



FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INCORPORATED

PO BOX 54 101, MANA

Newsletter Number 24

May 2005

Hi Folks

We are about to embark on yet another Planting Season on Mana Island, the 18th year of such effort, and for FOMI the 8th year of our involvement. The good news is that there are fewer trees to plant this year than in the past, the bad news is that we are now interplanting - it takes longer to plant each tree. Let us hope that the weather gods treat us a little more kindly than last year.

We have had yet another AGM and there have only been some minor changes in your Committee for the forthcoming year. It was my pleasure to be re-elected as your President for yet another two year term. We have a new Secretary and member of the committee; we welcome Darlene Adams to the team. All other members of the Committee were re-elected apart from Vicky who resigned at the end of last year. Kelvin is taking on the responsibility for organising the planting trips this year, which begin this month.

We have a number of exciting things planned for this year, and some have already taken place, such as the Green Gecko, released last week, another release of the flax weevils, a planned release of the spear grass weevil and the major project for early next year, the first release of fluttering shearwater. This release has prompted consideration for a better infrastructure for this and future releases and FOMI have been fund raising for the necessary field station and sound system. We are currently evaluating the purchase of a mobile field station in the form of a caravan to be located at the site of whatever projects are in hand, and a sound system covering a different part of the Island planned for the Shearwater release. We have so far been successful in receiving a generous contribution towards these costs from the Mana Community Grants Foundation (who incidentally also contributed to the Kakariki transfer at this time last year).

The fantastic news is that Kakariki, Takahe, Robin, Brown Teal and Flax weevil have all had record breeding seasons and all species are doing exceptionally well.

On that note I am happy to stop but hope you will all continue your support physically, by membership or donation to what is shaping up to be the best year yet.

Cheers

Brian

President

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The planting season is about to begin

Planting days are every Saturday and Sunday from 21 May until 31 July

Places available for 30 people.

The boat leaves Fisherman's Wharf at 9am

Phone Kelvin on 238 3194 (Work) or 235 6261 (Home)

Other opportunities

Burrow preparation (7 people) - 13 and 14 August

Yellow Crown box cleaning (7 people) - 10 and 11 September

For more information, email: contactus@manaisland.org.nz

Island News

Our indefatigable Ranger Jason is leaving us! He is to move to the DoC Waikanae Office working in the Visitor Assets area (the job he spent 11 weeks doing recently). He has returned to the Island temporarily and will stay until his replacement is found. We'll miss him!

During Jason's absence, Tony did a great job keeping the Island and its occupants afloat as well as keeping visitors, staff and volunteers happy. He worked through Christmas but got away for a couple of weeks in the New Year. Since then he has been busy mowing the lawns and tracks with the ride-on mower. Temporary staff, Grant and Erica did their tour of duty getting rid of weeds then Erica went off sunbathing in the Abel Tasman Park, swimming in Nelson Lakes and disciplining trampers that were not on tracks. As for Grant, he is still up to his neck with minor adjustments to his house in Pukerua Bay. Nio moved to the Chathams to work on predator control in a new reserve there.

Recently, both Tony and Jason have been working on next year's business plan. This happened to coincide with the better weather when they thought they should have been outside. Murphy's Law.

Annual servicing has taken place on the generator, the tractor and the motorbike. Undersea Construction also repaired the slipway and tried unsuccessfully to find a missing mooring.

There are now so many Takahe chicks it is hard to keep up with them! The season is going very well but it is too early to predict the success rate because some of the chicks are still very young. They are very lucky to be alive. If it wasn't for the help of FOMI volunteers helping staff to divert the floodwaters away from their nest, which had water running right around it, they would have perished. Everyone was up to their middles digging in the swollen streams, diverting the water away from their normally high-and-dry nest. A couple of days later, one chick had hatched but one egg was missing. However, two weeks later, it was a happier story - there were two chicks. Hopefully the parents will be able to raise both. The chicks are with the Lockwood gang with three dads and two mums, so they have a good chance. Keep your fingers crossed! All the other chicks managed to survive the flood and there are currently eight chicks in total on the Island.

The first fledgling Fairy Prion chick from the first release in 2002 has returned! See the article on the next page,

The lonesome kiwi can often be seen after dark on a mown track pretending to be a hedgehog.

The Yellow Crowned Parakeets are soaking up the sun and the attentions given by FOMI.

In January, Island staff did a survey of the Brown Teal around the Island, with Dave Barker and his faithful companion Gus the dog. Sixteen birds were caught over two days, fourteen of these were unbanded. An additional four were seen but were not caught. This means there are 20 known teal plus the unhandled ones on Jason's pond and any others that were not found. The total number of known adults and juveniles is at least 22, which is a great result. It is good to see so many unbanded birds on the Island, obviously bred from the Mana flock.

Visitor numbers were well down last year with only 869 people visiting the Island. This can all be attributed to possibly the worst boating season for a very long time. 2005 started off with better weather and there were a total of 121 visitors in January.

Mrs Heather May recently visited Mana Island for the first time and sent us an account of her day -

MANA ISLAND TE MANA O KUPE KI AOTEAROA

Upon waking, I heard the weather report on my radio. It was going to change to the south. Not taking any chances to go to church on my mobility scooter I settled back for a quiet day.

Thinking back, about the mobility scooter, it had bucked me off while taking a sharp turn. I say it bucked me because when I came to my senses it was still standing on three wheels while I'd hit the tar seal road (right outside the doctors surgery). This incident had happened just two days prior to Xmas and amongst lesser injuries I was still nursing a soft tissue problem on the right shoulder. It still felt awkward to lift my right arm. But then on the 26th came the news of the Tsunami and it was hard to feel sorry for myself under these circumstances.

At 9am the phone rang. It was my daughter Pam. She said that she was going to visit Mana Island with her husband Ray, who was the electrician on call to fix a generator problem. And would I like to come too?

Pam knew I had wanted to visit Mana Island for years. I'd painted it many times with its captivating sunsets from my home in Plimmerton. We had a perfect view from our lounge window. After appreciating it for so long from afar I was keen to see it close at hand. With all its gullies and trees it would be a great opportunity to check my observations

To the phone call I said 'Yes'. To the weather forecast, well I'd just have to trust Ray on that one. Pam added, 'We'll pick you up by 11am and don't forget your gumboots and wet weather gear!' What was I in for? Looking out to sea, it was a little choppy, maybe a half metre swell. Couldn't see much activity on the water.

We arrived at the Mana Marina to see the boat belonging to the Department of Conservation moored ready and waiting. A few Friends of Mana Island were already on board and the captain/DoC Ranger Jason Christensen. Jason knew how to negotiate the waves and in quick time we arrived at Mana Island. I saw the boat shed and the boat cradle sitting in the water waiting for Jason to drive the boat on to it. To the left of the boat shed was the remains of the old wharf. All of a sudden there's a jolt and we're being winched up into the boat shed. The reason for not having a wharf is an important part of keeping the Island pest-free. If people landed willy nilly all sorts of undesirables could be let loose on this protected environment.

We walked about a hundred metres to the visitor's accommodation building. I'm told that in the 1970's the Island was protected for sheep breeding and experimental purposes. Although it's still protected the Conservationists have taken over the Island to create an environment for wildlife. The accommodation building looked rugged, with kitchen bunkrooms and handy conveniences. Originally there was not general accommodation here and this building was used for operations and laboratory procedures. Opposite this building were storage sheds and a workshop.

Time for a cuppa and lunch in the fair sized kitchen; we were introduced to Colin. Colin very graciously offered to be a guide for Pam and me. Ray was going to be very busy on the generator, so when Colin explained that he'd been busy all morning especially looking for parakeets and would be pleased for the break, we accepted his offer.

First stop, the plant nursery which was on the northern side of the visitors accommodation building. And what a delight to see. Originally a barn, Colin explained how the variety of native plants still in their juvenile state would be planted in parts of the Island by volunteers and DoC staff. I was only beginning to appreciate the thousands of hours DoC staff and FOMI had already put into this massive scheme as we began our tour.

Being in my early eighties (yes I forgot to tell you that bit up until now) I was concerned whether my worn ankles would survive the distance, but we didn't climb the hill (thank goodness) and moved mainly under the more mature trees around the wetlands that have been man-made for the wildlife. We saw two brown teal on a man-made lake, and at the waters edge, dry bushes of manuka placed as cover for their young to protect them from the harrier hawks. The brown teal ducks are fully protected. Also we saw a paradise duck on another man-made lake further around. The paradise ducks are protected but may be hunted in the open season (not on Mana Island of course). We passed three residential- style homes tucked away in bush. One of them belonging to Jason the ranger. Walking under the trees and seeing the bird life was so peaceful.

Finally we visited the Woolshed which holds parts of the oldest woolshed in New Zealand, with its old implements and posters giving it historical interest. Then back to the visitor's accommodation building for feet up and another cuppa. We were very grateful to Colin for giving us his time. By now we felt like the Friends of Mana Island too.

It was not 4pm and the tide was telling us it was time to go home. It was suggested that I have a ride to the boat shed with Jason on the quad bike. My sore ankles told me this was a good idea. The boat was winched down into the water, and then released. On the way back I felt a few bumps (wouldn't like a three metre swell). Then back to the Mana Marina.

Although we did not get to the top of the hill on the Island, I was able to view an aerial map. It is not the shape I thought it was. Now, when I look across the water to Mana, I will no longer think of it as just my long and skinny Island. Although I will always enjoy appreciating and painting its ever-changing beauty, it has become much more than that to me now. Upon closer inspection, it's my friendly Island teeming with life and a bright future.

Thank you Ray, Colin and Jason for a delightful and interesting trip. Also the weather for holding out. A special thanks to Pam for instigating the phone call in which she expected me to say no. I'm glad I said yes!

Statistics on Mana Island

- In days gone by it was a whaling station
- Mana Island lighthouse on the North end of the Island – 1863 shipped from London – 1877 finally extinguished on Mana – 1881 installed on Cape Egmont
- 1886 the Vella family commenced a 70 year lease
- 1893 was first temporarily and later permanently reserved for defence purposes, except for 10 acres which comprised the landing place reserve
- 1948 declared Crown Land and ceased to be defence reserve
- Once known as the Table Island due to its formation
- First sheep station in NZ
- Quarantine for sheep
- Highest point 217 ft
- More than 380,000 trees have been planted to date April 2005
- 400 native varieties of bush and other plants
- Estimated 5,000,000 mice were eradicated by laying poison in small 18 inch long corrugated plastic pipes

It gives me pleasure to present you with this report for the activities of the Friends of Mana Island for the Financial Year ending 31 December 2004. The AGM is a couple of months after the period in question, purely because the Accounts have to be finalised and audited, a process which takes a little while, depending on the quality of wine supplied to the Auditor.

For me it has been a very rewarding two-year term in office and that is mainly as a result of having a dedicated and enthusiastic Committee, who have applied their energies with great efficiency and successful outcomes.

The main achievements over the past year were the completion of the Fairy Prion release, the Parakeet release and monitoring, continuation of the planting programme, the progress on the historical front, the maintenance of our Website and the continuing search for sponsors and application for funds for specific projects.

The Fairy Prion three-year release programme has been completed and we have been rewarded with confirmation of a breeding colony establishing itself last year, including at least one released bird. Our expectations are high for this coming year.

The Parakeet project has a special place in my heart as I was privileged to join the capture team and participate in the release, which was an absolutely magic moment. To visit the Island several times since May and observe the Kakariki flying around, pairing up and recently identifying fledged young birds is a satisfying experience.

Whilst planting was a struggle last year because of unfavourable weather, we still managed a reasonable total in the ground, and observation of the success of the planting as a result of reasonably damp weather over summer, bodes well for their survival. We are of course, nearing the end of the 20 year programme and there will be reduced numbers, but higher quality demands made for the next year or two.

We must not forget the outstanding success, without the same high profile, of the Takahe, Robin and Brown Teal breeding programmes which have been at a record high this year.

The Historic Sub Committee is quietly beavering away, preparing a bibliography, a list and photographic record of artefacts and the commencement of an oral history.

We look forward to the future with a Fernbird census underway in Manawatu to establish the viability of a translocation of this species, and a commitment to release Fluttering Shearwater next year. Applications for funding are currently being scrutinised by some potential sponsors.

The mention of sponsors reminds me that we have a regular monthly sponsor in the form of Young Hill Cooper Limited, who are Environmental Consultants who operate out of Auckland and Wellington, and we are grateful for their support. We are at the moment in negotiation with another sponsor from Porirua and I hope for an outcome in the near future.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and co-operation we have had from DoC, for Ian Cooksley's regular input, and to those hermits from the Island, and we have had a few of those this year, particularly Jason, whose marriage to the Island is about to come to an end.

To close I would like to thank you all for your support for the past two years, and remind you of a comment made a few days ago by Colin Miskelly, that in a talk in 1996, of the 'possible' introductions on the list, we have succeeded in introducing ten since. North Island Robin, fairy prion, diving petrel, yellow crowned parakeet, speckled skink, spotted skink, Duvaucel's gecko, Wellington green gecko, flax weevil and brown teal. In addition four more are being actively progressed, Whitakers skink, speargrass weevil, fluttering shearwater and North Island fernbird. A great team effort.

A BIG THANK YOU TO THE MANA COMMUNITY TRUST

Most of us have had to occasionally endure unpleasant weather while working up on the plateau on Mana Island a long way from any shelter. Those days may now begin to recede into distant memory thanks to the generosity of the Mana Community Trust.

The Trust has recently granted the Friends \$10,000 towards the cost of a mobile field centre (ie a second-hand caravan) and a sound system for the fluttering shearwater transfer project.

Action is now underway to urgently buy a caravan, strengthen it and helicopter it over to Mana Island. It will then be gutted and fitted out, ready for use, hopefully before the end of the planting season. Any funds remaining will contribute towards the cost of the sound system.

This grant from the Trust is one of several in the past three years; the previous ones being for tree planting and the exceedingly successful yellow-crowned parakeet transfer project.

Fund-raising for the balance of the first year of the transfer project is continuing apace. In this regard, the Committee would like to record its profound appreciation for the support of two members who have donated \$1,000 and \$100 apiece towards this project. Besides removing some of our financial exposure, these contributions have an importance far exceeding their dollar value because they indicate to potential sponsors that FOMI members are so committed to the project that they are prepared to support it themselves.

NEW ADDITIONS

The nine adult and three baby green geckos recently released on Mana Island are expected to boost the species' population and add new genetics to the colonies.

The decline in green geckos on the mainland is thought to be due to predation by cats and rats. The revegetation on Mana has created extensive areas of forest that will provide habitat for these reptiles.

Green geckos are active both day and night and feed on insects, nectar, small berries and fruit.

SEE MANA'S NATURAL TREASURES

Eighteen years of hard work by the Department of Conservation and volunteers is now paying off for Mana Island. The takahe, robins and brown teal have all had bumper breeding seasons, as have the more common birds such as the fantails and kingfishers. Even the yellow-crowned parakeets that were only introduced to the Island last May have experienced a population explosion.

It is ironic that just when the Island is beginning to fulfil its potential as an attraction for visitors, the opportunities for most members of the public to enjoy its simple but unforgettable pleasures are diminishing. Last year, almost 15,000 trees were planted by groups and individuals organised by FOMI. This year, only 10,000 will need to be planted as the forest restoration project moves into its second year of the new approach of interfill planting involving such canopy trees as kahikatea, kohekohe, milk tree, wharangi and kaikomako.

Planting numbers will continue to drop over the next few years until such time as nature can be left to its own devices. While volunteers will still be needed for such tasks as species transfers and monitoring, and weeding, their involvement in the major community project, the planting programme, will probably diminish quickly over the next few years.

So if you want to see Mana Island's natural treasures and do something for the environment then volunteer for the planting programme by contacting contactus@manaisland.org.nz as soon as possible. Trips start on 21 May and run through to the end of July.