

Matiu Really Matters

November 2007



Editor has a say

Summer 2007 is a-coming in on Matiu/Somes Island, and loud sing the kakariki, robins and the tuatara would if they could as they have all been busy. And thank you to you contributors recording this activity.

A working bee has meant that the Volunteer accommodation house aka Education House is now looking more modern, fresh, and more inviting to the volunteer groups who are helping with various projects on the island.

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 (\$20 individual; \$30 family; \$50 corporate) to keep in touch. Use the application form in this issue.

You can find out more about Matiu/Somes on www.doc.govt.nz/Matiu/Somes page. It also has TV6 video clips on it.

As always **we would like your input** please email janheine@xtra.co.nz or phone 04-562 8833.

The Island Speaks: “A Ranger’s Ramble”

An exciting winter on Matiu/Somes has passed with many remarkable occurrences. A great number of these things are thanks to our hearty core of volunteers and the mild weather over the ‘dark months’.

With both these things in mind the island has enhanced its recreation opportunities with the completion of the Shag Rock lookout and a new

picnic area in the Race Paddock. It has also bolstered its biodiversity with the finishing of the Fluttering Shearwater nesting site, a historic translocation of North Island Robins – the first species taken out of Karori Wildlife Sanctuary – and the exciting confirmation that tuatara are breeding here!

Summer brings a busier community relations time to the island with enhanced visitor numbers over the ‘sunny months’. To help us during these times we have the Eastbourne Forest Rangers back in support on land, and will soon have our boat owners’ information sheet available as support on the water. This brochure will outline correct landing procedure when visiting Matiu, and of recreation around the island including the discontinued use of the old northern wharf, which has been decommissioned for safety reasons.

Another point of great note is that all island accommodation is now set up for gas cooking (no more waiting on generator times for a hot drink!). This includes what will potentially be a new source of accommodation on the island with a trial of camping, for 12 people, by the tennis court, to be announced at the 24th November tuatara release.

Well, that’s about it from us. Next time you see us we will probably be working on the finishing touches on the North Eastern shoreline track where we have just put a new boardwalk, continuing to make the

Bullock Track more user-friendly before opening it again, or hugging trees so we don't get blown away by these mad winds!

See you soon, **Jo and Matt**

F&B Revegetation Programme

The days of mass plantings are now well over. From a peak in 1998 of 7,900 plantings, last winter only 2,450 plants were planted out over ten sites on the island.

Plants from the southern holding and shade nursery areas that were closed last year have been planted out.

In the nursery, remaining seedlings have been bagged and a great variety of over 1300 plants are growing on for planting out next and in subsequent years.

Since January, 17 Monday and three Sunday work parties have been held, with an average attendance of 14–15 volunteers.

A diminishing number of small pockets amid previous plantings still require infilling but the need to raise pioneer species is now limited. However the raising of seedlings for the planting of successional species will continue well into the future.

With the limited work in the nursery and preparation of sites for planting, work parties are now programmed for only once a month.

It is hoped that a number of volunteers will be interested in working on a number of Sundays prior to and during the planting season next year.

Lower Hutt Forest & Bird
Alex Kettles

People and Penguins

As you walk down the road on Matiu–Somes, past the workshop, the quarantine buildings and on to the rec hall, something seems different. The concrete, no longer grey, is covered with quirky wooden objects. On closer inspection you will find that they are new houses for little blue penguins.



A research project has been started on the island that creates an opportunity for schools and community groups to get involved in conservation, environmental education and the treasures that Matiu/Somes has to offer. Kiwi Conservation Club, Tawa Intermediate and Hataitai School have all been involved. Hammers have been banging, BBQs have been cooking and kids have been laughing and smiling. The results – nest boxes for 100 lucky blue penguin pairs.



Other than the amazing achievement of all the completed boxes, the highlight of everyone's day is always meeting one of the potential new

tenants for the boxes. Some lucky children also had the opportunity to meet two chicks just a few days old. Joy spread across their faces as the chicks were revealed. Getting to appreciate the forceful power of a penguin bill and the contrast of waterproof adult feathers to chicks' fluffy down was a special experience for all.

The research project is a comparative study of flipper bands and transponders as alternative marking techniques. Traditionally small metal bands around the penguin's flipper have been used to individually identify birds. The use of flipper bands has become controversial with fears they are affecting the swimming ability of penguins leading to higher mortalities. An alternative is transponders. These are rice-grain-sized chips inserted under the skin at the base of the neck or between the shoulder blades. They act like a barcode. The outcomes of the study will provide an independent assessment of the use of the two marking techniques. It will also provide DOC with more information about the techniques so that they can make informed decisions regarding their future use in penguins and other birds.

A huge number of volunteer hours have been put into the project with many more to come. Working in the dark till all hours of the morning, covered in penguin poo, with bleeding fingers and exciting traverses down cliff faces have become second nature to a great group of people. Thank you to all those who have given up their time so far and we will keep you posted.

Bex Wolfe

Eastbourne Forest Rangers (EFR) Programme 2007/2008

Last summer East by West introduced a schedule using two ferries, with four arrivals at the Island between 12.20pm and 1.35pm. This meant a large chunk of the DoC Rangers' day was spent at the wharf, meeting and briefing incoming visitors. Gradually the volunteer Forest Rangers were drawn in to help and in the current 2007/2008 season we will undertake most of this duty at weekends and on Public Holidays, freeing Jo and Matt for other tasks. With two volunteers on duty most days there will still be time to carry out 'compliance' patrols and talk informally to visitors about points of interest.



Reg Cotter showing Elspeth Blellock how to hold a little blue penguin.

On 29th September a training day on the island was attended by 14 of our team. We were fully briefed on what was needed in the introductory talk to visitors and other administrative matters, given a very informative talk by Richard Nester on the history of the Island, and a guided tour. We were also treated to a very satisfying BBQ lunch.

The programme was appreciated by us all very much and ensures we are well informed for our role.

We have recruited four new Rangers for this season and welcomed back two who had dropped out for a while. We now have 23 on our list, most of whom will do about 8 duty days through the season.

Two or three seasons ago guided tours were offered to all comers each weekend but this lapsed because of administrative difficulties. Since then only a small number of guided tours have been given to pre-booked groups. Jo and Matt are now offering this service to groups, subject to a volunteer being available, when they book visits, and the number of tours can be expected to grow.

We are now starting our 11th full season, with undiminished enthusiasm. My thanks to all those who co-operate so willingly in carrying out these duties.

Ray Smith

Fluttering Shearwater Project

The completion of the shearwater burrow installations and a numbering system in place to navigate to each burrow has allowed the sound system to be hooked up, hopefully to attract the birds. An initial problem with the sound system was repaired and it is now playing fluttering shearwater calls during the night.

To monitor any activity or potential use of the burrows a small fence of twigs will be placed in front of each burrow entrance. Any disturbance of the fence can be followed up by peaking inside the burrow to see what's inside. To date kakariki and possibly tuatara have been seen to be using the burrows.

Because the burrows are under wind-shorn coastal scrub, 'take off' ramps had to be constructed to give any potential new shearwater residents a chance to get above the scrub to catch the wind for take off.

We now wait in hope that all the hard work by staff and numerous volunteers will pay off. Hopefully it is just a matter of time.

Geckos and Skinks

The translocation of forest geckos and ornate skinks continues. More animals have been collected by the public via their cats or by builders lifting roofs and so on. Breeders have also produced animals for release.

The translocations of forest geckos and ornate skinks are reaching completion, however individual animals will continue to be released as they are brought in to DOC by the public.

Wellington green geckos are being produced for the island via a breeding programme. The cryptic nature and perceived rarity of the Wellington greens means that relatively few animals have been brought in by the public, so this means having to breed them.

Brent Tandy

Ranger Biodiversity, Ponoke Area Office

Found – WW2 Predictor

Richard Nester, Technical Support Officer – Historic, couldn't believe his luck while visiting family friends in Napier recently. In the back of their shed, which was being cleared out of 50+ years of junk, he found what he thought to be a World War 2 anti-aircraft gun predictor. "I didn't allow myself to get too excited in case it wasn't", but a quick look at the side

confirmed his hopes. Embossed on the side was Vickers Armstrong 3.7 inch anti-aircraft gun predictor, the exact model used on Matiu/Somes Island during World War 2.

After a bit of negotiating it was secured and, on a subsequent trip, placed on the back of a hilux and headed for Wellington where it will soon be transported to the island for permanent display.

The predictor weighs in at about 300-400kg. Its primary use was to instruct the gunners where to aim the big guns by calculating how far in advance they needed to aim. It took into account airspeed, vertical airspeed, wind speed, direction of flight and height. Using complex gears and electronics, the information was then fed by cable to the four guns.

Richard Nester, DoC



Side view of the predictor in its original box.

Photo: Richard Nester, DoC

Island Changing Rooms...

In just over 24 hours a highly trained team of operatives (i.e. workers) transformed the volunteer accommodation (aka Education House) on Matiu/Somes island – from a dated, lurid orange, floral wallpapered nightmare, to a light, clean, welcoming palace. Well, OK, not a palace, but a vast improvement!



Before (upper) and after (lower) changing dining rooms.



On arrival the painting crew were swiftly armed with paintbrushes, rollers and clear instructions. The first coat of paint was complete an hour and a half later. Unfortunately the laws of physics require paint to dry, before additional coats can be applied. This meant the team was forced to spend some time

**The next Karo busters group is planned
10-11 November
For further information please contact
Dave Cox: coxfamily@paradise.net.nz**

appreciating the island's biodiversity and historic features, as well as refuelling, before the painting could be resumed. It was tough, but we managed it.

After a second coat it was time to investigate the island's nightlife. Tuatara and little blue penguins were forthcoming, despite very windy conditions. When the generator stopped at 11pm the crew were well and truly ready for a rest.

Early morning seemed like a good time for another coat of paint (it took 4 coats to kill that wallpaper) and a little light maintenance around the house. With sparkling clean windows, tidier gardens and weeded native plantings, things were definitely looking up. Since the laws of physics had not changed overnight, another island tour was called for. Jo did a fabulous job of explaining the island's previous use as a quarantine station in addition to the history of the World War 2 gun emplacements. The recent installation of artificial seabird burrows and sound system, with supporting launching ramp architecture, was also visited.

After a final coat of paint and the last few maintenance jobs, it was determined that it had indeed been a working bee of two halves, and that the island was the winner on the day. The next lot of volunteers to stay on the island should be very impressed with their accommodation!

The crew were:

DOC staff: Bronwyn Bell, Bex Wolfe, Grace Yang, Cathy Priest, Charlotte Blake, Anne Harper, Bronwyn Barnard, Shirley Vollweiler, Sharon Alderson, Ann McCrone, Nadia Webster

Karobuster: Terese McLeod

Eastbourne Rangers: Elspeth Blellock, and Louise Huxley

A special thanks to Elspeth and Louise who did an outstanding job as kitchen fairies, with the able assistance of "Gopher General" Bronwyn Bell.



We all had a marvellous time, have a much better appreciation of the island (thanks to Jo especially) and want to come back for another round soon. What else needs painting??

Bronwyn Bell

And now for the tuatara They've hatched!!

Two baby tuatara that hatched in August from eggs found in a disturbed nest on the island in May are now thriving under the watchful eye of **Sue Keall** at Victoria University. They hatched in August and are the first known offspring of the 54 Brothers Island tuatara (*Sphenodon guntheri*) transferred to the island nine years ago.

"They haven't grown much in size but somehow look a little more mature" says Sue, who has been hatching tuatara since 1992.

Donations of slaters from staff members' gardens have ensured that the little tuatara have plump tummies and are looking healthy and alert.



These wee chaps are still nameless. If you have names for them, put them in before 9th November and be in to win an island getaway for four. Photo: Sue Keall

A naming competition is on DOC's Matiu/Somes Website (see below).

They will be released back into the wilds of the island on 24th November when a small, invitation-only, event will be held.

Sue Keall, VUW

Name the Matiu/Somes Island baby tuatara competition

The Poneke Area of DoC has launched a competition to find names for the two Matiu/Somes Island baby tuatara and incubated at VUW School of Biological Sciences. New Zealand residents (who are not tuatara) can enter the competition via the DoC website

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

and be in to win an overnight trip for four to the island to help release them on 24 November.

Closing date 9th November.

We want them to have names when they're released onto the island on **24th November.**

Find out more about the Matiu tuatara on www.radionz.co.nz, search for Matiu, 30th August programme for RNZ interview

First robin chicks have fledged

The robins transferred to Matiu/Somes from Kapiti in April 2006 have settled in and bred well last year. Even though we had an excess of

males and we ended up with only four breeding pairs, they produced fourteen fledglings, and the total population was 27 by mid-February.

However, an unexplained, unusually high mortality occurred during late summer, and by mid-April only 10 were found. We applied for a permit to transfer more, from Karori Sanctuary this time, to increase the founder population and even up the sex ratio.

It is difficult to be sure whether robins are male or female, apart from observing their behaviour during the breeding season. But, with the help of volunteers from Karori Sanctuary, we transferred what we hoped were 3 pairs on 19th August, and 4 females on 2nd September. All but one have been seen regularly, bringing the current adult population to 18.

This season has got off to a good start, with one of last year's pairs raising two chicks in their first clutch. After being fed in the nest by both parents for three weeks, they have just left the nest, and the family is often conspicuous along the west Circuit Track. The fledglings squeak noisily as they beg for food, and the parents look rather harassed as they rush around finding food for their demanding youngsters.

A chick from last season has paired with one of the new females. She has just started sitting on eggs in their first nest and, if all goes well, these eggs will hatch in 18 days.

Most of the others have paired up too, so we hope to find more nests soon. The robins have spread all around the island, many near the Circuit Track, so look out for them next time you visit!

Annette Harvey, OSNZ

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.

Overnight stays for Friends

We have a variety of overnight accommodation now available for Friends of Matiu including camping. If you are interested drop the Island an email:

matiusomes@doc.govt.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.

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

Do you want to become a Friend of Matiu or update your sub? Why not fill in the form here?

Island Cleaner Wanted

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

Hours – Approximately 4hours 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 p/h plus cost of the ferry.
Stay over and enjoy the Island

If you are interested contact Matt or Jo on
04 568 6555 or *matiusomes@doc.govt.nz*

Thank you to NZ Post for supplying 100 postage-included envelopes for this newsletter. It certainly helps, along with hand deliveries, to keep our expenses down.

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



