

Matiu Really Matters

June 2007



Editor has a say

Welcome to Matariki and midwinter 2007 on Matiu/Somes Island, and in this newsletter we can report on much that has happened since February.

Sadly we must first record the very recent passing of Bie Baker, David Moss' partner and mother of Alice and Lilly. We remember her love for Matiu and vision for its future, and I hope we can look forward to some of those dreams becoming real.

Many of the new animals and plants are doing well and the humans who have been helping to establish them have been busy too. Volunteer groups have a very important part to play in the restoration and return of this island a little nearer to its original state (which is the very long view).

Take advantage of being part of its restoration and join us for some of the activities that are described in this issue. The subscription is not much (\$5 individual; \$20 family; \$50 corporate) to keep in touch.

As always **we would like your input please** email 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's Trust, PO Box 536, Wellington**

The Island Speaks: "A Ranger's Ramble"

It is hard to believe that four months have already flown by since we (Jo and Matt) began our contracts. We both feel well settled into island life, as do our intermittently seen partners Iain and Joey. In fact Jo's husband Iain is now going to be very intermittent, spending the next four months sailing in the Mediterranean, a long commute by any standards.

Many interesting and important things have happened since we formed the new Matiu/Somes team on 5th February.

One was Matiu successfully passing its bio-security audit in May. The audit team checked that all systems were in place to keep the island free of pest plants, insects and animals while also suggesting some further things to implement in order to maintain our pest-free status into the future.

The last quarter has seen Matiu well loved by many volunteers with over 15 volunteer groups putting their backs, sweat and laughs into island projects. The volunteers who ranged from individuals to school,

environmental and corporate groups have made a big impact on the speed of getting many tasks completed. These included painting, beach rubbish clean ups, checking bait stations, gun emplacement-lichen removal, and weeding. Thank you all for the hard work and free food!



VUW trainee teachers put in some hard yards at the Shag Rock lookout.

Photo: Matt Sidaway

Other volunteer projects up and running are the enhancement of our recreation areas. Two jobs you may have noticed are the Shag Rock look-out expansion and a new track in the race paddock south of the houses. These areas will provide quieter picnic spots for lunching and to admire our fine flock of feathered friends, the black-backed seagulls!

Our special thanks to the Eastbourne Forest Rangers for all their time and energy over the summer months. Your guiding is of great benefit to visitors and Matiu. Already guided walks are booked for next season, when we look forward to catching up with you all again.

And on a final note; we are heading into the planting season, and hope some rain will fall soon so spades will easily breach the soil and roots can wander under the loving care of Forest and Bird's eager and wise hands. We are sure all the residents, new (the green forest geckos and possible baby tuatara?) and old, will appreciate the continuing restoration of this special island sanctuary.

Top Ten Island Stats

1. 100 Cook Strait Giant Weta translocated to Karori Wildlife Sanctuary.
2. 7 Wellington Green Geckos released.
3. 2 forest gecko and more ornate skinks join their kin.

4. 14 North Island robin chicks fledged, current fate unknown.
5. 19 tuatara located and measured by Vic Uni researchers over summer.
6. 880 grams was the heaviest tuatara weighed over summer.
7. 2 tuatara eggs taken to Vic Uni to be incubated.
8. 2 Karearea / native falcon sighted hunting frequently over Matiu.
9. 100s of fish seen under the wharf.
10. 1 blackbird chick raised by robins and banded.

See you all again soon,

Jo Greenman and Matt Sidaway

And we also have news from our Ex-Ranger

Leaving Matiu is always difficult but as all you long-termers know it's never permanent. I must admit that I didn't expect to get back quite so soon, and a couple of weeks became 8 months.

Now that Jo and Matt have got the reins, the birds and tuatara are doing it and the island has that good feeling about it.

I'm working out of Waikanae until the end of June helping out with a whole range of biodiversity issues, wetland development, and lifting up the water level of Papaitonga.

In mid-June I'm going back to Christmas Island in Kiribati for SPREP to pick up on previous work, on rats, cats and equipment for the island Wildlife Conservation Unit. Ray Pierce, Wildlife Scientist from Whangarei, is also coming to do a census on the rare Phoenix Petrel. The main task is to figure out how to catch and translocate Bokikokiko (Christmas Island Warbler) before they become extinct. I confirmed the arrival of ships rats to the island about 5 years ago, and there is no doubt that Bokikokiko will vanish. The rats will also have a significant impact on the important seabird populations.

And thank you, Friends, for all your continuing support for Matiu. For all the years of effort by F&B and EFR, and the wider community.

And a special thank you to you people who always come back to do the extra mile and so make things happen. Then I'll see you down the track,

Yours sincerely

Richard Anderson

At least 3 kakariki have been sighted near the Bus Barns recently. Have they flown their Island roost in search of bigger fields?

Wellington Green geckos

On the 6th of May 2007 the first release of Wellington green geckos (*Naultinus elegans punctatus*) onto Matiu/Somes Island took place. Seven geckos were translocated including wild animals salvaged from pet cats and captive bred geckos. The day was truly a lizard fest with 11 ornate skinks and 2 forest geckos also released.

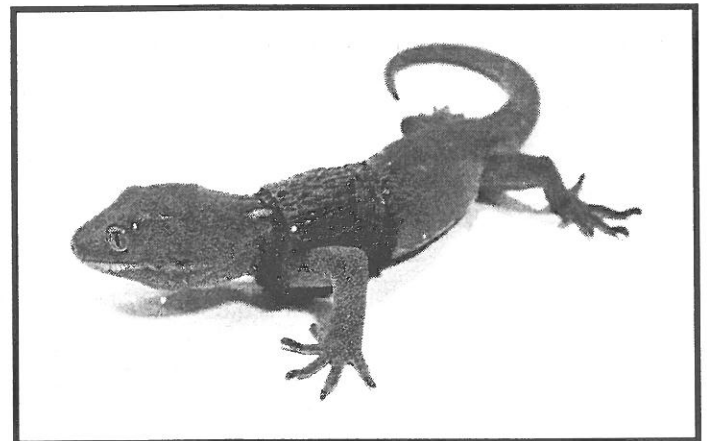
The green gecko release ceremony was conducted by Koro Tamarapa and witnessed by over 30 friends and associates from groups including Forest and Bird, Eastbourne Forest Rangers, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, Friends of Matiu/ Somes Island and members of the public including families that had handed in some of the green geckos after rescuing them from the pet cat.

People attending had the opportunity to see and photograph the geckos prior to release and the children present helped to release the animals.

Unfortunately the disease-screening process before the translocation picked up that some of the geckos planned for release were carrying salmonella, a bacterium that doesn't seem to effect the geckos but has the potential to harm other species on the island. As a precaution these geckos, and geckos that were part of the same captive colony, were left out of this translocation. Further testing will be done to ensure these animals are clear to be released later this year.

The planned monitoring of these geckos using a novel telemetry technique had to be postponed as none of the geckos available for release were over the 10 grams weight required by ethics approval conditions to carry the 1 gram transmitter. A Victoria University student will undertake the telemetry project late 07-early 08.

Further translocations of these beautiful geckos will be made to Matiu/Somes Island over the next couple of years.



Wired for sound, this green gecko is off to tell us secrets of its private life.

Photo: Andrew Morrison

Ornate Skinks

Another 11 ornate skinks were released on the green gecko translocation day, adding to the 26 ornate skinks already calling the island home. Once again the lizards had been rescued from pet cats and salvaged from construction sites in the Northland/ Wadestown area, and were cared for in captivity by Kelly Bargh. These skinks should thrive in the cat free leaf litter on Matiu/Somes.

Forest Geckos

Two more forest geckos were released into gecko boxes on the island on the evening of the green gecko transfer. Now 27 forest geckos have been released on the slope above the wharf and another release of captive-bred youngsters will be made this spring.

Monitoring of the gecko boxes continues and the most recent gecko to be recaptured that had measured only 47mm (snout to vent) when released, had almost doubled in size to 77mm (snout to vent) since its release in April 2005. Several of the boxes will be moved into the pohutukawa forest to see if the geckos have dispersed from the release site.

North Island Robins

The robin population on Matiu/Somes appears to have declined since the breeding season, when 14 new fledglings were produced. The last few monitoring trips have found a total of only 10 birds but it's not clear what has caused the decline. Plans are in place to set up a student project to get to the bottom of the problem and, if deemed necessary, more birds may be brought over from Kapiti.

A quick goodbye...

As you may be aware I'm heading back across the ditch to Oz in a few short weeks. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank everyone for their enthusiasm, help and support during my time in NZ. I will take back many happy memories of my work on the island and the great group of people that are restoring Matiu/Somes to her former glory. I look forward to catching up with you on return visits (to remind myself what rain looks like) and, if any of you are heading over to the ACT area, please look me up.

Cheers, **Andrew Morrison**

What the Weta are up to

Notes from George Gibbs

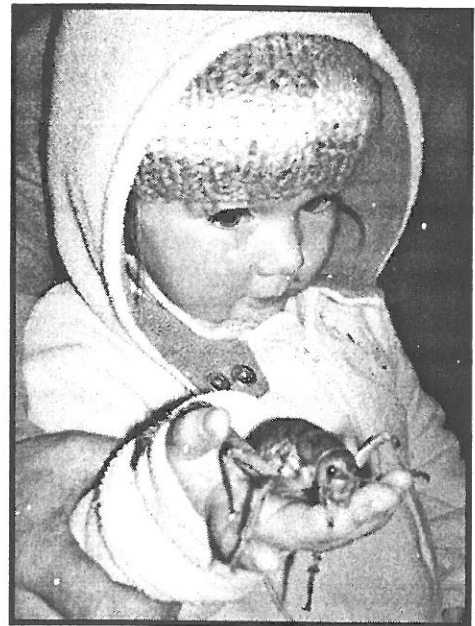
Success can be contagious and the island is now acting as a source area for weta export. We are all aware of how well the Cook Strait giant weta has taken to Matiu/ Somes over the 11 years it has been living there. They are now seen all over the island, in grassy areas and places with flax, tauhinu or pohuehue. Most are seen at night, along the mown track verges, but the odd adult has appeared in broad daylight for the public to ogle at.

It just goes to show how important the absence of rats is for many of the larger invertebrates of New Zealand. Cook Strait giant weta has not been seen on

North Island since 1870 when Walter Buller first described a specimen taken from 'the Wanganui district' (which presumably referred to North Island mainland rather than either Kapiti or Mana Islands, where the species has occurred more recently).

The idea that this impressive member of the weta clan could be transferred back to the mainland has not escaped the managers of Karori Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS). In February 2007, with all the paper work behind them, Raewyn Empson of KWS and Corinne Watts from Landcare Research in Hamilton, assisted by a number of others, descended on Matiu/ Somes for a nocturnal weta-gathering spree. Their goal was 100 adult weta. These they found no trouble at all in two nights, in fact so many that some were released again. All were numbered and their site of capture and any partner details noted so that near-neighbours could be released together in the Sanctuary.

The real punchline of this successful operation was that 20 weta were to be fitted with radio-transmitters in order to let researchers know how far they moved and where they went to seek their fortune in their new location.



Ayla Firth looks not so sure about this wee giant?

Photo: Jan Hollows

The release took place on Sunday 11 February, with due attention from the press, who wanted to see the whole hundred weta waddling across the path en masse! Not so, just a few were carefully placed under some flax and tussocks around the Tui Lawn, with the remainder being liberated later.

The major surprises were yet to come. The 20 tagged weta surpassed all expectations, with some males taking off right across the valley and back, others climbing trees (which nobody expected them to do) and still others remaining in the area they were released. None were caught by predators in the 5 weeks or more of their radio battery life and only one died. Mating and egg-laying were observed by the tracking team, hopefully guaranteeing more weta for next year.

This tagging exercise was a world first in terms of insect-release studies. This weta release is destined to become a landmark event in the technology used for insect conservation management.

Incidentally, there appear to be just as many giant weta on Mātīu **after** the removal of the 100 to KWS. This whole event has stimulated a new project, currently being discussed, which could yield an estimate of the overall number of giant weta on the island.
George Gibbs

And now for the tuatara

On a sunny day in May, Sue Keall (Victoria University of Wellington) and Brent Tandy (DoC Poneke Area Office) visited Mātīu/ Somes Island to investigate an exciting find of tuatara eggs by the resident rangers. Two (unviable) eggs found outside an active burrow had already been taken to the Area Office. Matt showed Sue and Brent to the site and further investigation revealed more eggs inside the burrow.

Tuatara females usually cover their eggs in a nest with soil once they are laid, so the fact that the eggs were found uncovered in the burrow chamber suggests that they had been disturbed after they were laid (normally November), probably by a tuatara using the burrow as a home retreat. Four of the eggs were dead and showed signs of predation by beetle larvae (holes in the shell). Two more eggs that were deeper into the burrow showed some signs of dehydration but overall were in better condition (no holes in the shell), and were taken back to Victoria University for incubation in a safe environment (*photo by Sue Keall*).



The eggs will be weighed weekly to determine whether they are viable. This should become apparent within the next few weeks, as healthy tuatara eggs absorb moisture through the shell (consequently gaining weight) as they develop. Here's hoping we have some viable eggs that hatch into baby tuatara!

Sue Keall



Maybe this is Dad (or Mum)? *Photo by Alex Kettles*

Forest & Bird report

from Alex Kettles

At the close of the 2006 planting season a total of over 100,000 plants had been raised and planted out since the Lower Hutt Branch F&B organised the first planting in 1981.

Interest in the revegetation project remains high. During the past twelve months 18 midweek work parties were held, and 5 Sunday plantings were organised. Areas planted are now well established and providing an excellent habitat for the introduced weta, tuatara, gecko and skinks, kakariki and robin, all of which are thriving.

A number of small grass areas have yet to receive pioneer plant cover and it is hoped to complete many of these this season. Most effort is now being put into opening up sites to infill with successional plants.

A keen band of regular midweek volunteers has been working on the western slopes below the houses and spaces have been created for over 650 plants which include significant numbers of wineberry, totara, pigeonwood, rewarewa, mahoe, tawa and kaikomako.

Fortnightly Monday work parties continue and will precede **Sunday planting days** planned for

July 1, 15, 29, August 19 and September 2

Groups of volunteers from Wellington. Botanical Society, Rabo Bank, Rover Scouts and VUC Enviro Group will be out planting on a number of these dates and their assistance will be most appreciated.

We will of course need more volunteers on these days. If you would like to help please phone in advance before each weekend for details.

Phone: **Alex 569 6208**

The annual F&B Plant Sale continues to be a significant source of funding. It will be at Hutt Valley Tramping Club Rooms Birch Street, near Waterloo Interchange, Sunday 11 August.

**Keen Karo Busters!
26-27 May 2007**

After three years working on Mātīu/Somes Island removing karo, a dedicated group of volunteers is still keen on removing karo and making the most of their time on Mātīu/ Somes Island.

Brilliant weekend weather reigned and after settling into our base, Education House, most of the team (Dave, Steve, Linda, Amanda, Martin, Karyn, Willie, Nolene, Romain, Hannah, Kelly and Hamish) geared up with gloves, Vigilant, and blades and headed off to remove a lot of karo by the lighthouse, the pond and the areas around the gun-emplacement track.

"It's one of the best karo removal weekends", commented Matiu/Somes Island ranger Matt Sidaway who directed the team into the areas to work while attending to all his other duties on a very popular public weekend on the island.

Opting for the gentler but more detailed work of removing succulents, Terese and Natasha took out two from behind the shed of the Whare Mahana (Iwi House) on Saturday, moving onto ranger Matt's place on Sunday to remove a large Aloe Vera plant. In the process they discovered a labyrinth of a root system and that there was no tidy way of removing such a massive plant!

A small amount of karo was also removed and some light gardening was started.

Three traditions are always observed by the group: a BBQ, entertainment and a night walk around the island. After our BBQ, night entertainment was a boisterous round of word puzzle games and the daily newspaper quiz, followed by a group walk around the island to observe the wildlife – in particular a lot of penguins.

The group was formed by current DOC Matiu/Somes Island ranger Jo Greenman and is made up of 15 adult members, most from the city or Hutt Valley but a few travel from afar as the Kapiti Coast and Masterton.

Over three years the group has completed a mix of 8 day and weekend trips to the island. Recently group members, a father and son team, Dave and Steve Cox have been assisting Jo in co-ordinating the logistics and provisions for the group.

Karo member Owen Calder donated a x3 seater couch (with pull-out double bed), to the Whare Mahana (Iwi House) which made its way to the island during our weekend after a fair amount of putting logistics and permissions into place. Karo member Terese Mcleod's mother is a shareholder in the Wellington Tenth's Trust who govern the whare and since working on the island with karo busting, has been keen to assist with improvements of the whare.

The group warmly welcomed foundation member and Wairarapa DOC worker Willie Wichman's wife Karyn Burgess to the team; the couple live in Masterton. Hannah's friend Kelly joined the group, though regular member Owen Calder missed this trip over due to work commitments.

The next Karo busters group is planned for October 2007

For further information please contact

Dave Cox: coxfamily@paradise.net.nz

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.

What have the Eastbourne Forest Rangers been up to last summer? From Ray Smith

The Eastbourne Forest Rangers again provided a roster of voluntary rangers to help with visitors to Matiu/Somes at weekends and public holidays, from Labour weekend 2006 until Easter weekend 2007. This was our 11th season carrying out these duties.

After a slow start due to indifferent weather, visitor numbers picked up from January onwards and there were many days with more than a hundred visitors. The ferry service introduced a weekend and holiday timetable with trips from Seatoun and Petone in addition to the usual Queens Wharf and Days Bay trips.

Rangers have taken on the task of meeting the ferries and briefing visitors in the Whare Kiore, thus freeing Jo and Matt to carry out other duties and to look after various volunteer groups working on the island. Eastbourne Rangers have also provided guides for booked tours, mid-week and weekends. Payment for these guided tours goes to the Trust, to be spent on relocation projects or other purposes.

Do you live near a beach on the east side of the harbour?

Can you help the Island to recycle?

We need a resident of the Eastern Bays who is willing to allow the Island staff to leave recycling bins outside their house and collect the bins when they have been emptied.

If you can help contact Matt or Jo on 04 5686555 or matiusomes@doc.govt.nz

Island Cleaner Wanted

Do you love the Island and want an excuse to visit more often.

Hours – Approximately 4hrs a week in summer and every 2 weeks in winter – days and times are very flexible.

Duties – Cleaning the public toilets and Island accommodation.

\$14 per week plus cost of the ferry.
Stay longer and enjoy the Island

If you are interested contact Matt or Jo on 04 5686555 or matiusomes@doc.govt.nz

Matiu/Somes T-shirts

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.

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

