



## **Chairperson's Report for 2021-2022**

**May 2022**

Once again, the year was disrupted by the impacts of Covid-19. The Island was closed for an extended period which interrupted progress on roofing over the cabins and some of our biodiversity monitoring.

We also saw a very significant change in personnel arrangements. After several years of lobbying, we were delighted that Kat Lane, DOC operations manager, found a way to fund what is essentially a full-time 12-month ranger position on the Island. In winter, when needed, the ranger may help out on Kawau, but we don't expect this to be too disruptive. On the downside, our ranger Vonny Sprey decided that she would like to have better access to her new property in Marlborough Sounds and so felt unable to accept the new role. After a careful recruitment process, we are pleased to welcome new ranger Al Fleming to the Island. Al took over around Christmas time and is settling in well.

I'd like to acknowledge the terrific dedication and hard work put in by Vonny during her tenure on the Island and to wish her a happy and fulfilling 'retirement' from Motuora.

When we were able to restart visits to the Island and stay overnight from mid-November, we found the new cabins to be a great success and very popular with our volunteers. Our building contractor Craig has installed supporting framework for a roof over the cabins and, weather and barges permitting, we hope to complete this final part of the cabins project by the end of the year. Thanks to a generous donation of a purpose-built stainless-steel worktop from Cooke Industries we now have a cooking space on the deck outside the potting shed.

### **Our relationship with the Department of Conservation**

As already noted, ranger Vonny has moved on and Al Fleming has taken over. Kat Lane remains Operations Manager though she will be on leave next year and Emma Kearney will be standing in during her absence.

We were able to attend our scheduled quarterly meetings, but these were on-line rather than in person.

We've been aiming to restart our plant nursery on the Island and the appointment of a full-time ranger is a key element in making progress as the seedlings need daily attention. Another difficulty is the current ban on digging anywhere on the Island to avoid the potential for disturbing archaeological remains. Fortunately, we were able to arrange a visit by DOC Senior Heritage Ranger Caleb Hamilton. Caleb walked some of our planting blocks to assess the likelihood of them having been used by the early Māori inhabitants. Caleb was able to identify some areas where we should avoid disturbance leaving us free to plant in other areas. All planting work will still be subject to the Accidental Discovery Protocol which sets out how to proceed if we find anything.

I'd like to thank Kat and her team for their continuing commitment to Motuora and our Society.

### **Managing the Island's restoration**

Although there were some interruptions to our visits over the year, much of the work planned was able to take place. Visits were made for weeding, nursery work, species monitoring, infrastructure maintenance and for the cabins.

Vonny, and later, Al worked with Helen Lindsay to plan and execute our weed monitoring and control with help from contractor Richard Sharp and his colleagues for rope access to the cliffs. The review of our weeding strategy mentioned in my last report is underway. Helen Lindsay organised a visit to the Island as part of the assessment and is now considering how best to proceed.

### **Seabird monitoring**

Because of our late start to the monitoring season, we missed most of the first clutches of our little penguins. We monitor pairs using our 21 penguin nest boxes and a few which use shearwater boxes near the gannet site. Nine nests in the penguin boxes produced nine chicks and there were also some fledglings from the pairs using shearwater nest boxes.

The dotterels had a reasonable season with perhaps seven chicks from multiple nesting attempts by three or four pairs. Lots of efforts were made to protect the nests from high tides, marauding black-backed gulls and pukeko, and disturbance from visitors.

Only four or five gannets attended the colony site this season and only one pair laid an egg. The egg hatched and the chick is believed to have fledged.

We had four fluttering shearwater pairs using the nest boxes. Four chicks were fledged although one of them had some lesions on its face and may not survive.

We were unable to visit the Island during the diving petrel season and so have no records to report. The sound system was moved to a new site on a high cliff north of Still Bay. The system proved unreliable and key components have been replaced in time for the 2022/23 season.

The Pycroft's petrels had an interesting year. Thirty-nine individual adults were recorded but there must have been at least two more as only one parent was recorded for two of the successful breeding attempts. The previous three years have had 36, 38 and 37 records.

Thirteen eggs were laid, 9 hatched and all fledged. This is unusual for Motuora where all the eggs laid in the previous three seasons have led to fledged chicks. In some cases, eggs were found displaced from the nest cup, and even in the entrance tunnel. This may have been due to fighting among birds for occupancy even though there are plenty of unused boxes.

Five new birds were recorded:

- 1 translocated chick from 2015,
- 2 unbanded birds (one now banded) both found in burrows and recorded multiple times,
- 2 birds which had hatched and fledged from Motuora in April 2018 (from our first 3 fledglings) and in April 2019 (from our next 5 fledglings). These are the first of the chicks hatched on Motuora to return and so is a great milestone to reach, and it will be even better when one of them produces a chick.

We had records of birds in 23 of our 101 boxes and signs of entry in about another dozen. For the first time we recorded three birds digging natural burrows.

Four of our pairs have produced a chick for four consecutive years.

For the first time we found a dead adult in the colony. It was in box 74 and had possibly been killed because it disturbed an active bumble bee colony in the box. Unfortunately, because of Covid, we had been unable to make a pre-season visit to clear out the boxes or block off any occupied by bees.

Our thanks are due to the volunteers who undertake the seabird monitoring each year.

## **Other activities**

Other notable activities during the year included:

- three newsletters were published, and other news distributed by e-mail

- our health and safety plans and programme were updated, and we have had another incident-free year
- we have suffered on-going issues with our website and membership database which have only been intermittently available. Work continues to resolve the problems

## **Sponsors and donors**

Simon Chamberlin  
Foundation North  
The Chisholm Whitney Charitable Trust

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

## **Conclusion**

The work described here is a bit like the tip of the iceberg as so much effort is required in the background to make it all happen. Thanks are due to your committee, to the staff at DOC, to our funders, contractors, members and volunteers. Our members and volunteers get their reward when they visit and enjoy the Island and see what has been achieved over many years of effort. I hope that everyone else who has contributed also feels their input has helped to get us this far and that all of you will continue that support and take pleasure from what has been accomplished.

John Stewart  
Chairperson.