



FRIENDS OF MANA ISLAND INCORPORATED

PO BOX 54 101, MANA

Newsletter Number 29

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Hi Folks

Another planting season on Mana Island is over, and whilst the weather did its level best to prevent us achieving our target, the total planted by various means was almost 12,000. A great effort and thanks to all the volunteers and contractors who participated. Less than 50% of the planned trips made it to the Island, which is, or will be one of the major factors in providing convenient, reliable and safe public access to this very special environment.

We have a couple of current projects on the run. One is to refurbish the concrete gannets nesting on the Island in the faint chance that a spruced up bunch of birds will be more of an attraction than our previously overgrown dullards. We have a special relationship with Resene Paints who have generously given of their products and tools for the volunteers to hone their artistic skills.

We also have some weeding days scheduled, and this is not for the faint hearted. This is not pulling little weeds from a cultivated garden, but getting stuck into some species which are unwelcome on Mana. This is part of an ongoing DoC initiative to try and control the number of weeds naturally occurring which, if left uncontrolled, would smother the 20 years of planting which has gone before.

Early next year we embark on the second phase of the translocation of Fluttering Shearwater following up on the 40 transferred this year with double that number this summer. The good news is, at least for this generation of Flutterers, that their artificial burrows have been redesigned, re-located and renovated to a very high standard of comfort, including the removal of the "leaky homes" details which impacted on some residents earlier this year. Again many thanks to Barry and his team for the logistics of build a condominium of 100 homes in a couple of weekends.

As always the Friends of Mana Island (FOMI) are in need of donations and grants to carry out the various restoration projects which have been identified in the Plan produced almost 20 years ago. There will be many endangered species which have not been high enough in the priority list for DoC to have implemented. Our role is to monitor the plan and to provide funding so that when opportunities arise they can be fulfilled. Your support helps us meet the objective.

I trust that you and your friends and families have a great summer, and you all get to see a Takahe.

Cheers
Brian

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Volunteer Opportunities

Fancy a couple of days on Mana Island?
(There's always a catch — you have to work!)

There are some opportunities for a few people to go over midweek, either Monday to Wednesday or Wednesday to Friday. The work involved will be general weeding, tube pulling or Nursery work.

If you are interested, please contact Kelvin Hunt to discuss dates -

kelvin.hunt@police.govt.nz

or

kindregards@paradise.net.nz

Tel 238 3194 (wk) or 235 6261 (hm)

Island News from Grant

As I write this we are experiencing storm force southeast winds and rain. However, it is a chance to come in from the hills to do some domestics, make my bed (so the area manager doesn't sack me for being untidy) and write this note of recent events on Mana Island.

Tony and Hugh have now left: Tony to holiday in Fiji and Hugh to troll Lake Taupo for pest fish. Nio, the stalwart of the boxthorn programme has returned from working on the Chathams and is putting his mark on things. I have been working out here since the beginning of May sorting a few things out, putting in more water troughs for Takahe and planting trees. There are still a couple of gaps that could do with a Ngaio or two. The FOMI sponsored planting trips were often cancelled, due mostly to the difficult sea conditions, but all was not lost — I managed to plant 5,000 odd trees and we almost emptied the Nursery.

On her recent visit to Mana, our lovely ex-ranger Selena Brown helped me plant a range of Wellington district rare and threatened plants, among them Matagouri, to rival the diminishing boxthorn for prickliness. There are now small plantings of *Muehlenbeckia astonii*, *Rubus squarosa* (a type of bush lawyer), *Fuchsia perscandens* and *Coprosma ascarosa*. There is also a small plantation of a rare grass, *Trisetum antarcticum*, the seed for which was collected from just a couple of remnant wild plants on the Wellington coast by Barbara Mitcalfe.

The new location for the pending Fluttering Shearwater

transfer has been prepared by FOMI and OSNZ members. New artificial nest boxes were built by Barry Dent in his garage at home. He transported them to the Marina and then Hugh, Tony and I took them to the site on the Island. Helen Gummer supervised the installation. All is now ready for the transfer except for the sound system.



Artificial burrow site

A couple of months ago, Clare Duston (my helper for the weeding contract) spent a few days on Stevens Island tree planting with Reg Cotter and others. While they were there they searched the Fairy Prion colony and found three birds which were hand reared on Mana Island and have returned instead to Stevens. It may be construed that the majority of transferred birds have in fact returned to Stevens which would explain the low rate of return to Mana. Clare is now doing a few night time checks of the Mana colony in search of Fairy prions — ever hopeful. She has found one bird so far.

The real success story is of course the yellow crowned Kakariki which are now abundant throughout the Island. Groups of three and four are often seen in flight and heard calling.

Clare spotted six new Brown Teal chicks on one of the wetland ponds last week.

The Diving Petrel colony which was discovered near Lance's Gully in 2004 was checked last week and has breeding occupants. Of course the Takahe are doing their thing with amorous breeding behaviour being shamelessly displayed.

Some members of FOMI stayed over one weekend to begin the refurbishment of our experimental concrete Gannet colony. Before his departure Hugh sprayed the grass on a site adjacent to the existing colony and now the models are being cleaned, repaired and repainted. The girl birds are having special eyeliner and a sexy look painted on. Maybe this time it will work.

Trevor Thompson and Api Ngatangata spent six weeks knocking back Boxthorn. This was followed up with some helicopter spraying of some of the more difficult sites.

Clare and I will be here till the end of November searching the entire Island for weeds, digging out, cutting, stump treating and removing any seed heads in order to prevent reseeding. It is evident that the effort over the last three seasons has paid off as there are almost no mature plants of any species left and although the numbers of each weed species are still significant, the size is down to seedlings. The fast maturing species such as Tree Lucerne and Tree Mallow require more regular follow-up.

All in all things are looking pretty good on Mana Island. Nio, Clare and I look forward to seeing more FOMI people out here to help with the great projects.

Gannet Makeover



The old Gannet Colony



Make-up artist Kelvin

The Gannets have been out in the cold for far too long. They have gotten dull and shabby and what is more they are not feeding very well. Their guano has been overtaken by grass, weeds and taupata. No self respecting gannet flying past will be attracted to such a low life colony. FOMI to the rescue. A pleading case to Resene brought tears to their eyes and they could not resist temptation to provide the materials to recoat the concrete gannets and decorate part of the Western face of Mana with white "lumbersider" guano. The task is not yet finished, weather again interferences, but they look better already.

Three gannets have already been sighted in the area checking the quality of the work.

Sponsors Finally Get to Mana

We are fortunate indeed to have some sponsors who contribute monthly to our coffers with specific objectives in mind. One such sponsor are Hill Young Cooper, Environmental, Resources and Futures Consultants who provide support for the Planting Programme. We finally got a group of them over to Mana in August, the third attempt. After a trip in the Mana Ranger and a briefing, they walked up the hill for an inspection of the Fluttering Shearwater condominium, and to plant some trees and get their hands dirty. It was a fine day in the midst of some rubbish either side. As you can see, the group enjoyed themselves and they were totally blown away by the Takahe.



Hill Young Cooper group

Your Committee

Brian Paget (President), Doreen Douglas (Vice President/Newsletter), Darlene Adams (Secretary), Jan Barnes (Treasurer), Kelvin Hunt (Volunteer Coordinator), Barry Dent (Projects), Paul Quinn, Aka Arthur (Kamatua), Tama Coker (Iwi Representative), Jason Christensen (DoC), Ian Cooksley (DoC)

The Home Nursery Group and an Australian Vagrant

by Colin Ryder

No, folks, I am not confused and I am not referring to a swaggy. I am referring to a self-introduced Australian immigrant which is barely hanging on in New Zealand.

Atriplex cinerea (Grey Salt Bush) is a Category B nationally endangered shrub which has been listed in the Mana Island restoration plan as a priority for reintroduction to the island. It used to be found in Wellington but is now extinct in the region. Its last remaining New Zealand strongholds are in Nelson although there are doubtless countless billions in its home country. One of its Management needs is to "re-establish in Wellington." I did some sleuthing and found a Nursery in Auckland which was holding four female plants only. (Apparently, all plants in cultivation are female and the person I talked to was very interested in acquiring some males).

My enquiries led me to Shannel Courtney of the Nelson Conservancy. He has sent cuttings from plants with both male and female flowers to Gary James of the Wellington Branch of Forest and Bird's Home Nursery Group for propagation.

As its common name suggests, this species is salt-tolerant and it is found, in very low numbers, on boulder banks and islets in Nelson. Once Gary and his team have built up our stocks to sufficient numbers, we will transplant them in suitable locations on Mana Island.

This little project follows on from the Home Nursery Group supplying several regionally rare and endangered Wellington natives earlier this year to the Island, including *matagouri* (the local prostrate variety), *Fuchsia perscandens*, *Muehlenbeckia astonii* and *Rubus squarrosus* (leafless lawyer). The Group is now specialising in the propagation of "niche" species rather than those for bulk planting which are being raised in huge numbers by the Wellington City Council.

Thank you to Shannel and Gary for making this project happen.

To Mana Via A Tragic Shipwreck

The Vella family were farmers on Mana Island for more than 70 years. Mariano Vella, was an Austrian who first came to New Zealand in 1880. His first wife tragically died in her twenties and a few years later he went back to his homeland, Dalmatia and married Elizabeth. Their journey back to New Zealand 1894 was not without incident. The SS Wairapa on which they were travelling struck a reef north west of Great Barrier Island and capsized. A hundred and twenty six lives were lost.

For eight hours they clung to pieces of wreckage until they succeeded in climbing back on board the ship which was still fast on the rocks. They were eventually rescued by local Maori.



The Vella Family

This was not the end of their troubles however. On the day that they finally reached Pliimmerton, they discovered that the man who had been looking after the Island in their absence was drowned, and their boat lost with him.

After recovering from these disasters, Mariano built a modest homestead and got on with the job of farming. He cleared the 525 acres of gorse and blackberry and pasture grew well.

In 1929, Mariano transferred the lease to his son Andrew who continued the successful development of the farm until 1951 when he died.

The Vella family's association with Mana Island ceased in 1953 when the lease was transferred to John Gault. From 1973 it has been run by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and then Department of Conservation. The last stock were removed in 1986.