

Motuora Restoration Society

Chairperson's Report for the year 2015 to 2016

A year of significant changes for the Society

This year has seen some significant changes for our organisation. Not least of these was the retirement from their posts of two of our long-serving committee members: chairperson Ray Lowe, and honorary secretary Kit Brown. I'd like to formally thank them both for their long and exceptional contributions to our highly successful restoration project. Ray was acclaimed as a Kiwibank Local Hero in recognition of his work for Motuora.

Another important change was associated with the expiry of our Management Agreement with the Department of Conservation. This agreement set out the terms of our joint management and, among other things, committed the Society to the employment of an Island Manager. Your committee debated at great length on the way forward and undertook detailed consultation and negotiation with the Department. We concluded that the risks to the Society associated with employing staff on the Island and the input required for management were not justified for the next period in our development. A new Memorandum of Understanding between ourselves and the Department has been agreed. This sets out the general principles of our joint venture but does not provide any detail on how the Island will be managed or operated. We hope to agree on these details soon, but in the meantime we have been asked by the Department to 'carry on with our restoration work as if the agreement was still in place'. We were delighted to have the Department confirm that they intend to maintain full-time ranger cover on the Island.

Coincident with the expiry of the Management Agreement in November 2015, our contract with Vonny Spray, our Island Manager, also expired. The Department offered Vonny a half-time role to manage the camp site through to April 2016. Vonny accepted this post and the Society was able to offer a top-up by engaging her services for weed control and other duties on a contract to the same date. This arrangement ended early in January 2016 when Vonny achieved a long-term ambition by gaining a position on an Antarctic programme. We wish Vonny every success in this and extend our thanks for the great work she did for us. We have been fortunate in Vonny's replacement, Eliane Lagnaz, who has proved to be a tireless and enthusiastic weeder.

What these changes mean for the restoration project

Your committee is still working through the consequences of these changes including somewhat slow-moving negotiations with the Department of Conservation. Our current plans for how the management and monitoring work will be carried out involve:

- the identification of team leaders for key projects (weeding, seabirds, nursery, tree planting, reptiles, invertebrates, etc.) who will organise and supervise volunteer teams
- recruitment and, where necessary, training of volunteer teams
- planning of visits to the Island (day trips, overnights, longer periods as required for the workloads)
- provision of accommodation for visiting volunteers (probably in our own building as we are unlikely to have the necessary access to the bach or the bunkroom)

We appeal to Society members and volunteers to renew or take out membership and to register your willingness to help as team leaders or project volunteers.

Achievements and events from the past year

These included:

- our fourth translocation of wetapunga (100 new arrivals)
- the return of our first six Pycroft's petrels three years after they fledged
- first successful breeding of fluttering shearwaters with two chicks fledging
- creation of a new target colony site for fluttering shearwaters, moving the loudspeakers and digging in 12 new artificial burrows, one of which has already been visited repeatedly
- consolidation of our gannet colony with around 12 chicks fledging (two more than last year)
- provision of 19 new penguin nesting boxes along the shore adjacent to Home Bay
- infill planting of canopy trees among the pioneer species
- a poor year for New Zealand dotterel with five pairs raising just one chick and other nests lost to weather, predation and disturbance
- a bird count was completed by Sharen and Mike Graham
- three newsletters were published, our website was regularly updated and news was distributed by e-mails
- new signposts were installed indicating the year of planting of various bush blocks
- there was a monitoring visit for Raukawa (previously known as Common gecko) and Pacific geckos. The initial feedback for the Raukawa geckos is that a lot of juveniles and a few sub-adults were found plus a few juvenile Duvaucel's geckos. At the Pacific gecko site all four life stages were found along with some Raukawas and possibly shore skinks. All the animals found were in very good condition with good weights.
- continuation of our weed programme. Maintaining weeds at low levels is a significant on-going project. There is a continuing need for surveillance to find

weeds which have blown over from the mainland, or been introduced by birds, before they have time to establish and to continue control of those already present. Although weeds are at lower levels than in the past now that there is so much forest cover, we need to keep up the pressure on species such as climbing asparagus which would otherwise quickly re-establish. Vonny and Eliane have covered a lot of ground over the past year and we are fortunate to have the services of Richard Sharp and his team who return to the Island every season to do the cliff abseiling, and to have Helen Lindsay oversee the weed control programme. We thank all of our contract and volunteer weeders for their vital contributions.

Sponsors and donors

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We also thank Kawau Cruises for subsidised cost of water taxis and for their reliable and helpful service to and from the Island.

Of course nothing could be achieved without the input of a host of enthusiastic volunteers who give their time and expertise to ensure we continue to be one of the best restoration projects in the Gulf. Congratulations to you all and I hope that you will continue for many years to come as we continue to work towards our goals for a maturing forest alive with native birds, reptiles and insects.

John Stewart

Acting Chair

Motuora Restoration Society

29th May, 2016