced storm petrels from the Chatham Islands, probably in February 2018, and this will be part of the Mana Island restoration story as well.

Currently DOC is helping us move several display panels from our lockup to install in the island's woolshed. These are full of interesting information prepared for an exhibition at Pataka a few years ago.

And, as always, you are likely to see kakariki swooping over your head, hear bellbirds and even spot our lone gannet Mana Island gannet, Nigel, sharing the gannet colony site with his concrete companions. Maybe this season a female will join him!

The guided trip season runs from now until June 2018.

To book a trip visit the FOMI website www.manaisland.org.nz and look under Visitors.

Great results from this season's fluttering shearwater monitoring

by Dale Shirtliff, FOMI executive

This year our monitoring of fluttering shearwaters returning to the island was carried out by a small group of volunteers, as well as the ranger Chris Bell. The planning, coordination and processing of the monitoring data was completed by Helen Gummer who has led this project for many years. Her full-time job on the mainland prevented her from taking part in the monitoring this year.

Monitoring was done over several nights in July and August by Dale, Miguel, Nancy, Colin and Chris.



A fluttering shearwater being returned to its burrow.

A total of 61 birds were captured across six nights. Of these birds, 47 had been translocated to Mana between 9 and 11 years ago (known age); eight were Mana-raised chicks (known-age); six were immigrants (unknown age) of which three were new unbanded birds and one banded bird from another colony. The newbies were banded by Chris.

This compares with 60 birds captured last season over six successive nights in July and August 2016.

These are great results for the opportunistic fluttering shearwater monitoring this year. We conducted some of the monitoring over two working bees.

Helen estimates that there will be at least 35 breeding attempts this year. This compares with last year when we knew of 30 breeding attempts.

Most failed pairs from last year have stayed together. Unfortunately, major downpours flooded burrows at key times and led to many egg failures last year. Several pairs appear to have changed partners or moved burrows.

We had another fresh capture of a 2007 translocated chick (by Colin Miskelly) – first time handled as an adult at over 10 years of age.

Adapting the monitoring plan to fit around the working bees and benefitting from the goodwill of Chris the monitoring has yielded a very informative set of data. Here's hoping the weather gods are kinder this year.

A huge thanks to Chris, Colin, Helen, Miguel and Nancy.

Please remember to renew your subscription to FOMI

The subscriptions we receive from our members help fund the many projects carried out every year.

As a FOMI member you receive:

- ✓ A quarterly newsletter sent direct to your inbox, with news about FOMI's projects and activities.
- ✓ Emails with volunteering opportunities, including weekend working bees on Mana Island.
- ✓ Notice of the AGM each year, with the performance report and President's report, and the ability to vote.

See our website under [Join Us](#) for how to pay your subscription.

Do you fancy having a heritage peach tree in your garden? by Jason Christensen, FOMI executive

We have some heritage peach trees from Mana Island for sale, as a fundraiser for future historic projects on the island.

In 1832 John Bell arrived on Mana Island to begin farming, bringing with him sheep, cattle, hay, seed, tobacco and fruit trees. Ships often stopped at Mana to replenish their supplies with locally grown meat and produce, and in later years fruit when it was in season.

One fruit tree variety still exists in the historic Bell's garden on the island. It is known as the Mana Island Peach, and is likely be a direct descendent from the original shipment in 1832.

There is one large old tree in the garden, and six more were planted by FOMI in the garden recently to eventually replace the very old tree. As part of the management plan for Bell's garden DOC, along with FOMI volunteers, have been clearing the woody vegetation so the ditch and bank garden can be seen again.



Xavier Braga planting one of the new 'old' peach trees on Mana Island.



The old peach tree flowering this spring in Bell's garden on the island.

As part of keeping the historic genetics of the Mana peach alive, we grew some trees on the mainland at secure sites as an insurance policy and these have produced fruit.

We are selling a limited number of the trees. They can be collected from Plimmerton or Masterton. The cost is \$10 for a small one up to 30cm tall, or \$20 for a large one up to 80cm tall.

These are some of the juiciest peaches you will ever taste!

To secure yours email jasonchristensen@xtra.co.nz for Masterton pick up or lindakerkmeester@gmail.com for Plimmerton pick up.

TAKAHE NEWS

Takahē swap island life for a city address



Two takahē from Mana Island, Nio and Orbell, were moved to Zealandia in August. They are the first breeding pair ever at the Wellington sanctuary. Zealandia has one other takahē, T2 (aged 22), who lost his mate Puffin in July.

At 16 years old, Orbell was the oldest takahē on Mana. He was born in November 2000 and named by FOMI after Dr Geoffrey Orbell who rediscovered the takahē in 1948. Nio (14) was named after Nio Mana who worked on Mana Island as a part-time ranger for many years and was involved in the takahē management.

Although Orbell is close to retirement age, there is every possibility that he and his partner Nio will breed this summer which is fantastic news for Wellington.

Until the move, these two takahē had lived their whole lives on Mana and have been paired since 2013. They have produced four chicks together, two in their first breeding together. Their chicks Brodie, Bon, Tara and Tupu-ā-Nuku are now part of the wider breeding population. They are spread across New Zealand and are located on Mana, Motutapu and Maungatautari.

Their daughter Tara is on Mana Island, and is already enjoying the freedom of her parents not being around. She has paired up with Swifty, an imported male.

Ranger News from Chris Bell, Mana Island's DOC ranger



Chris releasing a pied shag after removing a fish hook from its foot.

After a year as ranger on Mana Island I've been spending a bit of time reflecting over the last amazing 12 months. What a year it's been, and the most incredible thing is that it is about to begin all over again!

Once more the geckos are in the breakfast cereal, the bellbirds and tui are going bonkers over the kowhai blossoms, and the penguins are raising a din at night to rival any late night party given by *that* neighbour again.

Bang on time, the fluttering shearwaters began to return, and signs are that the number of returning pairs will be yet another increase in their steady recolonisation of Mana Island (thanks to FOMI efforts!).

Amazingly, three unbanded adult shearwaters turned up this year, the first since the very first year of the project a decade ago. Every chick reared in the artificial burrows on Mana is banded before fledging, so probably these are birds from elsewhere that have come in to check out the trendy new real estate of their Mana neighbours!

The takahē have had an exciting winter, with some birds moving to other parts of New Zealand to keep a healthy flow of genes in the national population. This has led to some new pairings and a likely total of seven breeding pairs for Mana this summer. In late September, takahē breeding began with a rush and a roar when three pairs laid their clutches in quick succession.

Last year was a brilliant breeding year for the Mana takahē and there is a lot of hope that this year will be the same! And of course, all of Wellington have their fingers crossed that Nio and Orbell, who bred successfully on Mana for years, will have a go at raising a chick in their new home at Zealandia.

The four takahē chicks from Mana's 2016/17 breeding season that went to Burwood Bush are still enjoying life in Fiordland. Plans to transfer them to the Kahurangi National Park have been put on hold for a year, but should still include Kikorangi and Moana, the two chicks given great names by FOMI.

With summer ahead there is so much to look forward to on Mana, a part of New Zealand that year on year becomes a richer place for wildlife and conservation values!

Working bees on the island yield good results *by Dale Shirliff, FOMI executive*

Two working bees were held on Mana Island in August and September.

The August trip ...

This ended up being one day instead of the normal two, cut short by a weather forecast for Sunday of winds gusting to 45 knots, which came true.

The 18 volunteers in the group included Colin Miskelly and John Cockrem who were working separately on bird monitoring work. Five gecko team members searched for Ngahere geckos. The other 11 volunteers carried out several projects achieving a lot in the reduced timeframe. Linda, Allan, Richard, Peter, Philippa and Adrian re-started light welling work, releasing the slower growing forest trees. John M and Bruce set up predator tracking tunnels for Chris the ranger. Brian and Kath worked on siting the first white-faced storm petrel burrow.

Chris and Dale had a successful Friday night capturing and identifying returning fluttering shearwaters – 42 in all, including two new birds which Chris banded. Colin caught another seven flutterers and a number of storm petrels at and near the new fairy prion site.

The gecko team, led by Gillian Candler, spotlighted on Friday night and checked the Ngahere gecko site again Saturday, although none were found this time. Gillian was ably assisted by Lynn, Neil, Nathan and Alicia.

The September trip ...

The election weekend saw 11 working party volunteers travel to the island, led by Dale Shirliff and Richard Grasse. The gecko monitoring team had three new young leaders (Jess, Chris and Nancy), plus two children and one parent from Ngati Toa. Friends of ranger Chris Bell made up the 20.

A number of kiwi were spotted over the two nights, as well as Ngahere gecko.

Work included light-welling in Weta and House Valleys, assembling the white-faced storm petrel nest boxes and painting numbers on the lids. Parts of the Tirohanga track were cleared from overhanging branches, and flax seedlings were replanted in root trainers.

There was weeding done in the wetland, karaka control, bird counts at seven stations, and the flax trial plots were monitored. An amazing number of worthwhile tasks were ticked off and everyone felt a great sense of achievement.

The group had two evening shared meals in the Lockwood house with a very friendly atmosphere, a great variety of food, and one very excited toddler. We were able to listen to progress reports for the election results on the Lockwood radio on Saturday evening.

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 one more working bee planned for 2017 in November.



David Cornick and Cathye Haddock assembling the white-faced storm petrel nesting boxes.



Angela Fisher and Heather Evans potting flaxes into root trainers.

Seeking a model maker or an aspiring model maker!

Do you have some model-making skills, or would you like a cool project to develop some?

For FOMI's 20th anniversary next year we are mounting a display of mainly photos. We would also like to include an existing 3D model made out of layers of plywood (see photo).

It needs some work to revamp it and add features such as the location of seabird colonies, buildings, historical features like the former lighthouse, farmers' garden etc. We are open to ideas on how it could be done.

This is a really fun project for someone wanting to make contribution to a voluntary organisation such as FOMI!

There is plenty of time – the display will be sometime after May next year.

You can get in touch with us by messaging our [Facebook](#) page or emailing fomi@manaisland.org.nz



The plywood model. You can get an idea of its size from the pair of feet in the top right-hand corner. It is very plain at present. Plenty of scope for a makeover!

Trees that Count!

FOMI has registered with this new initiative which is counting the number of native trees planted in New Zealand. This year we have planted 270 trees on Mana Island as part of the ongoing restoration programme. This includes titoki, matai, kahikatea and kowhai.

The national total is currently an impressive 8,032,120 trees planted this year. And the running total from 2016 is 11,157,619.

There are 237 planting projects registered with Trees that Count. The initiative was born out of the question – “How many native trees are planted in New Zealand each year and could be plant more to mitigate climate change?”

See www.treesthatcount.co.nz for more information. Anyone can pledge to plant a tree!



www.manaisland.org.nz