

Motuora Restoration Society

Chairperson's Report for 2017-2018

May 2018

Managing the Island

The past year has been a successful one for our progress on managing and restoring the Island's biodiversity. Thanks to the support of the funders listed later, we have been able to make sufficient working trips for weeding, for nursery work and planting, for maintenance of infrastructure and for biodiversity work.

Unfortunately, the Department of Conservation had difficulties with providing adequate Ranger cover during the year. The consequence for the Island included badly overgrown tracks hampering access and a noticeable deterioration in other facilities. We made our concerns known to the Department and there were complaints from members of the public using the campsite. It is pleasing to report that, by the end of this reporting year, the Department had successfully tackled the issues and the Island facilities had been largely restored.

The longer term issue of adequate Ranger cover remains to be addressed. The Department currently has no established post on the Island (no funding for a post) and is currently unable to provide continuous cover. MRS will continue to press for the maximum possible cover.

The seabird season

Last year I reported on the hatching of our first Pycroft's petrel chick which sadly died just before fledging. This year has been much better with four pairs occupying the nest boxes. Three eggs were laid and hatched and all eventually fledged. This is a significant milestone for the Pycroft's introduction. It will be another 32 months before we can expect these three youngsters to return to Motuora – seabird translocation projects are not for the impatient!

Once again, we had an enthusiastic team of volunteers who carried out regular monitoring during the seabird season and we hope this first success will encourage them to continue their good work.

This was the third year that fluttering shearwaters were attracted to breed by our sound system and the provision of nest boxes. The first two years had two pairs, but this year four pairs raised a chick to fledging. Three pairs used the cliff edge boxes while one pair bred for the second time in new boxes installed in a safer location on the inland side of the track. All the chicks were banded and we hope to see them breeding in a few years time.

Once again we have been unable to track the fortunes of breeding diving petrels as the few pairs which may be present continue to use inaccessible sites down the cliff near to the release site.

Last year our gannet colony had 19 pairs breeding, but all 11 chicks which hatched failed to survive. This year we had four pairs produce a chick and it is likely that three of these fledged. We are not sure why the fortunes of the gannets have had these setbacks from earlier more successful years and will continue careful monitoring.

Two years ago we installed 20 penguin nest boxes along the shore near the camp site and nursery. However, on reflection we decided that the boxes had not been buried sufficiently and could be subject to overheating. This season, with great help from a group from Warkworth Area Forest and Bird, the box situations have been improved. During this work it was noted that most of the boxes were full of penguin feathers indicating that they had, at least, been used during the moult and possibly also for breeding. Penguin box checking will be added to the tasks for the seabird teams next year.

And, finally, though not quite a seabird, I can report on the success of the New Zealand dotterels breeding on the Island. This year we found four pairs along Home Bay but none on Still Bay. One pair had three chicks and another at least one chick. We cannot be sure of the outcome, but the chicks were a reasonable size when last recorded. The dotterels are subject to predation from gulls and possibly ruru and to disturbance from some campers. It would be good to pay more attention to protecting nests and chicks as Motuora could be a reasonably important site for the species.

Weeding, planting and infrastructure

The need for weeding is on-going as new arrivals and existing problem species continue to surface. Apart from translocations, we probably spend more on weeding each year than on any other aspect of our work. This is not the most glamorous or exciting part of our work, but it is just as vital in maintaining the trajectory of the restoration project as any other aspect. We are fortunate in being able to use the services of our abseiling team, Richard and George, Eliane for searching and spraying, and, of course, Helen Lindsay

who plans and organises the weeding. None of this could happen without the continuing support of the various funding bodies and we acknowledge current funders the DOC Community Fund and Foundation North.

Around 1,000 trees were planted in the past year. The planting of pioneer species is almost complete and current planting is of 'succession' species planted among the existing established pioneers. About 150 coastal mahoe were sown and raised off the Island by Shelley Heiss-Dunlop and brought over bare-rooted (for biosecurity reasons). These have been potted on and will be planted out soon. We will also be trying to sow some spinifex which will be used to stabilise the Home Bay dunes which have suffered extensive erosion over the past two years.

Over the past twelve years we have had four species of lizard translocated to Motuora Island: Duvaucel's gecko (*Hoplodactylus duvaucelii*), Raukawa gecko (*Woodworthia maculata*), Pacific gecko (*Dactylocnemis pacificus*) and shore skink (*Oligosoma smithi*). All these species are regularly monitored and are doing well with good numbers of individuals being regularly being found. The recent survey of shore skinks demonstrated that numbers are stable despite the recent erosion of the dunes. For all the translocated species the founding populations have become established at the release site and are producing offspring. Over the past year there has been evidence that all populations are progressing towards ones that can be considered viable and self-sustaining.

Other notable achievements and events this year include:

- installation of two water tanks after relocation to the new site half way up the hill
- installation of a new privacy fence around the Ranger's house washroom
- the Department has generously replaced the batteries in the solar system which is now reported to be working perfectly
- 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
- after experiencing continuing difficulties with our membership database we have switched provider. The new system appears to be working quite well
- we have reviewed our health and safety planning and implementation and have had an incident-free year
- the Island continues to be used as a kiwi crèche and is supporting a healthy population which regularly provides birds to other sites
- a complete refit of the bach interior was completed – thank you DOC and Dave Jenkins.

A brief look ahead

Delays within the Department meant that our application for a replacement lease for the nursery was delayed and public notification did not take place until April this year. This is now complete and we hope to have the new lease within a few weeks. This should include permission to install two small cabins to provide sleeping accommodation for our volunteers staying overnight on the Island.

We are currently working on a new Management Agreement with the Department which will set out in some detail the contributions to be made by the two parties. It will also include details on insurance, health and safety and other issues where the Department has requirements of its partners.

Sponsors and donors

Simon Chamberlin

Foundation North

Heseltine Trust

Auckland Council

Department of Conservation Community Fund

We 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 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.