

Friends of Mana Island – Work trip report Mar 15-17 2024

Friday 15 March

Sixteen workers arrived on time at Mana Marina to take the Charmaine Karol across to Mana Island. The trip was to be co-led, with Laurie and Philippa benefitting from Annemieke's recent trip-leading experience. We enjoyed dinner together (standards of food remained high) and two groups headed off into the night to check the seabird sound system and to undertake the MIQ weevil monitoring in rain and wind.

Sat 16 March

In perfect weather Christopher, helped by Lizzy, Cat and Ann H, armed 160 pitfall traps, some large and some small. In one unarmed trap they discovered 101 geckos (high numbers in others as well!). This activity was described by one of the newbies as an exciting lucky dip because you never knew what you were going to find. Chris's experience was invaluable in identifying skinks and geckos.



Tree Rescue in action. Left: strangled tree. Right: tree without plastic strangulation.

Annemieke with Colin and Ben headed to the gannet colony to weed and repair and paint the concrete gannets so we are expecting a breeding colony to establish as soon as passing live gannets are on the lookout for a colony to join. At lunchtime the workers were treated to a distant display of dolphins frolicking. Annemieke and Ben came back to the Lockwood via the seabird colony and found that all but one chick had fledged. The one remaining chick (a Fairy Prion) had been underweight on an earlier trip and was now found to have died.

Laurie, Julie and Murray did excellent track clearing along the Hole in the Rock track and the bottom of the Central track.

Don and Trent checked the Ngahere gecko covers which were sometimes packed with Raukawa geckos, a tasty treat for the interested robins which were chased off. They also looked for speckled skinks in Wētā Valley but this habitat is also dominated by Raukawa geckos.

Philippa, Ann G, Monica and Stephen scrambled into the scrubby area below the macrocarpas and set about removing yellow plastic pipes from semi mature trees. Once the group got set up with spades and saws they managed to remove around 120 pipes (felt like 3000!). Many pipes were deeply settled into the ground with the tree bark and roots having grown into the pipe and were difficult to remove. They abandoned at 12.30pm and joined the gannet team for lunch. Some members defected to the gannet painting team while Philippa and Stephen returned to do a few more pipes and retrieve the tools.



Mana Island Peach;
small but mighty.

On a hot afternoon, what better activity than a cooling swim? Not everyone was keen but some enjoyed the water off the beach. A little later Julie and Philippa raided Bell's garden and found a stash of ripe peaches, enjoyed by all at the Lockwood. After dinner Robert McClean entertained us with a fascinating talk about the Vella family (he is descended from Mariano Vella) and around 9pm two groups set off, Annemieke and friends to water the drooping Cook's Scurvy grass and Trent and Ben to look for Te mokomoko a Tohu (formerly Duvaucel's) gecko. Trent expected to return around 2am.



Saving the Scurvy grass



Robert shares some stories on his family and their connection to Mana Island.

Sunday 17 March

Annemieke, Ann H, Julie and Murray headed up to the seabirds with the gannet box. This seabird speaker box had accidentally missed out on the DOC electronics' team island check last year, but was successfully swapped out – just in time too as the box (which had probably been in place for over a decade) had a small pool of water in the bottom – a miracle it was still working with all the electrical components. Ann H, Julie and Murray did an excellent job at painting, however there is still one more session of painting and distribution of seaweed (& other olfactory cues) to be done next trip.

Colin, Cat and Lizzy were not fazed by lurid descriptions of the yellow pipe removal difficulties of Saturday's team and continued this important work under the very difficult, dense, overgrown scrub. They were joined by Annemieke once the gannet box was swapped over. They removed 137 pipes (no competition with Sat team, yeah, right!) which were left in a pile for the ranger to collect.

Don and Trent joined Laurie, Ann G, Ben and Philippa clearing the dreaded convolvulus from the Waikoko Wetland track. Chris, Monica and Stephen closed and made safe the pitfall traps.

We met up at the Lockwood around 1pm for a lunch of delicious left overs, cleaned the Lockwood and a few hardy souls braved the cold sea for another swim before we gathered on the beach at 3.30pm for the Charmaine Karol.

This work party was highly successful, both in terms of work achieved and in terms of social interaction and everyone's willingness to work hard at sometimes difficult tasks. There wasn't a lot of time to just enjoy the island but no-one seemed to mind too much.



Cat and a happy rescued tree

A huge, heartfelt thank you to everyone on this work party and to Robert McClean for stepping into the ranger role at short notice and making us so welcome on the island.



The March team. L to R back to front; Ann Graeme, Murray Parker, Stephen Marsland, Lizzy Green, Colin Munn, Ben Carson, Philippa Doig, Julie Gordon, Ann Hayman, Kat Smith, Monica Nowicki, Annemieke Hamilton, Don Newman, Laurie Smith, Chris Stephens, Trent Bell.