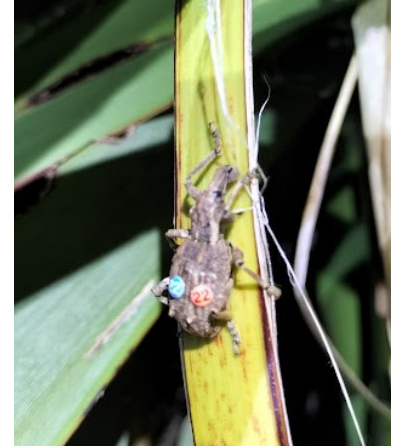


Friends of Mana Island Work party report July 19-21

Participants: Annemieke Hamilton, Philippa Doig, Colin Miskelly, Helen Gummer, Lizzy Green, Phoebe McLean, Stephen Marsland, Monika Nowicki, Maki Hasekawa, Howard Woledge, Rachel Smith, Angela Dawson, Robin Chesterfield, David Cornick.

Friday evening

- Volunteer rangers Dallas & Geoff led a team of six (Philippa, Lizzy, Phoebe and Angela) to weevil MIQ, where they found one tagged weevil and 62 untagged weevils inside the fence. This is the first tagged weevil found since May (the tags were applied to it in February last year). The team had a very close Rowi (Okarito Brown kiwi) encounter on the way back down to the Lockwood.
- A small group went to South Point with Helen to search for fluttering shearwaters at burrows that showed signs of activity last season but were not bred in, i.e. burrows that were visited potentially by immature non-breeders last season that we might not have identities for yet. Bright moon and still night, so only one bird was captured at 20:30h in FS17: X-18949 was a failed breeder in #14 last season.
- A team of four (Colin, Annemieke, Howard and Rachel) were at the Petrel Station 2010–2220 h. A total of 22 adult diving petrels were handled (19 recaptures of banded birds, and three unbanded birds), and several other diving petrels were heard. Two new burrows were found, though one was too deep to extract birds from. The new bands applied were D-138272 to D-138274. No other species of petrels were seen or heard, although there were signs of recent visits at several known fluttering shearwater breeding burrows.



Saturday day



- Rachel, Howard, Lizzy and Philippa went to carry out maintenance on the White Faced Storm Petrel burrows. They cleared entrances and exposed overgrown nest boxes from box 1-107. In the steady rain this was wet and muddy work and they were all soaked by the end. The team who were clearing at the Fairy Prion site (Annemieke, Maki, Stephen and Monika) had finished as well by late morning and both groups headed back to the Lockwood for a hot drink and dry clothes. Annemieke had also modified burrows AB40 & AB58 to improve operator access. Monika discovered a jigsaw which occupied several people until dinner time when Dallas and Geoff joined us for a second dinner feast. An outdoor break was had by most to collect suitable study rock covers for the seabird operators up at the colonies.
- A team of four (Helen, David, Phoebe and Ange) completed burrow maintenance at South Point. Big thanks to Jane (DOC) for weed-eating the site beforehand. Burrow lids were exposed again, hinges cleaned out, all soil from bird's excavations was removed from the front of chambers, compacted soil cleared from pipes, trenches were levelled and cleared of vegetation, and rotting lids identified. Great attention to detail by the team! (A small patch of grass was cleared above FS40 and Cook's Scurvy grass cuttings (trimmings from around FS83) 'planted', a post CSG1 marks this experimental patch.)



- It was too wet to set pitfall traps (or do 5-minute bird counts). Colin and Robin located and cleared all 160 pitfall trap covers, and checked that all traps had escape sticks in them. These were missing from one trap, which had about 40 lizards of three species trapped inside, two of which had died. This is a reminder of the great care that must be taken to disarm traps after each trapping session. Colin and Robin then continued on to monitor the health of all surviving (monitored) flax plantings from those planted by FOMI members in 2017. Only 84 of the original 400 plants remain (mainly in the basin above Lances Gully, and in a gully at the top of Tauhinu Valley, near the macrocarpas). All sites and plants have now been reached by flax weevils.

Saturday night

- From Helen: A repeat of Friday evening with six adult fluttering shearwaters captured from 20:50-09:10h. Bands: X-18091, 18916, 16176, 16327, 16216, 17875). Oldest birds handled is now in Year 18. No new birds arrived by 21:45h so the team descended to the flats to look for penguins.



- Colin and Annemieke (and briefly 8 others) were at the Petrel Station 2015–2145 h and observed or handled an additional ten diving petrels, including a (nearly) 2-year-old that had been banded as a chick and was caught for the first time as an adult. No other petrel species were seen or heard. The 32 adult diving petrels handled over the weekend were associated with 19 burrows (17 established, 2 new), and included 12 pairs where both birds were handled and their band numbers checked (or new bands applied). An

additional pair (which was not caught) was calling from under a dense tangle of *Coprosma propinqua*. We checked the battery charge at sound system 2 and found that the reading was 12.75 volts. This is to be checked again at the August work party to find out whether the battery is holding its charge.

- Other members of the work party team went for a kiwi walk but failed to see a Rowi kiwi.

Sunday morning

- A group collected seaweed at the beach to enhance the gannet colony, and flat rocks which were later transferred to the Mule trailer for transport to the top of the island. The flat rocks were intended to cover inspection holes at the seabird colonies.
- Annemieke, Ange, Lizzy and Phoebe went to the gannet colony to arrange the seaweed in nest circles and group the concrete gannets in a closer formation, more like a natural colony. It is hoped that the sight and smell of seaweed and “nesting birds” will make the colony more attractive to live gannets.



- A team of five (Helen, David, Robin, Stephen, and Monika) first undertook outstanding tasks at the Petrel Station. A broken fairy prion box lid was replaced. Approx. quarter of a 10 L bucket of leaf litter was added to each White-faced storm petrel artificial burrow as lining to make boxes more attractive to birds. At least one

dozen old man-made burrows (AB59-61, and AB64-78) in front of the sea-facing cone speaker were overhauled to make them attractive options for the small seabirds. (Note: AB62 is a fluttering shearwater burrow and AB63 a sooty shearwater burrow with study-hole access recreated.) There are still a few more to address another time (AB55-59 and AB98-105).

- Helen's team moved to South Point where burrow lids were replaced at FS17, 44, 84, 87 and 96, and batons replaced on a few others. An amazing effort by all to cut & apply turfs on top of all the burrows with receding soil on chamber roofs, to improve insulation. It is hoped the wet weather will allow these sods to mesh in



with surrounding soil. These boxes are now 18 years old and it's thanks to all the hard maintenance work by volunteers that they remain fantastic, nesting sites for fluttering shearwaters.

- Philippa, Howard, Rachel and Maki removed 172 yellow planting tubes from trees in the area opposite weevil MIQ. This was difficult work in dense undergrowth and scrub but so many trees were rescued from the suffocating plastic tubes that they all thought it was worthwhile. The DOC ranger has agreed to pick up the piles of tubes from the track. There are many more yellow tubes to remove from trees that have outgrown them.
- Colin assisted Dallas & Geoff with an attempt to capture seabird ticks for identification purposes from (vacant) fairy prion burrows, using small hot-water bottles wrapped in clean, dry cloths. The hot-water bottles were left in each nest chamber for 20 or 30 minutes. This is an established method for capturing ticks and other ectoparasites that hide in nest lining or burrow walls, waiting for a warm body to entice them out of hiding. This was attempted at eight burrows where fairy prion chicks successfully fledged early this year. Colin also trimmed vegetation along the routes used to access active breeding burrows (of diving petrels, fairy prions and fluttering shearwaters) at the Petrel Station, and replaced (or attached) numbered flagging tape at 20 active diving petrel burrows.
- Colin then headed to South Point where he removed about 15 litres of mouldy honeycomb from one of the artificial burrows, and found the remains of a banded fluttering shearwater chick in the back of the burrow. The chick had been banded in January 2023, and the bees weren't noticed until September that year. There is no record of the burrow being checked between January and September (when fluttering shearwaters are mostly absent from the breeding colony); however, the finding of the chick corpse in the burrow suggests that the bees moved in about the end of January. This is the first time that honeybees have used one of the artificial seabird burrows on Mana Island as a hive.



Overall, the work party achieved a lot in spite of very wet weather on Saturday (Sunday was fine and calm). The group turned out to be energetic and hardworking and greatly appreciated the opportunity to observe seabird handling at night by Helen, Annemieke and Colin. One participant said it was the best volunteer experience she had had, largely because of the night work.

Huge thanks to Jane, DOC ranger who helped out with the vehicle and trailer in spite of it being her weekend off, to the group leaders, without whom most volunteers would not know what to do and to the volunteers who are making a real difference to a very precious island.

