



MOTUORA RESTORATION SOCIETY (INC)

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Searching for Skinks and Finding Paradise

There can't be many ways to better spend a few days in the summer; camping on a beautiful island, good company, great weather and being able to prove that you can find skinks on Motuora after all! We did have some help, as 23 endangered shore skinks had been released five days before we arrived, adding to the moko and copper skinks that already inhabit the dune areas at the back of the beach. We were part of the volunteer monitoring team that is tasked to check on the population of shore skinks at the Home Bay release site - every summer for the next 5 years.

We began the exercise by activating the pitfall traps that had been set into the dunes before Christmas. Well some of the traps anyway, 14 had disappeared in the 2 cyclones that struck Auckland during January. The remaining traps we baited with fish-based cat food and each morning went back to see what had fallen into the "buckets", lured by the enticing smell. Alongside this technique, we searched under logs and man-made "refuges", pieces of corrugated material that heat up nicely in the sun. Much to our delight we found quite a few skinks over the 6 days, including 4 separate shore skinks with one gravid female. We got to know where along the 3 lines of traps each species liked to be. The mokos and coppers were



Moko skink (*Oligosoma moco*)



Tim and Nick Harker



Photo—Auckland zoo

THIS IS ONE LUCKY KIWI !

For over 10 years now, in addition to the work Motuora Restoration Society has done, Motuora has also been used as a 'crèche' under the Kiwi Recovery Scheme. This sees kiwi chicks hatched at the Auckland Zoo from eggs taken from the wild in Northland taken to predator free-Motuora, which is ideal territory with plenty of food, allowing them to grow to a stage where they can fend for themselves in the wild, they are returned to the area from which their eggs came. Over the years some birds managed to avoid recapture and remained on the island until they were old enough to breed.

In June four women volunteering on Motuora on the 5-day DOC Programme discovered an injured kiwi cowering under a rock on the beach below north end cliffs. During a beach walk Bev Hill stopped briefly and happened to spot the bird. The women were able to pick it up and carry it (in Ngairé's backpack) to Home Bay where Andrea set up temporary shelter. The ladies named the bird 'Hillbilly' after Bev (whose nickname is Hillbilly). Next day it was transported by water taxi and then by car to the Centre for Conservation Management (NZCCM) at Auckland Zoo and given over to the care of Richard Jakob-Hoff, Senior Veterinarian, Conservation & Research. The NZCCM provide veterinary services for zoo, wildlife and conservation organisations.

Hillbilly weighed 1.6kg and appeared in reasonable condition although was unusually quiet for a normally feisty bird. And interestingly, had no identifying micro chip, meaning he was 'island born'. There was some blood in the feathers on his left hind side which turned out to be from an injured beak which had been tucked along his side. The injured beak would have prevented him from feeding naturally (probing the ground). It is unlikely he would have survived if Bev hadn't intervened!

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Photo—Auckland zoo



Shore skink (*Oligosoma smithi*)

found throughout the survey area although the mokos were more frequently found in the most landward area while the coppers were more frequently found in the middle line of traps. The shore skinks, however were restricted entirely to the most seaward part. Maybe the real estate nearest the sea, was the area that this less dominant species had been forced to live in by the neighbours already in residence. Part of the exercise was to also weigh and measure the skinks. Training at Massey University and on site last year came in useful when handling these sometimes

lively creatures. In all we captured 53 different animals of the 3 species. And the secret to knowing if we had seen one before? A tiny spot from a silver marker pen was put on the animal's body to identify it as a "re-capture" should we see it again.

Once the morning beach rounds were done, we ended up doing some extra work putting out monitoring tunnels at the southern area of the island where there is a Duvaucel's gecko population. The bait this time was a slice of ripe banana, irresistible to these fruit loving nocturnal animals. The next day it was rewarding to return and pull out a card covered in large gecko prints - and no banana! This work was far more strenuous as many of the sites for the tunnels were on steep ground entailing much scrambling up and down. Our reward? A long cool swim in that wonderfully clear water, then time to read, snooze and then cook a simple evening meal before going out to spot kiwi or geckos on the prowl. That's what we decided was a perfect break away from it all, our team can't wait to return next year for some more "hard" work!

Liz Maire, Roger Harker and sons Tim and Nick. Shore skink monitoring team.

Photos by Nick Harker

Motuora Restoration – the next ten years

Helen Lindsay and John Stewart

So far it's mostly been about trees, with a bit extra on birds and lizards. But the range of tasks available for Motuora volunteers is gradually changing. The good news is that there are more things to do and a greater variety than ever before. There will be something for everyone.

Our plan to convert most of the kikuyu grassland to a cover of native bush species is about to be fulfilled. Now we face the next big challenge in our restoration project which is to fine-tune the forest, adding plant species which will eventually create a high canopy and low understory. And, as the bush matures, we will add more lizards, insects and birds. Building a complete self-sustaining ecosystem based on what might have existed in pre-farming, pre-mammalian predator times, was never going to be straightforward. If we stood back for a thousand years it might all happen without our help - but it might not. Hopefully, we can accelerate and control the process by introducing carefully-selected species and managing the development of a diverse flora and fauna on the Island. That is our ambition for the next ten years and beyond, and we need your help to do it.

A varied list of projects and jobs associated with the Motuora restoration continues to grow. Although the numbers of trees to be planted each year will be lower than before, the range will include new species some of them rare and threatened, and they will require extra care in planting and to maintain them. We shall also need help to develop and maintain tracks and infrastructure. We're going to need help with the nursery, planting, and monitoring threatened plants and weed sites. On the animal side there is work with translocations, chick feeding, and monitoring birds and lizards. And if you can't get to the Island we can guarantee that the committee members would love to have help with the administration.

Our idea is to form teams of volunteers, each with a leader who can provide the necessary training and guidance. The next step is for all you volunteers to sign up for some of the tasks listed above. We'll note your contact details and preferences in our database and then let you know when opportunities arise. So please e-mail Helen Lindsay at lindsay.helen@xtra.co.nz to register interest. The plants and animals (and the committee) are waiting!

Areas of interest:

- nursery
- planting
- plant monitoring
- weed monitoring
- tracks
- infrastructure
- bird translocations
- chick feeding
- bird monitoring
- lizard monitoring
- administration

FROM THE ISLAND

With the change of seasons, the island focus changes again towards getting the plants in the ground. Work trips started off with a large group in May after the April trip was cancelled due to high winds. Around 1500 plants were put into the ground in the northern sites where infilling is needed. Getting there meant a bit of a walk, but allowed for appreciation of past years' tree growth after a warm and wet summer, and a chance to view the artificial gannet colony in the distance on the way. June saw another 2000 plants in with help from the Department of Conservation volunteers on a 5-day stay, and the end of the month work trip. Around 200 more canopy trees were planted, involving volunteers moving through old planting blocks to find the perfect spot for those larger species trees which will be there for years to come. In amongst the planting blocks, many canopy trees from previous years' plantings are seen to be thriving under cover. The four ladies here under the DOC volunteer programme (pictured right) had the added excitement rescuing an injured kiwi.



Andrea Ravenscroft, Bev Hill ("Hillbilly"), Nolene Jolley, Nolene Phillips and Ngaire Skelton

Canopy trees for the coming year are continually sown and brought on in seed trays as seeds become available. It has been a great year for taraire, and after already collecting plenty from Mahurangi, bags full of the seed arrived from Motu. Excess seeds not sown in trays were broadcast into the planting blocks, especially under gorse patches, to hopefully germinate directly into the ground.

A start has been made towards planting and monitoring threatened plant species on Motuora. Trial plots of kaka beak have been planted in five sites, with differing environmental conditions such as shade, sloping ground and weed competition. These will be monitored monthly to determine growth and changes in individual plants at each site. There are also two sites of shore spurge, one of which is doing well in a sheltered spot, and one not so well in a more exposed location. The monitoring of all of these sites will help identify where on Motuora these threatened plants will have the best chance of survival, and to then provide a seed source.

Cheers Andrea

FAREWELL TO DEANE

Deane Williams ended his time as Island Manager in May. Below is an extract from his farewell message. *"I would like to say it has been a great experience working for and with you all in the restoration of Motuora, I have learned a lot and wish to thank you all for your knowledge you have passed on. To have been involved in such a project, with a dedicated committee and dedicated volunteers has been very rewarding. Thank you. I have no firm plans apart from a month down in the South Island so hope to catch up on a work-day this season...Cheers, Deane"*



The Committee marked their appreciation for Deane's diligent and hard work during his four and a half years in the job at a gathering at Wenderholm Regional Park.

Grey faced petrel burrow count 2011

Jacqueline Beggs, James Russell and Rob Dunn of University of Auckland together with Robin Gardner-Gee and Kevin Hawkins (MRS), conducted a check of the nine monitoring plots for grey faced petrel burrows on Motuora in May and found static or reduced numbers at almost all sites compared with last year.

After seven years of involvement, Jacqueline Beggs and Robin Gardner-Gee decided it was time to entrust the project to new hands: John Stewart and James Russell will be leading the monitoring, along with Kevin Hawkins.

Charities commission registration number CC 10250

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| Motuora Restoration Society The Society is undertaking the restoration of native forest to create habitat for endangered species on the island. Membership costs \$25 per year for individuals or families, and \$5 for students. | <i>Chairperson</i> Ray Lowe | 09 422 2057 | Bruce Ross | 09 445 1140 |
| | <i>Secretary</i> Kit Brown | 09 446 0618 | Helen Lindsay | 03 528 4020 |
| | <i>Treasurer</i> Gillian Thomas | 09 426 1481 | Liz Norquay | 09 424 7444 |
| | Les Buckton | 09 425 9619 | John Stewart | 09 833 7059 |
| | Kevin Hawkins | 09 424 7444 | | |

Biodiversity Sub-committee John Stewart, Sharen Graham, Melinda Rixon, Shelley Heiss-Dunlop, Helen Lindsay, Kevin Parker and James Luty.

