

# Matiu Really Matters

February 2007



## Editor has a say

Welcome to an exciting 2007 New Year on Matiu/Somes Island where much has happened since the last newsletter, and where much is gearing up to happen.

The main impetus must surely come from the removal of the asbestos and replacement of the roofs of the main buildings on the island. Once more people can use the island for overnight stays when they can take part in more volunteer activities like karo busting, extreme weeding, and planting, for longer hours. Although you have to work more, most would argue that you are more rewarded for those efforts. The overnight option also has the deeper effect of creating closer ties with the island, more at one with the land.

Because, overnighing gives those wonderful times about dawn and sunset, when the kingfisher calls, and the parakeets, robins and seabirds home in for the night. Hopefully the tuatara will show themselves, while the korora (little blue penguins) get on with their busy noisy night lives.

We urge you to take advantage of these intangible assets of the island and join us for some of the activities that we will keep you informed about. The subscription is not much (\$5 individual; \$20 family; \$50 corporate) and keep in touch.

*At our next meeting the Trust will discuss possible new projects it could undertake.*

***And we would like your input please*** – email [janheine@xtra.co.nz](mailto:janheine@xtra.co.nz) or phone 04-562 8833.

You may like to send donations or subscriptions (p.6) to **Matiu/Somes Island Charitable Trust, C/o Wellington Tenth Trust, PO Box 536, Wellington**

## Wildlife among 'guests' at planting anniversary bash

Native wildlife were among the "guests" at the party to celebrate the 25-year effort that has gone into cloaking Wellington's Matiu/Somes Island with native forest.

Kakariki chattered, giant weta emerged from the undergrowth, inquisitive robins perched on pathways, and ornate skinks were freed at an event on 5<sup>th</sup> November to celebrate the island's ecological transformation.

The planting project was initiated by a team of Forest & Bird volunteer planters affectionately known as



"**Mum's and Dad's army**" (see p.2).

More than 98,000 native trees planted by volunteers have provided habitat for threatened native animals, including tuatara, that have been released onto the island over the past decade.

Thanks to the dedication of numerous individuals, groups and organisations, Matiu/Somes Island is now one of Wellington's conservation treasures, managed by DOC as a historic and scientific reserve since 1995.

More than 130 people associated with the island attended the event. They included representatives from Forest and Bird, Eastbourne Forest Rangers, Matiu/Somes Charitable Trust, Tenth Trust, Ornithological Society, Coastguard, Harbour Police, Victoria University of Wellington, Marine Archaeological Association of NZ, Hutt City Council, and

Great Wellington Regional Council, along with karo busting volunteers, ex-MAF quarantine station employees, people involved in species transfers, and historians involved with the island.

They planted trees, helped install fluttering shearwater burrows, enjoyed guided tours of the quarantine buildings and reminisced over photographs and newspaper clippings documenting the project.

Matiu/Somes first caught the eye of Lower Hutt Forest and Bird members from the Maungaraki kitchen of Ron and Angela Freeston in 1979, as they pondered exciting new venues for their weekend tramping trips. As an animal quarantine station run by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries it was then strictly off limits to the public.

“But with determination, persistence and goodwill of the officer in charge and the launchmaster (who happily was a Forest and Bird member), we were granted permission to visit the spotted shag and little blue penguin nesting sites”, says Angela.

Several subsequent trips and a building of relationships with MAF staff led to a mutual desire to modify the bare windswept island by planting native trees. There was no shortage of volunteers when planting began in July 1981. Plant nurseries were established on the island, work parties visited every fortnight and there were mass plantings at weekends about six times a year. The volunteers also eradicated rats and mice, and controlled weeds.

DOC acting Wellington conservator Jeff Flavell said “Mum’s and Dad’s Army” had invested more than 100,000 volunteer hours in the island, transforming bare paddocks to a “thriving, loved and admired island for nature, heritage and celebrating our culture”.

“You can be rightly proud of your achievements and the Department of Conservation salutes you.”

The planting programme has wound down now that the pioneer plants such as ngaio, taupata and koromiko are established.

Successional planting of such species as totara and miro is not so labour intensive.

*Sue Galbraith*

## **Karobusting**

Despite a poor weather forecast on October 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 11 VUW exchange students from across the USA made the journey across to the Island. The programme started in September 2005 but because the island had been closed this was the first *Australearn* group to spend the night on the Island. They painted a section of the bull pen fence in preparation for the celebrations, dug several burrows for the fluttering shearwaters, removed karo and mallow from the west coast, and completed a beach clean of the same coast.

Unfortunately rough sea conditions forced them to leave early on the Sunday.

“This was wonderful, I am so glad I did it. Exactly what I was hoping to gain from coming to New Zealand”, one student commented.

On 28–29 October, the 14 local Karobusters returned for their first overnight trip since early 2005. They also completed a section of the bull pen fence and then headed off to tackle the Karo. I would like to thank *David Cox* for taking over the organising of this group who are enthusiastic and fun to spend the weekend with. These groups worked across most sections of the Island above the track and this has made a real difference to the mix of the bush. A group will be getting together to discuss how the removal of other areas where Karo is more dominant will take place.

*Jo Greenman*

2007 dates so far:

*Australearn*

28/29 April

22/23 September

*Karobusting*

17/18 February



## **New Visitor Centre and Matiu/Somes T-shirts**

The DOC Wellington Visitor Centre has moved out of the Old Government building. A new purpose-built centre is under construction below the new Head Office, "Conservation House" on Manners Street. In the meantime they are co-located with *Mainly Tramping*, 2 Manners Street.

### ***New DOC Wellington Visitor Centre***

#### ***Contact details:***

Phone 04 3847770 Fax 04 384777

The new Matiu/Somes T-Shirts are on sale at the DOC Wellington Visitor Centre. The range of styles include long-sleeved (\$45), classic and fitted (\$35), and kids (\$25) Ts, several colours and sizes.

## **Asbestos**

The asbestos removal programme has finished and all the clean-up work required has been completed. This has allowed the public areas on the island to return to normal operations and all public areas are open to the public. The only thing that may be noticed to the public is that in a few sites at some drain outfalls are signs advising the public that there may be asbestos runoff within the immediate area of the sign. These sites are not easily reached by the public and are more likely to be encountered by volunteers and staff working off the track. An asbestos plan has been written and this is available for viewing on the island. ***Peter Simpson***

***Forest & Bird house is again available for Conservation groups to stay overnight. Contact the Accommodation Officer, PO Box 31 194, Lower Hutt. Charge is \$20/person/night or \$40 minimum.***

### **Friends of Matiu annual membership**

(January to December):

Adult \$20; Corporate \$50; Life

member \$200;

Family \$30; School/ Library \$25

## **New Staff**

Two staff members have been appointed to the island for a term of 3 years as a posting.

*Matt Sidaway* has been appointed to one position. He is currently employed on the island as a temporary staff member helping out until the positions were filled permanently. Matt came to us with a background working with DOC in Southland Conservancy on temporary projects on Stewart Island and the Owaka region.

*Jo Greenman* has been appointed to the other position. Jo is well known to you as our Programme Manager Community relations based in the Poneke Area Office. Jo sees this as an opportunity not to be missed to work in a special and interesting place while working with the community. Her husband *Iain*, will also be based on the Island. Jo will be the "lead" ranger.

Matt has already started in his new role and Jo starts on 5<sup>th</sup> February. Several challenges face Jo and Matt, not the least is progressing the designing and setting up of some interpretative material, wrestling with some infrastructure problems and continuing working with the many volunteers. *Richard Anderson* returns to the mainland and will work on projects mainly up the Kapiti Coast after helping out for several months on his return from leave without pay. ***Peter Simpson***

## **New Signs**

The new "Welcome to Matiu/Somes Island" sign are installed down by the wharf and work is progressing on the production of a sign telling the story of the Lighthouse. We are currently looking at different designs for the supporting hardware to find something that is both aesthetically pleasing and robust in the rather harsh marine environment that characterises the island's south end. New signs about the need for bag checking are also coming to both wharves soon.

***David Moss***

## Our North Island robins

Many people visiting or working on the island have enjoyed the company of the friendly and inquisitive north island robins that were transferred from Kapiti Island in April 2006.

Closely watched by a dedicated team of volunteers and DOC staff, the 21 birds settled in well and within a week were seen from the wharf to the lighthouse.



Since the release, post-translocation survival has been high with all but five birds accounted for at the start September. (It's considered normal to expect a 30% mortality for transferred passerines in the first three months.)

The first breeding season has had its ups and downs with some unexplained nest



failures and the deaths of two adult birds, but in total 12 chicks have successfully fledged from 12 nests.

All the new additions to the Matiu robin population have a purple colour band above a metal band on their left leg, while the original birds have a red colour band above a metal band on either their left or right leg. (All birds have two colour bands on the leg without the metal band.) So keep your eye out and say hello to the newest members of the Matiu/ Somes Island family.

### Some interesting happenings during the season....

One female left her mate feeding their first fledgling, and snuck off next door, hatching three chicks with the male in the next territory.

A family of two fledglings and their mother were left to fend for themselves when the

male broke his leg and died while under anesthetic. Amazingly the male from the next-door territory, who had lost his mate and chicks in mysterious circumstances (the two chicks were found dead in the nest and the female hasn't been seen since), adopted the family and started feeding the fledglings. This new pair then hatched two chicks of their own down near the lighthouse.

Finally one pair near the junction of the workshop and circuit tracks have somehow managed to hatch three blackbird chicks. The only way we can explain this is that the female blackbird died shortly after laying the eggs and the female robin, who had three infertile clutches during the season, found the nest and started incubating. The two robins are now working double time to feed three very large hungry mouths.

### Season stats for the robins ...

12 nests, 26 eggs, 17 chicks, 12 fledglings from 8 birds.

Thanks to all the volunteers who have helped with the robin monitoring. A special note of appreciation goes to *Annette Harvey* who has donated many hours of her time and provided expert knowledge throughout the project.

### Ornate skinks

On the day of the 25-year Forest and Bird celebrations, over 60 people managed to drag themselves away from the band and lunch tent to witness the release of 26 Ornate skinks onto Matiu/Somes Island.

The skinks were salvaged from properties in Wadestown and Kelburn and included many individuals caught, and amazingly brought home alive, by Kelly Barghs' cat Tilly. After being issued with a reptile keepers



permit Kelly proceeded to pamper and care for the skinks over the winter in anticipation of a release on the island when things warmed up again. She did such a good job that all the skinks were in great

condition for the release and at least four of the females were gravid, ensuring a good start for the Matiu population.

With the help of onlookers the skinks were released under concrete roof tiles placed among the leaf litter in the Pohutakawa forest above the wharf.

Several of the skinks have been seen in the area since the release and a search to see how far they have spread and to check for signs of breeding will be undertaken later in the year.

The island is becoming a haven for local native reptiles and now boasts four skink species, two gecko species and Brothers Island Tuatara.

### **Fluttering Shearwater nesting boxes**

A project to encourage fluttering shearwaters to establish a breeding colony on Matiu/ Somes Island is well underway with the installation of 20 artificial burrows with nest boxes on the southern end of the island. with a sound system which will broadcast the sounds of a breeding colony each night, it is hoped that some of the fluttering shearwaters that commonly come into the harbour to feed can be enticed to nest on Matiu.



It is thought seabirds played an important role in New Zealand coastal

ecosystems by bringing nutrients from the sea back to the land. Returning the seabirds to Matiu will be yet another step towards restoring the island to its pre-human state.

Special thanks goes out to the Matiu/Somes Charitable Trust for funding the sound system, a number of volunteer groups led by *Jo Greenman* who have dug over 20 holes for the boxes and volunteers attending the the 25<sup>th</sup> celebrations who installed 20 of the nest boxes in record time.

### **Wellington Green Geckos**

We are currently working on a project that hopes to release 20-30 Wellington green geckos onto the island in March this year. The geckos are currently in the care of two experienced local reptile breeders and consist of captive bred and wild animals that have been rescued from cats. A similar project has just been completed on Mana Island with 48 green geckos released there since 1998.

If the project is approved a ceremony will welcome the geckos to the island, and anyone who would like to see one of these beautiful animals close up is encouraged to come along (more info will be sent out when a date is set).

*Andrew Morrison*

### **Victoria Continuing Education 2007**

Phone 04 463 6556; [ceed@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:ceed@vuw.ac.nz),  
[www.vuw-ceed.ac.nz](http://www.vuw-ceed.ac.nz)

#### **Course 0724005, Saturday 24 February 1pm – 5pm Fee \$55 (\$49) includes return ferry transport**

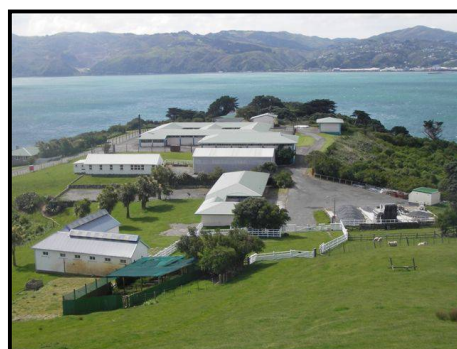
Matiu/Somes Island is centre to a course, hosted by members of local iwi Te Atiawa, and led by *Ihaia Puketapu*, offers you the opportunity to visit Matiu and be enriched by its Maori heritage. While on the island you will be immersed in both its traditional and contemporary Maori history, and hear tales of the discovery and naming of Matiu and surrounding islands by Kupe. Also you will learn about the significance of Matiu and other Wellington landmarks to Maori, pre-European contact, and the impact of British settlement on Maori.

Resident DOC workers will give you a brief explanation of the general history of the island.

Also available this year, is

#### **Course 0723001A, Kapiti Island**

*George Gibbs, John Barrett and Te Waari Carkeek* lead the seminar and field trip \$80 for permit, boat trip and seminar.



***Matiu Really Matters: Newsletter of Friends of Matiu & Matiu/Somes Charitable Trust***

Issued c.3 times a year, and as required

Name based on that used in Wellington Botanical Society Newsletter, by kind permission of Stan Butcher, Lower Hutt Branch Forest & Bird, Wellington Botanical Society

**A friendly reminder about**

**Friends of Matiu annual membership** (January to December):

*Adult \$20; Corporate \$50; Life member \$200;*

*Family \$30; School/ Library \$25*

