

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2013-2014

This year's Annual Report has been compiled by the Secretary, as the Chairman has been temporarily out of action.

The Motuora Restoration Society has had another good year, with four translocations achieved, a major blitz on weeds, and plantings which have taken us that much nearer to the end of the project's planting phase.

LANDMARKS FOR THE YEAR

- The completion of two years by Sian and Toby as our island managers showed them to be fully competent and popular with all with whom they worked: campers, the committee, volunteers and DOC staff. This made our life on the mainland just that much easier.
- The successful translocation of 92 Pycroft's petrel chicks, all of which fledged.
- The acquisition of an acoustic anchoring and attraction system for Pycroft's petrels.
- The first translocation of Pacific geckos.
- Evidence of the return of diving petrels to the vicinity of the artificial burrows from which they fledged.
- Adoption by many gannets of the artificial colony created for them at the northern end of the island, and the first successful fledging of gannet chicks.
- Indications that a high proportion of the kiwis on the island are island-bred; and the "export" of 30 mature birds to two privately-owned restoration projects.
- Release of a further 150 wetapunga, and the discovery that one from the first release in 2010 had moved some 300 metres from the release site.
- Planting of 3273 pioneer species trees and 994 potted canopy trees.
- A major onslaught on the island's weeds, especially those established on the cliffs, by Toby and Sian, a comprehensive search of the whole of the rest of the island for new arrivals, and particular attention given to sites of persistent weeds identified last year.
- Visits to the island by two of our long-term financial supporters, the Becroft Foundation and the Chisholm Whitney Family Charitable Trust.
- The very welcome decision by Bridgestone New Zealand to become our principal sponsor.

In addition to these landmarks I can report that:

- Three Newsletters have been published.
- Our web-site is well received and continues to be improved.
- Our solar system has successfully supplied our power requirements.
- We have had the services of several groups of volunteers from DOC, and the usual support from our own members and other volunteers on our end-of-month work days.
- We had an accident-free year.

TRANSLOCATIONS AND OTHER ISLAND ACTIVITIES

Translocations

Pycroft's petrels 92 chicks were collected by a team of six on Red Mercury Island, helicoptered to Motuora and installed in their artificial burrows in March. They were hand-fed under the direction of our contractor, Helen Gummer, and all successfully fledged after between two and four weeks. This brings the total successfully fledged over two years to 162.

Kiwis This year 13 four-week-old chicks were brought to Motuora from the Zoo as part of the Operation Nest Egg kiwi-creche programme – an average number. By 31 March 2014 26 mature birds had been captured and taken off the island, but by the middle of May 2014 this figure had risen to a massive 70. Of these 36 went to Maranui, a private restoration project in the Brynderwyns, and 34 to Mataia, another private restoration project on the Southern Kaipara coast. The split between island-born and formerly-translocated birds was about 50/50.

Diving petrels No further diving petrel translocations have been carried out since 175 chicks were brought to Motuora between 2007 and 2009, so our interest has been in trying to determine whether any have returned, and if so how many. So far the evidence is uncertain. One bird was recaptured which had been part of the 2008 translocation, calls have been heard from four previously-used nesting sites, and some possible new sites were found when the cliffs south of the release site were being abseiled as part of this year's weed control programme.

Pacific geckos 40 adult and 4 new-born geckos were translocated from Little Barrier Island/Hauturu in January, in a joint collection exercise with Auckland Council which saw 30 other adults taken to Crusoe Island (between Waiheke and Motuihe Islands).

Wetapunga (Little Barrier Island giant weta) The original translocation in 2010 of 25 raised at Butterfly Creek was boosted this year by the addition of 150 hatched at Auckland Zoo. A spectacularly-successful breeding season at the Zoo produced almost more than the Zoo knew what to do with, and Motuora was a beneficiary.

Assisted Natural Introductions

Gannets This year saw up to 35 real gannets at a time at the artificial gannet colony at the northern end of the island, and 17 eggs were laid, of which 7 hatched. Of those, 2 chicks made it through to fledging. This is a big improvement on last year (when two eggs were laid and the one chick that hatched died), which bodes well for the success of the colony. It has been noticed that some of the decoys show signs of having been pecked! Draw your own conclusions.

Fluttering shearwaters The speaker system that plays gannet calls in the daytime plays fluttering shearwater calls at night, the intention being to attract fluttering shearwaters to investigate the artificial burrows we have installed for them near the gannet colony. A night-vision camera caught a bird which looks like a fluttering shearwater walking about in the vicinity of the artificial burrows, but so far none of these burrows has been occupied.

Weed Control

This year, to take advantage of having two trained abseilers with weeding experience on the island in the persons of Toby and Sian, it was decided to make a major assault on the cliffs, where most of the weeds that have escaped our attentions hitherto are growing. To this end we raised extra money to pay Toby as an independent contractor, and a very large proportion of the cliffs was covered by him and by Sian working together as a team.

The objective for the year was to search the entire island. This comprised grid searches of all parts of the island that are accessible on foot, and systematic searches of the cliffs by abseiling drops 10 metres apart. With the exception of a small portion of the cliffs this objective was achieved. This has given us a good overall picture of where control should be exercised in the next few years. We have confirmed that most of the effort still needs to go into the original bush remnant and cliff areas and that the planted areas need very little attention. Nevertheless, it was still worth grid searching the planted areas as again a new weed was found there that had not been previously recorded on the island, a buddleia.

Climbing asparagus, periwinkle and Mexican daisy remain our problem species. Climbing asparagus continues to pop up, though mainly around the edges of the island. Good progress was made with reducing the extent of periwinkle and Mexican daisy infestations, largely as a result of having the infestations visited every two to three months, a practice that we will try to continue.

SPONSORS AND DONORS

Our restoration project would not be possible without all the voluntary hours put in by so many people – the committee and the many other volunteers who work on the island and on our translocation projects. We thank them all. But we must also remember that without funding, much of the effort put in by these people just could not be harnessed. Therefore we gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance provided by our many generous sponsors and donors:

Principal Sponsor Bridgestone New Zealand Ltd

and in alphabetical order:

Agpro New Zealand Ltd for herbicides
Auckland Zoo Conservation Fund for Pacific gecko translocation funding
The Becroft Foundation for weed control funding
Hester Cooper for root trainers
Simon and Morag Fordham for acoustic attraction system funding
Ron and Edna Greenwood Environmental Trust for acoustic attraction system funding
Heseltine Trust for weed control funding
Kawau Cruises for transport subsidies
The Lion Foundation for weed control funding
Lottery Grants Board for Pycroft's petrel translocation funding
The Mad Butcher, Glenfield, for barbeque sausages
Michael J Taylor for acoustic attraction system funding
WWF-NZ Habitat Protection Fund for weed control funding
Yates New Zealand for horticultural supplies

Kit Brown
Secretary