

HAUTURU

LITTLE BARRIER ISLAND SUPPORTERS TRUST

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NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE CHAIR

This issue of *Hauturu* is dominated by farewells and welcomes. The key farewells are to Little Barrier Island Supporters Trust (LBIST) trustees David McGregor, Judy Hanbury and John Hagen, who, especially in the case of David and Judy who were founding trustees when the trust was established in 1997, have been integral to the Trust's ability to support scientific work on the island, to champion the island's mana and significance, and to raise funds for pest control work that DOC is unable to finance. There's more about this further on in this issue.

There are farewells also for one of the island's rangers, Nichollette Brown, and welcomes to kakapo, Jester and Dobbie, and three new LBIST trustees, Mary Binney, Nicola Legat and David Stone.

The Trustees acknowledge the terrific work done on and for Hauturu by Rory Renwick and Tim Brandenburg, who have both left DOC following its recent restructure. We look forward to working on issues relating to the island with the new appointees to senior DOC roles.

Finally, the Trust is grateful to the ASB Community Trust which recently, and generously, donated \$35,000 to support LBIST's work on the island.

We thank all our supporters and funders for their commitment to the island during 2013, and wish you all the best for the coming festive season.

Warren Gibb – Chairman



Honor Hamlet, daughter of LBIST trustee Evan Hamlet, opens the door to Dobbie's cage as two new kakapo are released on Hauturu.

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Retiring trustees John Hagen (in hat), Judy Hanbury and David McGregor (far right) with LBIST patron Ruud Kleinpaste at the farewell lunch.



RANGER'S REPORT

BIRD NEWS

Two male kakapo were transferred onto the island on October 5. Jester and Dobbie (a member of the group of kakapo resident on Hauturu who were taken off prior to the kiore eradication project of a decade ago) were welcomed to the island by Ringi Brown and a support group. Both birds were relaxed on release and made their way up the hill slowly over the next few days. Leigh and the weed team noticed some early track and bowl clearing along the high points, which indicates some breeding-related activity (from the males at least).

Most other birds we see are nesting well, and Mahina has spotted a bellbird nest close to the office and has got her eye on several bellbird, tui and saddleback nests as well as a robin nest close by.

The results of the hihi distance sampling show that hihi and tieke numbers are up 20 per cent from last year and that tui numbers are up by about 50 per cent; however these are rough estimates only. The numbers have been up and down a bit over the last few years, but that is to be expected and on the whole they are looking fine.

Michael Anderson was out for his first visit to work with the long-tail cuckoo and observed a few birds. Catching proved difficult partly due to bad weather. Chris Gaskin set up visual and acoustic recording devices in the vicinity of the New Zealand storm petrel burrows. The aim is to learn more about their breeding behaviour and hopefully record some calls as their call is to date unknown.

TUATARA

The tuatara are doing well and in November Nicky Nelson will be on the island to look at sex ratios after incubation at a median ►



Jester hits Hauturu soil for the first time.



Bethany Jackson and Mikaylie Wilson from Auckland Zoo undertaking kakariki research.

FOND FAREWELL TO TRUSTEES

The farewell lunch on November 17 for retiring Little Barrier Island Supporters Trust trustees David McGregor, Judy Hanbury and John Hagen was a mixture of happy memories and also sadness. After all, three outstanding advocates for conservation in general and the island in particular will not now be involved with the island on as regular a basis as they have been.

However one cannot imagine David, Judy or John entirely letting go of their passion and affection for Hauturu. As their hours of volunteer work over 16 years in everything from fundraising to newsletter editing, organising working weekends and writing submissions, have so clearly attested, they are true believers in the international significance of Hauturu. They have worked to protect it, to support conservation and scientific work there, and to ensure that its role as a pivotal element of our national conservation recovery strategy is treasured and valued. They've left the remaining trustees and new appointees with a terrific legacy to carry on.

The luncheon guests learned how the Trust was established after a group of friends who were staying on the island for the third

Opposite page Retiring and new LBIST trustees, from left David Stone, Mary Binney, Nicola Legat, Judy Hanbury, John Hagen and David McGregor with chair Warren Gibb (back left) and LBIST patron Ruud Kleinpaste, crouching in the foreground and demonstrating the state of his knees the day he finished the Rakiura Track.

time were asked by then ranger Chris Smuts-Kennedy whether they would consider forming a group of friends of Hauturu, as the island could really do with some extra funding. As Judy Hanbury joked, she was outside the bunkhouse, hoping to hear kiwi calling in the bush, while this idea was being mooted. Those inside all agreed that if anyone could make the new group happen then she could. And so it has come to pass.

Many others have helped along the way, of course, and in her speech Judy paid particular tribute to former trustee the late Jim Holdaway, who she said gave such excellent guidance and support.

John Hagen was thanked for his sterling chairmanship over the last seven years and in particular for his great success in attracting increased funding support for the island. David McGregor, the settlor trustee, was thanked for his years of wise counsel and commitment.

The LBIST trustees, who are now joined by three new members, Mary Binney, Nicola Legat and David Stone (we will read more about them in the next issue of *Hauturu*), presented David, Judy and John with a copy each of the recently published new edition of *Buller's Birds*, illustrated by John Keulemanns. We know that Hauturu o Toi will always be dear to their hearts.



Jester and Dobbie awaiting release.



A crowd waits for the cage doors to be opened.

► temperature. She is planning to bring 28 tuatara from last year's clutches back to Te Hauturu o Toi from incubation at Victoria University. We are planning to release the cohorts from two years ago, and Rose, Captain Awesome and Teeny Weenie on the slopes behind Te Maraeroa flats soon. The tuatara have started the first sign of 'digging', which is an indicator that the females are getting ready to lay eggs. Hauturu working-weekend volunteers cleared weeds and dug over some ground in the enclosure to make egg laying easier for the females and for us to find the eggs.

WEED ERADICATION

The weed team has now completed the majority of the ground searches for weeds (mostly climbing asparagus) in the south-west and Orau Gorge areas for the year. The fine weather and some good volunteers, as well as a dedicated core team, all helped to achieve this. A few climbing asparagus plants were found in the south-west plots and more at Orau Gorge as that is a 'newer plot' and hasn't been searched for as long as the south-west plot. The numbers of plants found are slightly up from last year but long term we are still achieving a trend that indicates a reduction of the weed.

All DOC funding for pampas spraying by helicopter has been spent for the year but if we got some extra funding we would spray the pampas at Pohutukawa Flat. To date we have managed to cover the south and east coastal cliffs as far as the start of Pohutukawa Flat. I have undertaken some trials of hand-pulling smaller plants and dropping agricultural granulate on the larger ones heading west to the areas that have not been covered by helicopter this year.

The weather had been very dry for the last month and the island started showing the signs of it, but we have been getting good rain now.

Richard Walle, Hauturu Ranger



AU REVOIR HAUTURU

Nichy Brown and a Hauturu bellbird.

Hauturu ranger Nichollette Brown left DOC's employ and the island in August for travel through Argentina and Chile, and then a return to New Zealand and contract work. Prior to joining DOC, Nichy had been an environmental manager for Fletchers. 'My main role was environmental management, ensuring the least impact from construction works on the environment and encouraging initiatives to return areas back in a better state than which we received them,' she says. 'It was lovely to have seemingly endless budgets to rehabilitate streams, sponsor community projects and develop school programmes around local works and environments. One can struggle a little with one's conscience being an ecologist/conservationist when working for a construction company, but I was pleasantly surprised by the willingness of the industry to move with the times and strive for the least impact possible.' While working for Fletchers Nichy spent a season as a DOC volunteer on Raoul island and that's where she felt the call to do more for the environment. As she says, 'although working for DOC meant a significant pay reduction, the personal value I got from my role as ranger on Hauturu was vastly higher. I never regretted the move.' LBIST enjoyed working with her very much and wishes her all the best. Please enjoy, as we did, Nichy's, last piece of writing for Hauturu.

In summarising my time on Hauturu I decided to describe my top five stand-out moments. This proved to be a much more difficult exercise than I first imagined. Was it watching groups of juvenile kokako on the lawn outside the office? Holding weeks-old Cook's petrels, more fluff and air than substance? Perhaps abseiling the south-western cliffs looking for asparagus and pausing

half way down to enjoy the views from a precariously hanging pohutukawa? Or kiwi prospecting on the front lawn? After much contemplation, I reduced it to the five following events:

HANGING OUT ON HAUTURU Pampas is a significant weed, and the best way to control it on Hauturu's cliffs is by heli-strop spraying, ie. dangling beneath a helicopter with a spray gun. As the ranger with primary responsibility for weeds it was my duty to give it a go. As I waited for the helicopter to take my weight on my first flight I wasn't sure if I was more excited or nervous ... and then I was weightless! It must be one of the closest experiences to flying, especially as the helicopter is high enough above that it's easy to forget it's even there. The view is spectacular, with schools of hammerhead sharks below, vistas inland into impenetrable valleys, and, of course, front-row seats to the habitat of our target weed. It may sound idyllic but a day on the strop is one of the hardest day's work I've done. The wind pulls on your helmet to the point where you wonder if your neck will sustain much more, and you are dropped through and against trees and bounced along cliffs, all while maintaining a constant, spastic leg-spin to counteract the eternally spinning strop. By the end of the day every muscle, ligament and bone is hurting. However, this is quickly forgotten the next day as you are soaring in for your next mission. Another day, another dollar...

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH A KAKAPO In 2012, Rakiura the kakapo succumbed to another bout of the dreaded 'crusty bum', an uncomfortable rear-end infection. This required treatment, and having captured her quite late in the day we held her overnight in the island aviary in preparation for a helicopter



The rare chevron skink.



Nichy with Liam, Mahina and Rakiura.



Manu the tuatara.

transfer to the mainland. She was not terribly impressed at our efforts to care for her, and expressed her disgust by biting whoever's hand came near. I wore the injury with quite a bit of pride for the following weeks, disappointed when it didn't scar. That night, with a big bowl of apple and kumara, we snuck into the aviary, scattered the treats around and sat quietly in a corner to observe. Gradually the branches at the end of the aviary began to tremble, and then shake and move like a Mexican wave. And then suddenly we caught a glimpse of an owl-like face peering out. Slowly Rakiura emerged into the open, her desire for apple and kumara treats stronger than her fear of her strange surroundings. Each step was deliberate and slow, each bite tentative and calculated. As she became a little bolder she began to explore her surroundings, drawing closer to our observation spot. It seemed unbelievable that a kakapo, one of the rarest birds in the world, was making her way directly towards me. She was very close. She lowered her head and rested her beak on the toe of my gumboot, pausing for what seemed like ages. Perhaps a kakapo apology for the earlier blood-letting? Finally she recommenced her patrol of the enclosure, unconcerned by what she had found and eager to get back to her kumara. Our bond was sealed.

The next day I accompanied her back to the mainland and ensured her safe delivery to the Auckland Zoo veterinary hospital. It was such a thrill to drive through Auckland watching the residents' ordinary lives as I passed metres from them in the car with a kakapo on my lap!

FINDING A (NIHO) TANIWHA For two years I have supervised field teams looking for the chevron skink (niho

taniwha). None were ever found and there are only three records from Hauturu for these elusive reptiles. And then one day while taking a field team on a tour of Orau Gorge, I saw one. 'It's a chevron!' I yelled. 'Grab it!' my companion yelled back, and without a thought for my safety I lunged off the track and after it. Anyone who has visited the steep confines of Orau Gorge will know that lunging off anything is not a good idea. However, I triumphantly reappeared with the very special reptile held firmly in my grasp. The chevron skink is by far one of the most attractive reptiles I've encountered. It was long and slender with a back of beautiful gold and brown chevrons and a lengthy tail that curled around my wrist as I held it. After some examination, record-taking, and many 'ohhs' and 'ahhh's', we let her go. Instead of darting off, she sat for several minutes in the dappled light, posing for pictures and seemingly enjoying her new celebrity status. And then she was gone. (Another chevron was found in Orau Gorge a couple of days later, and a permit to undertake research on this remote population will be active from next year.)

A BIRD IN THE HAND My passion for birds has grown exponentially since being on Hauturu and having the pleasure of daily contact with so many wonderful species. Their temperaments and habits seem species-specific, and you soon start to anthropomorphosise them. These personalities are even clearer when they are captured. My first mist-netting experience was on Hauturu during a whitehead and saddleback translocation. I was paired up with the very experienced Kay Middleton to learn the ropes. After watching her do several extractions from the hair-thin net it was my turn. My first bird was a bellbird, noisy and frantic. I approached cautiously. My first



Nichy on the heli-strop.

grasp confirmed my suspicions of its perceived frailty, so small and delicate in spite of its volume. How was I to manipulate and remove it without destroying it? But with Kay at my shoulder gently talking me through the steps I soon had it free and in my hand. To have the opportunity to be so close to a bird usually only seen at a distance, to examine the minute detail of the feathers, the shine of the eye and the fight in the claws and beak is such a privilege. And those personalities? Well, you should casually defer to your mist-netting colleague if you ever see the black and white flash of a tui in your net!

SPECIAL CHARGES Tuatara eggs from our breeding programme are transferred to Victoria University for incubating

and hatching, with the young tuatara returned to us three to four months later. Occasionally one or two eggs miss detection and transfer. These little fugitives are incubated on the island by carefully placing them in vermiculite (an incubation medium) and storing them in a quiet, dark place, usually the ranger's hot-water cupboard. The temperature and humidity are carefully monitored but not with the same precision as at Victoria. Development, therefore, is unpredictable and it is a mystery as to when our little charges will enter the world. From June, the eggs are checked daily and it's a very big shock to discover that the little round spheres have ruptured and are wriggling! The sudden surge of pride and nurturing is quite unexpected and it's hard not to check on them hourly, worrying about their comfort, about whether they're getting enough food, and too much or not enough sunlight. I have had the pleasure and stress of being a surrogate tuatara mum three times and feel a special bond with my three little charges Manu, Tahi and Tere Tuatara.

These recollections were written in the sun from a bean bag on the boulder beach below the bunkhouse during a period when I was sole ranger on the island over winter. All was quiet except for the squawk of kaka and the melody of bellbird, the ocean was mirror calm, and the atmosphere blissful. Writing and remembering all the special moments I have experienced here over the last couple of years makes me reflective and a little melancholy about my impending departure. However, I have a bond now with Hauturu and know I won't be away long. I pass on my responsibilities for this taonga to the new ranger with some reluctance but much confidence. I wish them the best of luck for the next couple of years and hope they enjoy it as much as I have.

Toitu he whenua, Whatungarongaro he tangata, Tena koutou mo to awhi toku mahi o Te Hauturu o Toi. Haere ra nga e hoa.
The land is permanent, the people disappear. Thank you for your support of my work on Hauturu. Farewell my friends.

ISLAND RESEARCH

As always, important scientific work on the island continues apace and LBIST was delighted recently to give its consent to a couple of new proposals. Stephen Pohe, a PhD candidate at the University of Canterbury, has been given consent to collect aquatic insects for his own research while assisting LBIST trustee Lyn Wade with the field work for her own research project. The Hauturu survey will update a study undertaken 50 years ago.

LBIST has also given its support to the request from the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, based at Eltham in South Taranaki, to translocate 20 saddlebacks and 60 whiteheads from Hauturu. This translocation is another example of Hauturu's major role in mainland restoration, through providing good founders for new populations at sensible, safe sites.

The Trust also received a research proposal and funding request from Chris Gaskin on behalf of the NZ Storm Petrel project 2013-2014. LBIST has granted up to \$7500 towards this project, which will continue investigations into one of the most exciting New Zealand bird 'rediscoveries' in decades.

MIRIAM AND MOFF

In a photo in our June newsletter you may have noticed a small dog in the front row of the April working group. Dogs are not usually allowed on Hauturu but Miriam and her dog Moff had been doing a routine coastal check for rodents. Thankfully none were found. Miriam and her dogs travel to many interesting places, sometimes doing routine checks and sometimes responding to reported incursions of rats or mice. When Lyn Wade spoke with her recently she had just been on Maud Island in the Marlborough Sounds assisting rangers and volunteers track an incursion of mice that had probably arrived with some goods in a boat. Makes that rigorous quarantine check for visiting Hauturu worth its while, doesn't it?





A flash new Norski toilet was installed on the island a couple of months ago. Fully funded by the Little Barrier Island Supporters Trust, it relieves the pressure on the bunkhouse toilets when there are larger working and volunteer groups visiting the island.

And there's more news on the loo front. DOC is currently assessing the sewerage system on Hauturu, which presently consists of two septic and two grey water tanks, one at the ranger's house and one at the ranger's flat and bunkhouse. Both systems have been problematic and a wastewater engineer has recommended combining all the greywater and sewerage wastes into one new system, with pumped discharge to a dripper line system that will produce a far cleaner effluent. DOC is consulting all interested parties, including LBIST, and a recommendation will be made shortly.

AUGUST WORKING WEEKEND REPORT

'It's like going back in time,' Hauturu has often been described to me. One imagines that the bush is prehistoric somehow, as if a dinosaur might step out round the next corner. I did find Hauturu indeed had a strong sense of the past, and was as we might imagine New Zealand to have been before people changed the landscape, introduced predators and reduced habitats. But when I got to Hauturu it was not a sense of the past that intrigued my mind and inspired my curiosity as much as a sense of the future, of what it can and will hold, of the possibilities, and how this will be made possible through the minds and physical commitment of not just environmentalists, conservationists and enthusiasts but also through the knowledge, perseverance and quest of science.

'Yes, yes, all set, packed and ready for the quarantine check,' I announce, while busily emptying my jacket pockets of bits of goodness knows what. How did I forget to check my own pockets? As organised as we think we are, it was amazing how there were still nooks and crannies for us all to find a bit of possible 'no-no' to clean out before we begin our adventure to the island.



Good boat trip over, a little rough, but good weather and exciting. 'Nice boat! Thanks Dave!' There was much fun and challenge landing in the rubber ducky; when they say 'bring two pairs of shoes', they really do mean two pairs of shoes!

Second quarantine check and we're here. Marks, set, go! The most experienced of our party was off to the bunkroom to select his bed in a mighty rush. I thought, I'd better follow suit, he must know something I don't. Turns out the bunkrooms are great, and there are no worries about which bunk to take. Maybe it was because he had the best cake and wanted to get started on it as soon as possible!

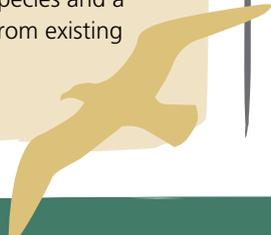
There are two classic occurrences for me when I am away from home: getting lost and getting injured. By the time we had started the first group activity or job – really, it was too much fun to be called a job – I had banged my head on an overhanging pohutukawa branch and had wandered off to see the ranger's children's hut and raft (the most amazing hand-built collection of recycled objects I have ever seen). I lost my group in the bush and was now all alone, calling, 'Anyone? Anyone at all?' How far could they have gone? We're on an island!



NEW ZEALAND BIRDS ONLINE

New Zealand Birds Online, the digital encyclopaedia of New Zealand birds, is now freely available to all at www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz. This sister website to the NZ Plant Conservation Network's website is a collaboration between Te Papa (the National Museum of New Zealand), the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, and the Department of Conservation. It covers all 457 bird species on the New Zealand list, including Miocene fossils, recently extinct species, vagrant species, introduced species and all living native bird species.

The original text was provided by 111 different authors, and over 250 photographers contributed over 6500 images, including at least one image for each species, living and extinct. The website also has over 1100 sound files (representing almost all living species and a few extinct ones) and over 1300 extracts from existing publications.



I loved the 'job', creating homes for lizards and geckos using black rubber butynol sheets and black corrugated squares placed in double layers with sticks in between to allow the geckos to crawl inside. The butynol sheets were tacked around tree trunks, so the geckos can crawl up underneath where it's nice and warm. The shelters were spread out in as straight a line as possible from the first marker point, and mapped on a GPS so they could be found easily later for checking.

I took my camera, and came back with fabulous shots of rocks and boulders. There were shots of birds too, but mostly of boulders; they were much better at posing. The shore is an amazing wild expanse of rocks and driftwood. The flora creeps its way right up to the shore in naturalised areas of grasses, flaxes and muehlenbeckia (on whose berries the kereru feed in huge numbers). A landscaper could not have done better.

The ranger Richard and his wife Leigh, an experienced ornithologist, were amazing, so giving of their time, energy and knowledge. Even though the island on its own is intoxicating, having these two passionate, experienced environmentalists share their amazing knowledge and expertise highlighted the intricate secrets and wisdom of the island, its ongoing projects, research, discoveries and future possibilities.

There was something for everyone during our weekend excursion, from a challenging walk up the Valley Track to valley walks for the quiet day trekker. We had night adventures discovering the incredible giant weta hanging out on the pongas and hunting for the elusive kiwi. We watched kokako climbing in the hedge next to the ranger's house and then swooping down to the lawn to waddle about eating daisy heads. We enjoyed feasts of homemade baking, a festive shared dinner, and someone even thought to bring the coffee plunger. Well-done team!

Leaving the island was as adventurous and fun as the arrival, with groups relayed out to the boat in the rubber ducky. It seemed we were the last bus leaving as everybody jumped aboard to head for the mainland except for Leigh and her two lovely children, who stood on the shore to wave us good-bye, no doubt thinking, 'Fabulous, the island to ourselves at last!'

Thanks so much to Lyn Wade for organising our fantastic experience. I know everybody in our group was touched in their own way by the magic of Hauturu, its history, its journey and the stories it has to tell.

Sandy Meharry



November working group

WORKING WEEKENDS AUTUMN 2014

Two working weekends are planned for Autumn 2014.

Target dates (weather permitting):

29/30 March (back-up date 5/6 April)

26/27 April (back-up date 3/4 May)

All participants need to be reasonably fit and agile and prepared to cope, if necessary, with a wet and difficult landing over large and slippery boulders. We will do a variety of jobs for the rangers plus there will be time for walking, bird-watching and botanising.

For further details and to register your interest in either of these weekends, please contact Sandra Jones, ph 09 817 2788, or email info@littlebarrierisland.org.nz

The closing date for enquiries is Sunday 9th February 2014.

Hauturu Supporters Trust

The Trust was established in 1997 to help support conservation and research activities on Te Hauturu-o-Toi / Little Barrier Island. Membership of the Trust is by subscription and donations are also welcome. All donations and subscriptions are directed towards activities of benefit to Hauturu.

Your subscription ensures that you receive *Hauturu*, the Trust newsletter, twice a year, bringing you up-to-date news from and about the island. Copies of past issues are available on request.

If you wish to become a supporter, make a donation or offer help in some other way, please contact the Trust secretary Sandra Jones, phone: 09 817 2788.

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THE TRUST

Patron: Ruud Kleinpaste

Trustees: Warren Gibb (Chair), Evan Hamlet, Ray Stone, Lyn Wade, Dr Matt Rayner, Mary Binney, Nicola Legat, David Stone, Geoff Drew, Ruud Kleinpaste

Advisory Trustees: Bob Cranfield, Annie Whittle, Dr Philip Yates

Scientific Panel: Sandra Anderson (UoA), Dr Jacqueline Beggs (UoA), Ewen Cameron (Auckland Museum), Dr Nicola Nelson (VUW), Dr Kevin Parker (Massey U, Albany), Dr James Russell (UoA), David Seldon (UoA)

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