



### Work Party Report 14-16 February 2025

Trip co-leaders: Linda Kerkmeester, Philippa Doig

Participants: Erin Patterson, Bernie Salmon, Monika Nowicki, Joanna Kendrick, Robin Chesterfield, Helen Kettles, Richard Grasse, Helen Gummer, Colin Miskelly, Zuleika Chang, Ben Wright, Phoebe McClean, Colin Munn, Stephen Marsland.

We had an extraordinarily warm and calm weekend for this work party, complete with magnificent sunsets and excellent swimming. At times it was perhaps a little too warm for work, but the whole team coped well and we got a lot done. It was a bit special that we had two direct descendants of Mariano Vella, previously unknown to each other, who were pleased to meet and get to know each other. What are the chances of this happening at random on one particular work party?



### Friday evening

#### Seabirds

Helen G, with Stephen, Monika and Colin Munn visited the Fluttering Shearwater sites to check on fledging progress. They found just two chicks still with down cover, with the youngest estimated to be still a couple of weeks away from fledging. There was no adult activity at either colony. One diving petrel was heard near South Point, unusual for February.

#### Flax weevil MIQ



Colin Miskelly led teams to 'Flax weevil MIQ' both nights (Erin, Joanna, Phoebe and Zuleika on Fri, Ben, Colin Munn, Helen K and Stephen on Sat), continuing the now 4.5-year study of flax weevil life cycle. Only a single tagged weevil (of the 99 that were tagged) is known to survive, and it was seen both nights.

Philippa and Linda led a kiwi walk. We saw an amazing sunset but no kiwi along the Hole in the Rock track or around the Lockwood. There was a very bright, nearly full moon which may have kept the kiwi at home in the evening. The sunset illuminated several eagle rays which were flicking their 'wing' tips on the sea surface.

#### Fairy prion breeding success

Colin Miskelly checked fairy prion burrows where he had banded chicks in early January. Unfortunately, one chick had died (the other burrows were empty, meaning that the chicks have now fledged - flown out to sea). This means that eight fairy prion chicks have fledged from known burrows this season.

## Fluttering shearwater natural burrows

Colin also re-found and re-marked the ten natural burrows found by Miro the dog in early December (and found another likely burrow). The four fluttering shearwater chicks from these burrows had all fledged and are likely on their way to Australia. Re-marking the routes to the burrows occasionally during 2025 will ensure that they can be located and monitored during the 2025-26 breeding season.

## Maud Island / Te Pākeka flax plantings



Colin Miskelly checked the 79 surviving Maud Island / Te Pākeka flaxes planted by FOMI in 2017, to monitor their health and browse status. All plants have been reached by flax weevils and are now heavily browsed.

## Saturday

### Wetland investigation

Linda, Richard and Colin Munn explored the wetland area and redirected water flow to concentrate water into two main ponds. This was as recommended by Vaughan Keesing in his report from the work party trip on 9 December 2023.

This task was much easier than planned due to the detailed planning of the wetland when it was created in 1999 which had allowed for such diversion by simply changing two boards from one direction to direct flow into another pond, as required. (See Colin Munn in photo.)



### Flax weevil impacts pitfall trapping



Colin Miskelly led teams to the pitfall trapping site on both days, to continue the 6.5-year study of how flax weevils impact insect and lizard communities through their modification of plant communities: Monika, Phoebe and Stephen on Fri, and Ben, Helen K and Joanna on Sat.

A significant highlight was the first capture of a McGregor's skink at the study site, more than 400 m from the nearest known previous sighting.





## Yellow pipe removal

Philippa took Helen K and Bernie to the site where we had worked most recently, where they removed and carried to the track around 80 pipes - a good tally for a team of three. In the afternoon, Philippa, Robin, Zuleika, Erin and Richard continued the work in the same area and increased the heap of discarded pipes on the track.

## Bindweed control

Starting around the 'pond' (now dried up), on the left of the track leading towards Bell's Garden, Joanna, Erin and Zuleika tackled rampant bindweed.

In the afternoon, Joanna, Helen K, Bernie and Linda added their efforts to this tedious but necessary task.



## Cook's Scurvy Grass (CSG)

Helen G, Robin and Ben mocked up some CSG propagation enclosures in the workshop, then took enough materials to the South Point fluttering shearwater colony site to set up 10 plots/enclosures. Each consists of a numbered wooden stake with four sections of pipe screwed on at ground level. The pipes sit on soil that the team prepared for the sowing of CSG seed, enriched with guano/soil extracted from some of the breeding burrows. Each pipe was covered in windbreak mesh to prevent any lizards or birds from interfering with future seedlings, or from getting stuck in pipes. CSG seed was collected and stored for sowing in the protected plots in April (cooler and hopefully less dry). There is likely to be more seed available as the mother plant was still flowering.

After a very hot working day, several people enjoyed a cool sea swim.

A night kiwi walk was very successful with an excellent and lengthy sighting of a kiwi which walked amongst the small group of Erin, Phoebe, Joanne and Linda sitting silently in awe at the edge of the track.

## Sunday

### Cook's Scurvy Grass and seabirds



Up at South Point, Helen G explained to Philippa, Erin and Linda how to sow the seed and maintain the CSG plots at each work party from April 2025. Seed was sown in plots CSG10 and 11 to test a February sowing. Zuleika and Bernie came and were introduced to the last Fluttering Shearwater chick.

Wing measurements showed that it was almost ready to fledge. Erin drilled some escape holes in the pipes at ground level that were big enough to allow any small lizards to find a way out, in case some young lizards potentially enter any pipes (by pushing

through the mesh covering on top of the pipe).



At the Petrel Station, Erin cleaned out some of the remaining high-number AB burrows up to AB103 in front of one of the cone speakers to create additional attractive natural burrows for potential white-faced storm petrel use. Meanwhile, Helen took photos at this site that were required to complete the new Mana Seabird Operations Manual which is currently being drafted for FOMI.

Later Ben and Joanna walked to the Hole in the Rock in search of the only other known sighting of Cook's Scurvy Grass. Although they tried hard, the CSG proved elusive.

Linda checked out the Tauhinu plantings at the Fairy Prion site which were transplanted there on the last November trip and found most still surviving. It was thought to do a similar trial using seed from the rare Cook Strait Mahoe (*Melicytis orarius*). Ben found some seeding plants on the island. A task for the next trip.

### **Yellow pipe removal**

A team of Richard, Phoebe, Monika, Stephen and Robin added to the large heap of removed pipes. Philippa was a late starter but, in the end, over the weekend, around 300 pipes were removed.

### **Caravan clean-up**

Helen sorted through the translocation equipment in the caravan and found several blenders to come off Mana Island, destined for use in other translocation projects. These will be passed on by Annemieke to projects at Whenua Hou and the Chathams. The Lockwood also now has a yoghurt maker and large soup pot for use.

### **Seabird sound system**

Both sound systems at the Petrel Station were not working on Friday night. Two speakers were found to be unplugged. On Sunday, Helen G tested both systems with updated status as follows: southern system assumed to be working normally on 16 February with single speaker plugged back in; northern system had no battery charge and Pelican Case was removed from Mana for servicing (system currently plays during daylight which is a malfunction).

### **Fadges of reusable yellow pipes**

Three of these were loaded onto the vehicle and taken to the beach. We manhandled them onto the Charmaine Karol and Laurie Smith and Philippa, using Laurie's trailer, delivered two fadges to Forest and Bird Kapiti Mana for use at QE Park. The third was taken by Robin to reuse the pipes at the Forest and Bird reserve at Pauatahanui.

We are still considering how the many fadges of broken pipes that remain on the island will be removed at some later stage.



Everyone was back at the Lockwood by 2pm for packing and the clean-up which must have happened in record time. We ate superbly on both days, thanks to all the dinners, desserts, cakes and snacks provided.

Thanks to Tom and Georgia (relief rangers) for helping out whenever needed and keeping a watching eye on the administration.

Most of all, enormous thanks to the hardworking and committed volunteers. You have made a real difference this weekend.





**Front row** (kneeling): Phoebe McClean

**Middle Row:** Colin Munn, Ben Wright, Stephen Marsland, Monika Nowicki, Zuleika Chang, Helen Kettles.

**Top Row:** Richard Grasse, Joanna Kendrick, Robin Chesterfield, Helen Gummer, Erin Patterson, Colin Miskelly, Philippa Doig, Bernie Salmon. Photo taken by Linda Kerkmeester.