



Matiu Matters

March 2006

From our Chairman

Kia ora koutou, Greetings to you in 2006,

The effect of flaky asbestos roofs and cladding on the Island's buildings has had effects on many activities on the Island, including production of our newsletters. However the wait has been worth it because this newsletter has good news to report about opening the Island to overnight visits, truly one of Wellington's most magical experiences.

Also we are able to report on two exciting undertakings by Matiu Trust and the Friends. They are the solar-powered sound system to attract pakaha/fluttering shearwaters to nest on the Island, and the relocation of toutowhai /North Island robins from Kapiti happening **on 5th April**. Increasing the numbers of New Zealand birds on the Island makes involvement in the Trust's work so exciting. They help too in attracting the high numbers of visitors to the Island over the summer.

So tell your friends about these projects, and encourage them to become a Friend – we would love their help. Come along to the **Trust AGM on 10th April** to hear of likely future activities, and meet other members.

Mark Te One, Chair

UpDate from David Moss

Asbestos removal work is done!

Work started on Matiu Somes Island on the 13th of September with a dramatic start. The contractors travelled by barge from Seaview in a well-organised and sparkingly clean flotilla. As part of the biosecurity measures all the vehicles and equipment went through a process of steam cleaning, rat baiting and / or being sealed in drums. One result was that many of the truck drivers commented that their vehicles had never been so clean. The Wellington-based barge was pre-baited and declared rat-free prior to departure. Having to work either side of a high spring tide the unloading went well in near-perfect weather conditions.

The removal of all the asbestos cement roofing and wall claddings from the island has been progressing well despite some wild weather events.

But: although the Island is still open for day visits, the area around all the buildings is closed to the public until further notice. A survey of the level of contamination is being carried out by Montgomery Watson Harza (MWH) and to determine how to manage the risk. So the re-opening is also on hold.

Birds

Three main work programmes involving birds are coming up in the next few months. A solar-powered sound system is in the process of being installed to attract a range of seabirds to the island.

Primarily aimed at **attracting fluttering shearwaters / pakaha /Puffinus gavia**, the broadcast will also include other species' nesting calls, in an attempt to encourage them to take up residence on the island. Fluttering shearwaters /pakaha are common in Wellington Harbour and are often seen feeding in large flocks. They come in from the Marlborough Sounds to feed in the harbour.

Our annual **gull egg control programme** is undergoing a change of procedure as we look to using less toxic methods. We are going to trial three different methods in different areas of the Island. Rather than use Formalin injected into the eggs, we will trial a method used extensively overseas of oiling the eggs to seal them and thus stop their development. We will also try pricking the egg to introduce air, and the simplest method of giving the egg a vigorous shake.

This work is part of our contracted work supported by Wellington International Airport Ltd which provides financial support to the Island restoration programme. We have reduced the numbers from 1500 breeding pairs on the harbour islands to around 350 pairs. This has meant Wellington Airport has gone from one of the worst airports for bird strike or near-miss incidents to one of the best. We aim to keep the gull population at around the current level.

Robins / Toutouwai are on their way! We are releasing 20 North Island Robins / Toutouwai early in April to allow them time to settle before breeding. They will be sourced from Kapiti Island as were the Kakariki. See separate announcement. The transfer has been helped too by the generous contribution of \$2000 from the Lower Hutt Branch of Forest and Bird towards the costs.

Kakariki have been breeding from early August with the result that many are flying around with no bands on their legs. They are becoming increasingly confident and are often on the ground feeding.

Our visiting **falcon / karearea** has been mainly eating blackbirds over the winter and so far there has been no sign that any kakariki have been taken.

Beasts

Tuatara were seen doing a fair bit of digging around the Island and they have moved into some new areas. These are good signs for a hopeful breeding season but with a species that takes up to two years for the eggs to hatch we will be awaiting future developments for some time.

During the recent "weigh in" of tuatara, we found all the recaptured tuatara had significant weight gains with the best one prompting the Victoria University researcher to question whether we had released some Stephens Island tuatara as well. The tuatara in question was released in 1998 weighing 330 grams and was weighed in at a massive 840 grams. Considering they usually only get to 500 grams on North Brothers Island this is an impressive size. They are obviously enjoying their diet of weta and beetles. Despite its massive size, it was not obese and just goes to show the benefits of a change of scenery.

The **forest geckos** seem to have settled in well. Some have been seen using the tree huts provided and are co-habiting with both our weta species and also common geckos.

Karo busting

The Wellington Karo Busting team have been chomping at the bit to return to the island after their successful trips in March and April 2005 when they cleared karo plants of small and large sizes from the well-established bush cover as follows.

AUSTRALearn is an exchange programme that brings students from the USA to study in New Zealand. A weekend of Karo busting was organised for 30th April 2005, but the discovery of flaking asbestos cancelled this trip.

Karo busters found Matiu steep but probably not quite as steep



as this photo suggests.

However, on 17th September 2005, 10 enthusiastic students headed for the Island, with a not too pleasant forecast. David and Jo took them on a tour of the island introducing them to some of the special biodiversity aspects and history of the Island. Then they got to work on removing Karo from the north-eastern side of the island. Some quite large seed trees were removed with great satisfaction.

"I really enjoyed holding the giant weta but also got a sense of achievement from cutting down large Karo trees," Susan said.

The weather held out and after returning to the city Jo accompanied them on a night walk at Karori Sanctuary. The evening chorus and glow worms' glen were enchanting. The aerial displays from the Kaka, and Kiwi calls, rounded off the day. On Sunday morning we woke to a classic Wellington southerly, with swell, rain and wind. Impressively after our exhausting Saturday, all 10 students made their way to the ferry in various versions of suitable clothing! However, they were fairly pleased when I cancelled the trip.

"I gained a greater awareness and appreciation for New Zealand's native animals and the importance of preserving that natural history before it is lost," said Jaynann. Australearn are now hoping to run this programme twice a year.

Watch this space for future weed-busting action, and if you have ideas for the re-opening celebration, contact:

Jo Greenman,
Community Relations Ranger, Poneke Area Office,
P.O. Box 5086, Wellington
ph: (04) 470 8416 Fax: (04) 499 0077
e mail: jgreenman@doc.govt.nz

Island Re-opening Programme

Once the asbestos removal is completed and any remaining risk is minimised, it will be time to celebrate and look forward to a bright future on the Island.

Events may include:

A friend's day - a little work and a lot of BBQ!!
Karo busting weekend, North Island Robin Release,
LEARNZ, public open day during Seaweeek,
Matiu/Somes EE Resource Teacher Workshop

For more information on DoC activities contact:

David Moss,
Field Centre Supervisor,
Matiu Somes Island Field Centre,
Poneke Area Office, DoC, PO Box 5086, WN
Phone. (04) 5686 555; Fax. (04) 5688 688
Mobile. 0274 477 488

Sound System for Fluttering Shearwaters

Thanks to a generous grant from Pub Charity, the nocturnal welcoming calls of fluttering shearwaters/pakaha will again ring out from Matui/Somes after a gap of several hundred years. Yes, the Trust is funding an acoustic attraction system for this common, but important seabird.

The fluttering shearwater is a gull-sized brown and white seabird common around New Zealand coastal waters. Its main breeding areas are on islands off Northland, in the Bay of Plenty, and in the outer Marlborough Sounds.

The Matiu/Somes Island Charitable Trust intends to re-establish a breeding colony of fluttering shearwaters as part of the island's ecological restoration. As a first step, it will install a solar-powered sound system, at the proposed colony site, that broadcasts calls of predominately fluttering shearwaters, but also other burrowing seabirds such as diving petrels. It will 'call' from dusk till dawn throughout the year to give the impression of an active colony being present.

This system will be used on its own for several years in an endeavour to encourage some of the many fluttering shearwaters feeding in the harbour during their breeding season in autumn and winter, to take up residence.

In the event that the sound system by itself does not attract sufficient birds to form a breeding colony, then consideration will be given to transferring almost fully-grown chicks to the island and hand-feeding them to the time of fledging. (This technique has already proved successful in establishing a colony of fluttering shearwaters on Maud Island in the Marlborough Sounds.) A similar sound system on Mana Island has helped attract transferred diving petrels and fairy prions back, and also immigrants from other colonies.

The objectives of the first year of the proposed fluttering shearwater project are to:

- (a) begin the establishment of a fluttering shearwater colony on Matiu/Somes Island;
- (b) involve tangata whenua (through the Wellington Tenth Trust), sponsors and volunteers in an innovative project which will have important conservation outcomes, as well as the ability to attract strong media interest; and
- (c) add to the attraction of the Island as a regional eco-tourism destination.

Why are we doing it?

Burrowing seabirds, such as the fluttering shearwaters, are foundation species on many New Zealand islands, providing major nutrient inputs (droppings, regurgitations, and corpses) for terrestrial ecosystems, and habitat (burrows) for many invertebrates and reptiles. Colonies of such species as the fluttering shearwater (*Puffinus gavia*)

and diving petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*) on Matiu/Somes Island will help ensure the ongoing success of many other restoration projects, including re-introductions of threatened plants, reptiles, and invertebrates.

So basically we are relying on these species to provide free fertiliser. Just remember to wear a hat at night when all those seabirds start flying in (hopefully)!!

Details for further information on projects

Matiu/Somes Charitable Trust,
Colin Ryder (460 3325 or 0210 383 655)

Department of Conservation
Peter Simpson or Rob Stone (472 5821)

Donations to bird relocation or other projects can also be made to:

The Matiu/Somes Charitable Trust,
c/o Wellington Tenth Trust,
PO Box 535, Wellington

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MATIU CHARITABLE TRUST

5.30pm Monday 10th April
at Wellington Tenth Trust,
9 Pipitea Street, Thorndon

Friends are cordially invited to come along and hear what future activities of the Trust and you are likely to be involved in, & shared nibbles

LEARNZ

The first week of June saw the LEARNZ teacher Audrie and her camera man spend three days on the Island. 172 schools across New Zealand have signed up for this programme to learn about Matiu's biodiversity, history and community involvement. The pupils stay at school and follow Audrie's field trip online, via a photographic diary, video clips and real time audio conferences with guest speakers. These included George Gibbs, Reg Cotter, Ray Smith, Clair Brown and Apple the dog, Ron and Angela Freeston, Richard Nester, Rob Stone, David Moss, Jo Greenman and Dave Wrightson from Kapiti. LEARNZ are hoping to run the trip again in 2006

If you want to find out more check out the Website www.learnz.org.nz and there you will probably see footage of Audrie at Mt Cook National Park. (where she was spied at Mueller Hut recently by its volunteer wardens, Friends of Matiu Jan and Arnold Heine).

Newsletters by email: if you prefer we can email these to you (will reduce the effort preparing them for post). Please email janheine@xtra.co.nz to make it happen, with your email address.

ACTIVITIES OF MATIU FOREST & BIRD

The number one nursery is full at present with 5000 plants.

Planting days for 2006

28th May, 18th June, 2nd July, 16th July, 30th July, 3rd September and 17th September.

A maximum of 20 persons per planting day is the most manageable size for a group.

Please contact **Alex Kettles on 569 6208** to arrange a trip.

Robins will be released in early April (see separate announcement) and hopefully Wellington Green Geckos will also be liberated soon on the island.

Future plantings

Locally sourced canopy tree species such as Kohekohe, Nikau and Rata will be propagated for future planting among the existing colonising species. Also progressing is the rare and endangered native garden.

The wetland

This is also planned for the future, and the committee will advocate for NIWA to do a professional design that will incorporate a hydrologist's report.

In preparation we look forward to propagating the *Baumea*, *Bolboschoenous*, *Eleocharis* and *Schoenoplectus* species of local provenance for this future wetland to demonstrate the wide range of such lesser known wetland plants.

Thank you for your support

Fred Allen and Stan Butcher

The Robins' return

The release of 20 Robins is planned for **Wednesday 5th April**, after their trip from Kapiti and arrival by the 2pm East by West ferry. It will be low-key ceremony with a blessing for the birds and their new life on the Island, followed by immediate release.

You are most welcome to join in the happy event but let Rob Stone know so he can co-ordinate 'things'.

