

**Motuora Restoration Society**  
**Chairperson's Report for 2016-2017**  
**May 2017**

### **Managing the Island**

This year saw continuing upheavals in our partnership with the Department of Conservation. After yet another reorganisation and the appointment of new staff, once again we are faced with the need to establish new working relationships.

With the expiry of our old management agreement in November 2015 we ceased to employ an Island manager and gave up looking after the camp site. Fortunately, DOC were able to provide a ranger for most of the year and it was a real pleasure to have Dave Jenkins back on Motuora for a few months after his long term of office on Tiritiri Matangi came to an end. Special thanks are due to all the DOC rangers and other staff who provided cover while the rangers were off the Island. Hvar Jackson has taken over as the main ranger since Dave finished his spell.

As our project matures the workload to manage the Island is changing and with those changes the requirements for volunteers is also changing:

- we need fewer volunteers but need people with more skills – and once trained it's good if volunteers can make multiple trips to the Island
- landing and leaving the Island remains a challenge and visitors must be prepared for an occasional wet landing
- thanks are due to the Kawau Water Taxi skippers who have patiently and helpfully got us on and off the Island.

### **Year of the seabirds**

This has been an interesting year for seabird activity as we begin to see some encouraging signs of early progress.

Most exciting was our first Pycroft's petrel egg and chick. Pycroft's petrel chicks were transferred from Whakau/Red Mercury and hand-fed until fledging in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The fledged chicks go to sea for three to five years before potentially returning to their natal colony to find a mate, dig a burrow and, possibly, to breed, though it may be the year after their first return before they manage to lay an egg. This is exactly what has happened on Motuora. Birds from the March 2013 transfer first returned in December 2015/January 2016 when four birds formed two pairs and occupied two of our artificial nest boxes. This season (2016/17) those four birds were back in the same boxes and one pair laid our first egg and hatched the chick. Sadly, the chick died a week or two before it was due to fledge after a period of very wet weather. It is not surprising that the inexperienced parents failed to raise their first chick but hopefully they will do better next year. In 2015/16 we identified six individuals, while this season (2016/17) four of those six were found again together with five new birds from the 2013 transfer and our first two from the 2014 transfer. Eight of these eleven birds were occupying nest boxes.

For the second successive year we had two nesting pairs of fluttering shearwaters. One pair returned to their previous box on the cliff top near the gannet colony but the other

pair used one of our new boxes installed this season in a safer location on the inland side of the track. Two chicks were raised.

We have again been unable to track the fortunes of breeding diving petrels as they continue to use inaccessible sites down the cliff near to the release site.

Our gannets began the season well with a possible 19 pairs nesting. Most of the pairs laid an egg and we had a best count of 12 chicks. Unfortunately, none of the chicks survived to fledge, an unusual outcome for our colony. We don't know why this happened and are considering whether to adopt closer monitoring for next season.

### **It's not just about the birds!**

Our nursery work and planting programme has suffered a slight hiatus mostly due to the absence of an Island Manager. Thankfully Colin Cordes and Jan Velvin have stepped up to lead this aspect of our work and, with the assistance of some of our dedicated volunteers, we should be able to complete the remainder of our planting plan.

As mentioned in the early part of this report, we have had to change the way we organise our volunteer effort to better match the workload on the Island. Nursery and planting management, seabird monitoring and infrastructure work are all now working with teams of volunteers each with a dedicated leader (Kevin Hawkins for infrastructure and myself for seabirds). More volunteers are needed and a warm welcome is assured.

Some of the notable achievements and events this year include:

- water tanks relocated to the new site half way up the hill
- our first Island-born wetapunga from the Pohutukawa Bay release site (from the translocation in April and June 2014)
- an Award for Excellence in the large restoration projects section from the Australasian Society for Environmental Restoration
- as a consequence of Cyclone Debbie a big landslip blocked the main track up the hill from Home Bay. Volunteers on a day trip were re-directed to dig away enough soil to allow access by the quad bike. Later on a tractor-digger from Kāwau was brought across by barge to finish the job
- the automatic watering system for the nursery was modified and brought into service to help ensure adequate watering during periods when there was no Ranger on the Island
- monitoring of Duvaucel's geckos continued by Manu Barry and her team
- other reptile monitoring was completed by our members
- three newsletters were published, our website was regularly updated and news was distributed by e-mails
- work on our weed programme continued. Maintaining weeds at low levels is a significant on-going effort. 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 significant forest cover, we need to keep up the pressure on species such as

climbing asparagus which would otherwise quickly re-establish. Once again we were fortunate to have the services of Richard Sharp and his team 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

- we applied for and obtained a new licence under the Wildlife Authority Act for long-term monitoring of reptiles
- a complete refit of the bach interior was completed – thank you DOC and Dave Jenkins.

### **A brief look ahead**

Progress has been slower than anticipated in renewing our lease for the nursery area and in obtaining permission to install some volunteer accommodation within the nursery ‘footprint’. Consultation is now almost complete and we expect to submit our application for a new lease within the next few weeks.

The settlement process between the Government and local iwi is progressing and we expect to see greater involvement from iwi on the Island and in taking an overview of our activities. We have been fortunate in having the enthusiastic support of iwi for our restoration activities over the life of our project and believe this is likely to continue.

It is now ten years since the publication of our Motuora Native Species Restoration Plan which has guided our efforts since 2007. We have initiated a review of progress against the Plan and an assessment of where we stand today and will consider whether we need to update or add to the Plan or to generate a new one.

### **Sponsors and donors**

**Bridgestone New Zealand Ltd** (our principal sponsor)

Simon Chamberlin

Heseltine Trust

Auckland Council

Sheila Coombs

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

We are also grateful for a generous bequest from the estate of Lois McCracken, one of our early members, who sadly passed away last year.

Of course nothing could be achieved without the input of a key group of enthusiastic volunteers who give their time and expertise to ensure we continue to be one of the best restoration projects in the Gulf. As Chairperson, I’d particularly like to draw attention to the efforts of your committee who put in many hours, often unrecognised, without which none of the achievements listed in this report would have been possible.

Congratulations to you all and I hope that you will continue to find enjoyment in this wonderful project and will be able to do so for many years to come.

John Stewart, Chairperson Motuora Restoration Society.



Motuora 2004



Motuora 2012