

HAUTURU

LITTLE BARRIER ISLAND SUPPORTERS TRUST

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NEWSLETTER
ISSUE 24 NOVEMBER 2010

FROM THE CHAIR

There has been much concern about the invasion of the island by plant seeds from the mainland, partly by bird transfer and partly by wind. This leads to problems with climbing asparagus and pampas in particular. The Little Barrier Island Supporters Trust has been endeavouring to raise funds to assist DOC to combat this continuing threat and we are very pleased to have recently been successful in securing grants from both the ASB Community Trust and the Lion Foundation – \$50,000 each to fund a helicopter spraying programme aimed specifically at eliminating pampas from the island. Removal entails what is kindly referred to as 'a dope on a rope' dangling from a helicopter to reach the hard-to-get bits of the island.

We wish to sincerely thank both the Lion Foundation and the ASB Community Trust for their generous grants.

John Hagen
Chairman



NEW TRUSTEE WELCOMED

The Little Barrier Island Supporters Trust is thrilled that Dr Matt Rayner has accepted an invitation to join the Trust, filling one of two vacancies created by the resignation of Annie Whittle and Nicki van der Meijden last year. Matt is well known to readers of *Hauturu* as the scientist undertaking research into Cook's petrel, an extension of his PhD research at the University of Auckland.

Matt is currently a Foundation of Research Science and Technology (FRST) post-doctoral scholar, based at both the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) in Auckland and San Jose State University in California. His current research is an investigation of aspects of the community ecology and migration biology of New Zealand seabirds.

He lives in Titirangi, Auckland, with his wife and two children. When asked to express his views of Hauturu, he said 'Where do I begin? High cloudy peaks, thick misty dripping forest, rugged, beautiful, a soul-touching place whose magic comes from the illusion that it is a lost world untouched by a bigger one increasingly filled with people, plastic, i-Pads, Facebook and noise.'

Matt's work on Little Barrier Island has received international attention, with the Faculty of Science 1000 recognising his study of the impact of rats on the island's seabirds as one of the most



Dr Matt Rayner

important in its field.

From time to time there is a need to appoint new trustees and the Trust is always interested in receiving expressions of interest from supporters. If you are interested or wish to suggest someone, please contact John Hagen.



NEWS FROM HAUTURU

Hi Everyone

I was on my way to the mainland the other day when my mind started to wander and I got thinking about what changes had come about on Hauturu since caretakers, and subsequently rangers, have lived there. Although there must have been huge change over the life of the nature reserve, I started to think about just the last 10 years or so, and I realised that it has been defined by one action: the eradication of kiore.

When I compared what the island was like when I started on the weed team in 1999 with what it is like now, 11 years later, I came up with the following:

Plants During that first weed season of mine, walking through the bush on Hauturu was exactly that – a reasonably easy ‘walk’. There was no undergrowth to speak of as the rats had taken up the island lawn-mowing contract with great gusto. These days the walk has been replaced by a scramble through the reasonably dense ‘crap’, as the weeders put it. Of course without rats to eat the seeds etc, that leaves more food for...

Birds A few species have excelled since 2004. One of those is also one of my favourites, the kokako (sorry, Sirocco but you are too mainstream these days). In the seven weeks I spent on Hauturu in 1999, I heard one bird. *One!* The next year I was lucky enough to see one. *One!*

Fast forward to 2010, and I would guess that 95 per cent of the day-visitors who come to the island would see a couple of kokako. There are up to eight that live in the back garden, and wherever you go over the island you are never far from the haunting sound of the blue-wattled crow. The species that had instant success – and many of you would have read about it – was the titi or Cook’s petrel. I’m not going to throw numbers at you to show you how well they have done but I will say that ten years ago you could stand outside and hear them and pick out each sound in the sky. Last year, before Christmas, I couldn’t tell who was who as it was a clamour overhead, all of them yelling out to their partners, ‘Chuck the billy on love, I’m home!’

Another sight people always remark on when they visit is the RNZAF Number 1 Kereru Squadron. In the last year or two, our regal pigeons have been flocking on the flats all year around, with some flocks being up to a couple of hundred at times. It’s truly an amazing sight when they all lift off as a harrier swoops over! Ten years ago they would only come to the flats in their flocks to over-winter.

Invertebrates Like the kokako, I didn’t get to see a wetapunga on Hauturu ten years ago, and now they can be seen most nights all around the flats. Their numbers have risen exponentially (see articles in previous editions of *Hauturu*) and



Left: Shane and Liz.
Right: Captain Awesome

we can even usually find them during the day in some areas.

Reptiles Hauturu is home to around a dozen species of reptiles. Skinks and geckos make up the bulk of those numbers. This year we have been seeing green geckos on a regular basis not far from the bunkhouse. The last one we saw was about four years ago, and they hadn’t been seen regularly before that. They would have always been on the island in small numbers and are arboreal, which makes them hard to find, but in the absence of rats the numbers must have climbed high enough for even bumbling bipeds to run into them. The other big news in the reptile world, of course, is that the island’s population of tuatara has had a huge boost with the release of about 140 animals from their enclosure. And, since 2006, two wild animals have been found at opposite ends of the island so there is a good chance there are still others out there that withstood the rodents’ onslaught.

So that’s just a few observations and I’m sure that the many of you who have visited over the last ten years will have your own special memories of the island and changes that you have seen.

So onto the usual ranger’s column...

It’s mostly a pretty standard recipe from the island this issue, with all the usual ingredients: two tablespoons of weeds, a cup of translocations, a teaspoon of tuatara action, species monitoring to taste, and instead of using an oven, chuck it all out in the rain to go soggy as there has been plenty of it around!

The island has had its share of wet and its share of wind of late, and I think everyone is looking forward to the summer. I’m hoping that we won’t be moaning about it being too dry as we did last summer!

Weed Programme

As mentioned by John, the trust has done a marvellous job in obtaining a massive amount of money to aid in the fight against pampas on the island. Rory, Liz and I were gobsmacked when we heard, and we all had huge grins on our faces as this will now put us a whole year ahead of our schedule! Awesome stuff. The aerial spraying is underway and we are slowly eating into the large patch at Pohutukawa Flat, which will take some time.

Liz and her team are having a good year on the asparagus fern and have made a great dent in the Orau Gorge infestation that

was found a couple of years back. The abseil contractors are due to start shortly and will be attacking the gorge as well.

Translocations

Nothing too much to report from this area. There is only one planned translocation and that is for Cook's petrel to the Cape Kidnappers Wildlife Preserve. The initial 50 chicks taken last season all fledged which is a great result, so all the methods used were bang on the money.

Great news, also, from another island just a stone's throw away. Motuora now has the Hauturu wetapunga living there after 12 animals were taken from here to Butterfly Creek, where Paul and the team did a great job of bringing the captive population numbers up to a number they could release. Tiritiri is also getting 25 of the gargantuan insects.

Of course you can't always have great news with translocations. Many of you would have heard that several kiwi were predated at Pukaha Mt Bruce this year, and some of those were confirmed as being from Hauturu. It is extremely sad news for our national bird and although the team down there did all they could, I'm sure some lessons were learned for further operations around the country. Just another reason why we can't relax anywhere there is a threat from rodents, mustelids and felines.

Tuatara

Auckland Zoo, take a bow. They have stepped up and are funding the next year or two of Hauturu's tuatara programme. It had been expected that the programme would come to an end but if we can get outside funding for it we can continue, and that is exactly what has happened so there is hope for more tuatara yet.

We have one more tuatara this year. Unfortunately we were only able to harvest one egg last season as many others were punctured by mum. This egg was 'incubated' on the island by the rangers and on August 14 we had a little hatchling weighing in at 5.2gms. We then had to think of a name – something tuatara-ish, understated, and original. 'Captain Awesome' fitted the bill, I thought. It is coming into egg-laying time again so fingers crossed!

Distance Sampling

This year's bird monitoring is under way. Robin Toy is leading a team of volunteers across the island doing call counts at predetermined sites, listening for tieke, hihi and tui. All the data collected is thrown into a machine called the Birdatron, which will give us an indication of the health of the island. We hope to have the results for you in the next issue.

Trust Involvement

The Kiwi monitoring project, alas, did not go ahead again this year, which is a bit frustrating. Here's hoping that Lyn and her posse can get out next winter. Another successful supporters' weekend has been and gone with a large amount of onion weed dug and a donation made to the 'bunkhouse fund'. Hopefully a new couch will appear in the bunkhouse soon!

That's about the lot from me. I know it's a bit early but have a great Christmas and safe holidays.

Shane McInnes

Ranger, Hauturu Little Barrier Island

WAR AGAINST WEEDS HOTS UP

The battle against weeds on Hauturu has never seemed more winnable. In early October, the Trust received two very welcome emails, one from the ASB Community Trust and one from the Lion Foundation, each pledging \$50,000 towards pampas control and eradication.

The Lion Foundation is a valued supporter of LBIST's work and LBIST is delighted that it has renewed its critical financial support again. The ASB Community Trust is a new supporter of the weed eradication work and LBIST is delighted to have its support.

These two heavyweight donations come on top of \$20,000 raised by the trust to assist with the control of climbing asparagus on the cliffs in the Orau Gorge. This sum comprises a \$15,000 grant from the Chisholm Whitney Family Charitable Trust, and donations from individual Hauturu Supporters, in particular long-standing conservationists, Arthur & Pat Cowan.

So there is a grand total of over \$120,000 committed to the control of both climbing asparagus and pampas.

The continuing spread of pampas in Northland is threatening the effectiveness of the control programme on Little Barrier. LBIST has been advised by the ARC that a management programme to reduce the spread of pest plants within the Hauraki Gulf Controlled Area has been implemented and was outlined in the Auckland Regional Pest Management Strategy 2007-2012 which contained specific provisions relating to the Hauraki Gulf as a whole. The trust believes this message needs to be continually reinforced, particularly when the new Auckland Council is established on 1 November.



'A dope on a rope' spraying pampas.



A rare white kiwi photographed by Trustee Lyn Wade's father Dr W.M. Hamilton in the 1930s

THE AUSTRALIAN AND THE KIWI

The following is an excerpt from a report by Lucy Goodman, who joined the Trust's March working weekend.

I'm one of those rare specimens who ignored the ingrained migratory patterns of those New Zealand youth who flock across the Tasman Sea to Australia each winter. I ventured in the opposite direction to these gannet fledglings, and headed eastward from Brisbane to Auckland city. This is the story of how the Australian met the kiwi (well, not only the kiwi, but the kaka, kakapo, kakariki, and kauri).

The harsh call of a kaka pierced through the still air. A brief sighting of a kakariki gliding between the kauri trees that are only in the first few centuries of their 3000-year lives... all these unique, endangered specimens on one small island. I quickly discovered that from the many volunteering opportunities available in the Hauraki Gulf, I had chosen the most unique.

To the south, the ocean stretched to the horizon, Auckland city too far to be seen above the curvature of the earth. To the north, the bush backed up the hill and beyond. I felt a sense of true isolation. I left the group for a moment to take a lone stroll along the beach. I say 'stroll' as if it was a leisurely walk along firm sand, but in actual fact this involved clambering over giant pebbles the size of footballs that lined the beach. Each of the pink, purple, or grey stones had been molded smooth by the waves and made me feel as if I'd stumbled onto a field of dinosaur eggs.

Lacking any considerable ecological or conservation background, I was in awe of the others on my trip so knowledgeable about the flora and fauna of this unique sanctuary. I observed the passion amongst this group of people so enamoured with this island and all it contained, and likened them to a unique endangered species that also should be conserved.

The rangers introduced us to the tuatara – a scuffle from inside the enclosure, and a small lizard appeared in Shane's hands, its third invisible eye no doubt blinking at us from between the other two. Later, under the velvety cover of darkness, we ventured into the night in search of those creatures hidden by day. A giant wetapunga gripping a leaf had the appearance of a grasshopper relic from the dinosaur era. I reminded myself that this was the only place in the world where I would ever see this creature.

We were alerted by a rustle in the undergrowth. Standing in the dark peering into the bushes in search of the source, I couldn't help but draw a comparison between this isolated nature reserve and the rural suburbs of Brisbane where I grew up. At home, the source of the sound could be anything – a rat, possum, fox, wild cat, snake... I would not have scrounged around in the dark to find out. But here was a different story. There was really only one possibility of what the rustling noise meant.

In an open field, we stumbled across a kiwi. It froze briefly in the spotlight, before tottering off as fast as its little legs would carry it. In three seconds it was gone, but I'll always remember its funny little swagger and lopsided mannerisms.

At our departure, we rowed in small dinghies out to the boat. The crystal-clear waters beckoned me, and I quickly leapt into them for one last experience on this once-in-a-lifetime trip. The ocean floor completely visible, and a dolphin cruising slowly past, I did not for one second miss the flashy environment of the Gold Coast that draws Kiwi tourists every year.

Almost every person I meet asks me why I came to New Zealand when most New Zealanders flock to Australia. Now I have a response. New Zealand has some beautiful wildlife reserves in its backyard: why do you need to go elsewhere? I live in New Zealand and I'm thankful that I've now seen far more than just the fledgling colony of gannets that draws tourists to Auckland's western beaches.

For a report on the October working weekend please see page four of this newsletter's supplement, Island Visits.



THE TRUST OUT AND ABOUT

It has been a busy few months for the LBIST since the last issue of *Hauturu* was published. The trustees have met three times, and other key activities included:

- On July 29 the trustees met the Auckland Conservator Sean Goddard in the first of regular and ongoing discussions on matters of mutual interest. The July agenda covered the Ngati Manuhiri Treaty Settlement Agreement in Principle; translocations of birds and other wildlife from the island, and the Conservation Management Strategy (CMS)

- Also on July 29 the trustees formally farewelled Annie Whittle, Nicki van der Meijden and former secretary Denise Le Noel.
- In August the trustees signed off on a new brochure, revised by trustee Judy Hanbury.
- Judy and trustee Lyn Wade organised the October and November working weekends. By the application closing date of 27 August numbers were up to 40 for a total of 18 places!
- In October 31 the trustees visited Tiritiri Matangi to look at the work being done there, and to see the riflemen and hihi transferred from Hauturu.