

# Matiu Really Matters

June 2008



## **A Ranger's Ramble – Autumn Antics, words from Jo and Matt**

The transition from summer into winter naturally sees a time of changes on the island. Increasing rainfall sees visitor numbers decrease, as Matiú grows greener by the day. Camping numbers mysteriously drop off, while penguin bookings increase. Our long term summer volunteers Dave and James departed as we wave goodbye to summer 2007/08.

The rainfall is great relief to island flora and fauna, which weathered a long dry summer. These warm days helped our camping trial along, and we have had much positive feedback about how it's working. A bonus that the camping and other overnight visitors has offered was having many extra sets of caring eyes and ears roaming the island and alerting us to potential biosecurity breaches. If you have comments regarding this trial now is the time to submit them.

A steady stream of volunteers, scientists and general public experienced and enjoyed Matiú in the dark and the different feeling offered to a day visit. The money received from these groups has helped upgrade accommodation, with the new gas cookers the biggest benefit to all.

We feel honoured to have shared Matiú with long-term guests – who have given us a real sense of island community and helped us achieve much – over the past months. These people are Canadian Dave, English James, and our very own Peter Russell, who has been undertaking a weeds contract, removing both invasive native and non-native species.

Dave and James both had magic experiences thanks to meeting many friends of Matiú, learning about life within a historic and scientific reserve, the joy of island fever, and enhancing their sheep farming, weta monitoring and interpretation skills. We actually attribute the dropping off of visitor numbers to their departure, as when one of them left there was a group of female American volunteers in tow.

Their help also allowed us both to take some time out on holiday. Jo made her way to Nepal to go hiking, came back very relaxed and more aware of how environmentally conscious New Zealand really is. Matt took his annual leave to coincide with Dave's departure. They travelled up the East Cape, then to Cape Reinga and back down through the Kauri forests of Northland, achieving Dave's last goal in NZ – to see Tane Mahuta and associates.



With our annual leave balances now in check, we can both stoke the home fires and settle into some winter jobs including gravelling the Tramline/ Bullock track, hopefully having it open for summer.

The coming months will also see a busy time for contractors. The main wharf will have its fenders raised, making landings more comfortable for both ferries and their passengers, the Barracks will begin phase one of TLC or reframing the building, and the island should get its first solar hot-water and lighting, to be installed in the motel units.

Thanks again to everyone for your ongoing friendship, help and support, we look forward to catching up again soon.

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*And from Jan, Editor of this newsletter – thank you to all contributors – without your input it would not be the interesting read it is.*

*Jan Heine*

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## Little Blue Penguins

Here are just a few points on what's to come with the blue penguin research project in the next few months.....

The penguins are starting to return and so are we!!

The 6<sup>th</sup> Oamaru Penguin Symposium will be held in Oamaru, on 26<sup>th</sup> Thursday and 27<sup>th</sup> Friday of June 2008. Graeme Taylor and Bex Wolfe will be attending to give a presentation on our blue penguin project and to learn more about other penguin research that is happening. Graeme will also be talking on Fiordland crested penguins.

We plan to get another 100 nest boxes made this year. We have had the Hutt High School enrichment programme students keen to get involved and have had lots of groups from last year keen to help out again this year.

Mapping of sites of penguin burrows and nest boxes is continuing.

Watch this space for the next exciting penguin update!

**Bex Wolfe**

## Forest & Bird Revegetation Programme

Work parties are again being held fortnightly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays in the month. Preparation of sites for planting is well in hand.

Planting will take place on the Mondays and as well on the following 4 Sundays:

**15 & 29 JUNE, 20 JULY, 3 AUGUST**

Groups of Global volunteers, Wellington Business School and Victoria Roses are booked to assist but more volunteer planters will be welcome on both the Mondays and the four Sundays.

Remember the **Lower Hutt Branch Forest & Bird PLANT SALE** to be held in the Waterloo School, Hardy Street, on

**SUNDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST**

Lower Hutt Forest & Bird,  
**Alex Kettles**

## Eastbourne Forest Rangers (EFR) Programme 2008

At the start of the 2007/2008 summer season our volunteer rangers began the task of meeting the ferries, greeting visitors, supervising their baggage search in the Whare Kiore, briefing them on the island rules, and introducing them to the human and natural history of the island. Our carrying out this task has given Jo and Matt more time to continue their other tasks with fewer interruptions.

Forest Rangers have still had time to undertake their usual patrols around the island, interacting informally with visitors enhancing (we hope) their island experience. The trial has been so successful that this year, for the first time, we are providing volunteer rangers right through the 'winter' season as well, but with only one ranger on duty each holiday/ weekend day, instead of two.

During last summer there was a marked increase in the number of kayaks visiting Matiu/Somes, partly because of the settled weather but also the number of kayaks on the harbour seems to be a growing generally. And what better destination than Matiu/Somes Island? They are a bit harder to keep track of than the ferries, of course, or yachts for that matter, so when we start our summer season in October we will probably have one ranger on waterfront patrol at all times when we are on the island.

Details of our volunteer ranger programme have been put on the DoC website. As a result we have had a number of enquiries and three new rangers have joined the team. Welcome to Josie, Cynthia, and Joanna.

A number of guided tours have also been held. Money from these tours goes to the Matiu/Somes Island Charitable Trust and is used for projects such as species translocations.

Our thanks to Jo and Matt who have made us all very welcome on the island and are a great team to work with.

**Ray Smith**

## **And now for the action on Makaro/Ward 19<sup>th</sup> March**

After collecting DoC's launch *Manaia* from storage at Rongotai, Hawea launched her at Evans Bay Marina for the trip to Makaro Island. There were few birds to see on the way.



**Jo and others landing on Makaro**

We took 2 bags of premixed concrete to re-install the DoC sign further out from the foliage that had obscured it. This was while Reg did a bird count around the island. We also tackled all the mallow that is rampant on the island and renewed the rat bait stations.

Rubbish was scarce on the island although at the north-west beach some fishing had taken place and a number of broken bottles were collected as well as several empty ones and a full one! About 20 litres of rubbish was all that we found.

We had no opportunity to go to the top of the island as we were off to reach DoC Thorndon Quay at 2pm.

Many thanks for the help given by Peter Simpson (DoC), Brent Tandy (DoC), Hawea (DoC), Dave Rodger (volunteer working on Matiu/Somes)

**Reg Cotter** (OSNZ, Leader)

### *Birds seen :*

Black back gulls 3 juv; 38 adults;  
Spotted shag 1; Black bird 1;  
Variable Oystercatcher 11; Starling 8;  
Little black shag 1; Little shag 1

### *Found dead:*

Black back gulls 3 juv; Spotted shag 1

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## **Rabbits on Mokopuna**

Based on an extract from RF&B journal, November 1951, supplied by Reg Cotter

*Leper Island, re-named Mokopuna in 1949, was well on the way to being a desolate rock after some irresponsible person had liberated rabbits there about 1946. After Mr L.C.Bell, Wildlife field officer, exterminated them in 1950, the growth of vegetation was rapid, and the island was transformed with a green mantle by 1951. The notice that it was a sanctuary and illegal to molest native birdlife had also been erected.*

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## A Weeder's Wamble

Weeds are one of the biggest threats to the ecological restoration of Matiu/Somes Island. Of course, weeds don't just threaten our ability to re-establish the unique vegetation that once occurred on the island, but also the unique collection of wildlife for which that vegetation was habitat.



**Weedbusters at work**, courtesy of Tim Galloway

In 1998 I completed a comprehensive weed survey of Matiu/Somes and had the pleasure of meeting some of the Forest & Bird volunteers who have done such a marvellous job of re-establishing forest on the island. Many species of weeds were present – most being adjacent to the buildings, but several being relatively widespread. Despite having bird-dispersed seed, the distribution patterns of the more widespread weeds strongly indicated that most arose from parent plants on the island. However, weed invasion from the mainland will continue to be a threat, especially if birds such as kereru continue to recover and visit Matiu once again.

While early revegetation efforts were well ahead of their time, some involved New Zealand native plants that were well outside their natural range. Unfortunately, several species from the northern North Island are vigorous and fast-growing colonisers of coastal and lowland areas south of their natural range (some hybridise with local natives): houpara (*Pseudopanax lessonii*), karo (*Pittosporum crassifolium* & *P. ralphii*), northern lacebark (*Hoheria populnea*) and pohutukawa.

These species are spreading rapidly on Matiu/Somes and will seriously restrict the ability of locally distinct vegetation to re-establish and thrive on the island unless they are controlled.



**Weedbusters can distinguish whauwhaupaku (five-finger) a local (left), from Houpara (coastal five-finger), an invader with stalkless leaflets (right).**

Houpara/coastal five-finger leaves (left) are highly variable, their leaflets lack stalks, whereas those of whauwhaupaku/five-finger (right), which is native to Matiu, do have stalks.

Last February I began a four-month contract controlling weeds on the island. Much of my time has been spent removing woody weeds from the northern tip of Matiu/Somes (north of the memorial) and extending this 'weed-free' area southwards along the eastern side of the island. This strategy will create a large 'weed free' area and will lead to weeds being reduced to a 'core' area on the western side of the island, which will be tackled last. This will also create a 'buffer zone' for Mokopuna, reducing the likelihood of weeds spreading to it from Matiu/Somes.

As an example of the progress made over the last ten years, boxthorn has been reduced to about 1% of its previous abundance. The work is often very physically demanding and mentally challenging, but I feel very satisfied with the progress we are making.

We are removing weedy trees gradually (especially prominent ones) rather than taking a 'scorched-earth' approach.



**Peter Russell conquers a boxthorn on Matiu**

Damage to surrounding vegetation is usually negligible, but tree removal sometimes creates large gaps into which local natives such as rata can be planted. Tree removal often 'releases' plants such as totara which had been struggling to get enough light, and it is surprising how quickly the gap fills in.

High priorities for weed control during the next season are likely to include work on Mokopuna, isolated weeds (including those requiring roped access) and extending the 'weed-free' area as described above. Please remember that an important way you can help protect areas such as Matiu/Somes Island from weeds is to inform your family and friends about them and control them on your own property (see [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) for general information on environmental weeds). To join or start up a group to tackle weeds in your local area see



[www.weedbusters.org.nz](http://www.weedbusters.org.nz)

**Peter Russell**

[prussell@doc.govt.nz](mailto:prussell@doc.govt.nz)

## **Movie Magic made on Matiu Island in May 2008**

New Zealand's most extreme filming competition 48HOURS saw a film crew made up of the islands Iwi and DOC volunteers produce their entry entirely on Matiu/Somes Island.

The *Goat Embryo Project* is the team name for the film crew, suggested by recent volunteer ranger Dave Rodger from Canada and refers to a folder he found while clearing out old files in the animal quarantine offices on the island.



**The film crew on location**

The film genre the team drew was Animal Movie which they worked into a 6-minute short film entitled **Manimal Planet**. The fictional story centres on a character called David Rattenborough, played by the Rat House's resident rat puppet who, in documentary style, passes commentary on strange human (manimal) behaviours.

The crew received a lot of media attention from The Dominion Post, C4 and Close Up. They featured in a Dom Post photo-story; C4 trailed the team and documented them to be screened during the live grand final of the competition, Close Up pulled out at the last minute due to staffing difficulties. Media interest was due to the extreme nature of the competition together with the logistics of isolating themselves on the island which had everyone's eyes on them – national competition organiser Ant Timpson said "if they pull it off, it will be a miracle". The team were one of the first to make the deadline!

The logistics of being on the island ended up working in the teams favour and the reservations about filming there proved unfounded for Producer Terese Mcleod. “The island’s natural rhythm took over and whakawhanaungatanga kicked in and made it the most satisfying and enjoyable 48Hours I’ve ever had in 4 years of entering this competition on the ‘mainland’, where crews tend to be cut throat and the resources available in the city can actually work against a team, providing a lot of distraction and complexities that we didn’t have to deal with”, says Terese.

Any competition prizes won will be donated to benefit the island.

Manimal Planet has just premiered at the Paramount in the heats round. Judges then select 12 Wellington region semi-finalists from the heats (to be announced), then the regional finalist goes into the national grand finals which then screen on C4 early July.

#### **Further Information**

48Hours Competition <http://www.48hours.co.nz/2008/>

Dominion Post Article

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominionpost/4550452a23918.html>

## **Makeover Magic on Matiu Island**

Makeover magic happened on Matiu/Somes Island to the Wellington Tenth’s Trust house, the Whare Mahana.

During the Easter period house renovation project co-ordinators Terese Mcleod and Alice Te Punga Somerville led a group of twelve volunteers made up of family, friends, colleagues and DoC workers making significant progress repairing and painting resulting in a radical house ‘face-lift’. The project is particularly special to Terese and Alice because their mothers, Kaye Mcleod (from the Tuatahi Poneke/Murray Horo whanau) and Anne Te Punga Somerville (Te Punga whanau) are Wellington Tenth’s beneficiaries.

The house is one of five identical houses on the island. The others are used to house the island’s two DoC rangers Matt and Jo, Forest and Bird

govern a house and the other is called Education House which is looked after by DoC and usually used for various volunteer groups working on the island.

Designing the rooms around themes has been the approach used for the house ‘facelift’, for example, the lounge or ‘flax room’ will pick up on flax colours, the dining room or ‘stone room’ will pick up on stone/river colours, the bedrooms will be themed, paua, driftwood and moana. The kitchen will likely be in olive colours and the bathrooms and laundry in neutral light golden sandy colours. Using these themes to choose paint colours and fittings has modernised the house without compromising its era or environment.

Mystery surrounded the accessibility of Matiu/Somes Island for Terese for many years after her parents moved from Opunake, Taranaki to the Hutt Valley in the seventies, only ever glimpsing the island from the motorway in her formative years.

Knowing the island as ‘off limits’ changed five years ago, when she answered an ad in a local community newspaper looking for DoC volunteers, since then she has been heavily involved with a range of work there and constantly takes various individuals and groups to enjoy an affordable island experience a quick ferry ride from the Wellington CBD.

“DoC work experience has been invaluable and one of the most satisfying parts of my life”, says Terese, who while doing that work started formulating ideas to improve the whare, particularly for people to enjoy whakawhanaungatanga, conservation appreciation and affordable holiday/recreation time for people without the usual expense.

These ideas crystallised and gained real traction with Alice’s return from working overseas and the dynamic duo have been thrilled to see this vision realised. Many people they encounter are still surprised to learn they can visit the island and that staying there is possible, many finding it fascinating to actually see what the island is like and learn of its varied histories.

During breaks from their tasks, the key objectives driving the purpose of the house renovations were fully experienced by all –

whakawhanaungatanga. Diving for kai moana, engaging with the natural environment, education and conservation issues and the unparalleled satisfaction of working collectively as whanau, all forming rich memories. Exciting residents at the whare Mahana include a tuatara, whanau of blue penguins and the discovery of a native slug of interest to DoC staff.



**Renovations volunteer Matiu Somerville (above, with mum Megan obscured) turned 3 years old during the week of work on the island. Here he is putting primer paint on the Paua-themed bedroom.**

When he downed his painting tools Matiu experienced a very special island birthday party with his family, fellow volunteers, Ranger Matt and resident sheep, tuatara, penguins and native slug.

The project has been called 'Operation Kakariki', after the Red Crowned Parakeet or Kakariki birds who zip in pairs around the island, referred to as the 'boy racers' of the island bird world by DoC Island Ranger Matt Sidaway. Terese and Alice felt this would give the work a focus, liked the rich colours of the birds and the association of a duo zipping around – much like they do!

A full and detailed report on this phase of the project is available.

#### **Operation Kakariki Easter Crew Workers**

Alice Te Punga Somerville, Megan & Matiu Somerville (3 years), Terese Mcleod & Owen Calder, Sam Kahui & Sharon Morunga, Mark Chambers, Matt Sidaway, Iain Wilson, Ocean Mercier, Arini & Tahiwi Loader (8 years).

**For further information about Matiu/Somes Island please visit**

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/>

**For Ferry Transport information to Matiu/Somes Island please visit** <http://www.eastbywest.co.nz/>

#### **Further information about Operation Kakariki**

**please contact:** Erini Shepherd, Wellington Tenth Trust Office on (04) 473 2502, [eshepherd@wttandpnmr.maori.nz](mailto:eshepherd@wttandpnmr.maori.nz), Terese Mcleod, [Terese.Mcleod@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Terese.Mcleod@vuw.ac.nz), (04) 463 9786 (DDI), (04) 970 8400 (Home) or 021 043 5285 (Mobile).

## **Wired weta!**

In February 2008, 6 Cook Strait giant weta on Matiu-Somes Island were fitted with miniature radio-transmitters to allow us to follow them to find out their movements each night, and what they were doing.



**Corinne Watts** and **Danny Thornburrow** from Landcare Research in Hamilton, with help from David Rodger, a volunteer DOC ranger, followed the technology-clad weta for one month. We wanted to compare how far Matiu weta moved to those transferred into Karori Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS). On average, male giant weta in the KWS walked 96 m per night, while females moved only 33 m. The maximum distance a male weta moved in one night was at least 295 m, and the actual distance may have been more as only the start and finish points were recorded, not the route taken.

On Matiu Island, 3 male and 3 female weta that were followed travelled similar distances, with 12 m per night on average, with a maximum distance of 70 m overnight.

During the day, weta were always on the ground hiding in clumps of grass, under leaf litter or logs. They were often found mating during the day and males were frequently seen walking at night, when the females were feeding on clover and dandelion on the mown grass.

Weta do not have home ranges and this study has shown that they are constantly on the move, and these movements seem to be random.

We think that weta moved shorter distances on Matiu because they had not been disturbed by the translocation process and they are in their preferred habitat – shrubland with long grass in which they can hide during the day and venture out onto the mown grass at night to feed.

## Overnight stays for Friends

We now have a variety of overnight accommodation available for Friends of Matiu including **camping**. Are you interested? Why not drop the Island an email: [matiusomes@doc.govt.nz](mailto:matiusomes@doc.govt.nz)

*camping \$10 adult, \$5 child per night,  
access to kitchen, toilets*

*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.*

**Karobusters** – a volunteer group removing karo and other undesirable species on Matiu, and doing a range of tasks to assist DoC – goes to the Island about three times a year.

New volunteers are sought as changes in members' lives mean some can no longer attend. So a few spaces in the group have opened up. If you are interested or would like to find out more, see below.

**The next Karobusters groups are on  
26 June & in October 2008**

**So for further information please  
contact Dave Cox:  
coxfamily@paradise.net.nz**

### ***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

**NEXT ISSUE IS OCTOBER:  
DEADLINE DUE 01/09/08**

Thank you to NZ Post for supplying  
100 postage-included envelopes  
for our newsletter.



## Friends of Matiu/Somes Island Become a member

The Friends of Matiu/Somes would love to hear from you. To join, please fill in the form and send to the address below.

As a Friend, you will be invited to take part:

- in hands-on conservation projects
- have fun and learn new skills
- receive newsletters
- be able to stay overnight as part of a 'work' weekend

Name: .....

Address

.....  
.....  
.....

Telephone: .....

Email (for newsletters) .....

### **Annual membership (Jan-Dec), please tick:**

Adult	\$20
Corporate/Club	\$50
Life member	\$200
Family	\$30
School/Library	\$25
Donation	.....

Please send to:

**Matiu/Somes Charitable trust**

C/- Wellington Tenth Trust

PO Box 536

Wellington

Do you want to become  
a Friend of Matiu, or  
update your sub?  
Subs are due now.

Why not use this form?

