



Chairperson's Report for 2022-2023

May 2023

Even though Covid-19 remains very much with us, our regular monthly work trips, seabird and weed team visits were mostly able to continue as planned. We had a short disruption for cyclone Gabrielle and the heavy rainfall events of early 2023, but the Island and our work programmes were not seriously disrupted.

The change to Saturday work trips instead of Sunday has been a success. We've had good numbers of volunteers and much easier journeys for those heading back to Auckland in the late afternoon. Resuming the work trips has made an important contribution to many of our biodiversity and infrastructure activities. More importantly, it provides members and volunteers with opportunities to engage with the restoration project. Without your input we could not hope to make progress.

Al Fleming, our current Department of Conservation (DOC) ranger, is now about 17 months into his tenure on Motuora and is now a welcome 'part of the furniture'. Al has given enthusiastic support to every aspect of the restoration project and is an effective curator of our relationship with DOC. One of his most important roles is in maintaining biosecurity including monitoring for incoming animal and plant pests especially as visiting campers present a significant pathway for accidental introductions. Plague skinks and Argentine ants are a growing threat, and we are increasing our own measures to avoid bringing them to the Island.

Last year I reported that we hoped to complete the final work on the roof over the cabins by the end of 2022. I should have known it would be better not to make that kind of prediction, but the work has finally been completed in May when new guttering was installed to collect rainwater from the roof and carry it away.

We have been giving some thought to our Restoration Plan which was published in 2007. We have successfully completed much of the work proposed in the Plan although, inevitably, some remains to be done. It is also the case that our knowledge of what can and should be done has changed over the years and so we believe it is appropriate and timely to review the Plan. We will begin by consulting DOC and those Iwi who are associated with Motuora.

Since last year's report we have lost two of our long-term supporters, Simon Chamberlin and Sheila Coombs. Sheila made a very generous bequest to the Society which will secure our financial future for several years.

Our relationship with the Department of Conservation

Our thanks go to Emma Kearney, acting Operations Manager while Kat Lane was away.

We were able to hold our quarterly meetings with DOC with some of us attending the Warkworth office in person, while others joined online. Online participation is sometimes limited by the technology, but the relative convenience does allow more people to attend meetings. Much of the discussion at meetings centres on sharing our respective plans for work on the Island.

Kat has returned to her post in May.

I'd like to thank Emma, Kat, and their 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 and track maintenance and for the cabins.

The only animal translocations this year were the arrival of 20 wetapunga from Auckland Zoo and the departure of 10 kiwi to Tamahunga near Matakana.

More significant in the long term, has been restarting the plant nursery. Once we had renovated the seed house and standing out areas and completely renewed the water supply and irrigation systems, we were able to begin seed sowing. By now we have hundreds of small seedlings potted up, including spinifex, puriri and kohekohe, and with many more to come. The spinifex will be gradually introduced to the shoreline dunes at Home Bay to stabilise them, resisting further erosion and protecting the habitat for shore skinks and nesting dotterels.

In the face of a noticeable resurgence in weeds in one area on the Island, Helen Lindsay has worked with Al and with our rope-access contractors Richard and George, to increase our efforts to find and remove them. We are planning to set up dedicated volunteer 'weed teams' who will take ownership of an area and carry out regular searches.

Seabird monitoring

We monitor penguin pairs using our 21 penguin nest boxes and a few shearwater boxes near the gannet site. This year there were 12 nesting attempts producing 24 eggs, 20 of which hatched, but only five chicks fledged. This is our lowest success rate in three years of monitoring.

Fluttering shearwaters fledged three chicks and one pair of gannets fledged a single chick.

The dotterels didn't do quite as well as last year with perhaps only two chicks fledging from multiple nesting attempts by three or four pairs.

The Pycroft's petrels had an interesting year. As last year, thirty-nine individual adults were recorded but there must have been three or four more as only one parent was recorded for three of the successful breeding attempts and one where an egg was laid but did not hatch. The previous four years have had 39, 36, 38 and 37 records.

Eighteen eggs were laid, 14 hatched and all but one fledged. 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. There were four new pairs this season, three of them produced a fledgling.

Four new birds were recorded:

- 2 translocated chicks from 2014,

- 1 unbanded bird,

- 1 bird which had hatched and fledged from Motuora in April 2019.

We had records of birds in 23 of our 101 boxes and signs of entry in about another dozen. This year we had no records of birds digging natural burrows.

Three of our pairs have produced a chick for five consecutive years.

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

Lizards

Regular lizard monitoring is continuing, and it appears that our translocated populations of skinks and geckos are doing well. A male Pacific gecko found last June may be the largest of its species on record. Although there are now six species on the Island (three skinks and three geckos) it is likely there were once many more. We hope the review of our Restoration Plan will identify more candidates to be translocated.

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

Auckland Council Regional Environment and Natural Heritage Grant Programme

A bequest from the estate of Sheila Coombs

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

Conclusion

My report has described some of the major events of the past year, but there is so much more activity that has not been documented here. 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 and what has still to be done.

John Stewart
Chairperson.