



# MOTUORA RESTORATION SOCIETY (INC)

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

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## PYCROFT'S PETRELS TRANSFER 2013



Pic: ©Simon Fordham / NaturePix

Seventy Pycroft's Petrel chicks were transferred from Whakau/Red Mercury to Motuora on 12th March. We are thrilled to report that all these chicks fledged successfully from Motuora, healthy and at a good weight.

Over the next three years, before they reach adulthood and return to land to breed, many of these chicks will die at sea from natural or other causes. Some of those that survive will return to nest on Motuora and will hopefully start a new colony there.

It was important to select only those chicks at an appropriate stage of development for transfer to Motuora. Our target was to take birds likely to

spend between ten and 28 days in their artificial burrows before fledging. Like many other burrow-nesting seabirds, this species normally returns to breed at the colony in which it was born. Young birds learn their home location before they fledge and leave the colony for the first time. We found that most chicks emerged from their burrows on about ten nights before they finally left Motuora. They are thought to use a range of visual (star maps, local terrain features), odour, sound and possibly magnetic clues to find their way back to the colony. More advanced chicks on Red Mercury might already have imprinted on that site and so were not selected for transfer. The removal of very

*(Continued on page 2)*



Pic. Dylan van Winkel

## Duvaucel's geckos translocated to Motuora



In a joint endeavour MRS and researchers from Massey University Albany have translocated ninety Duvaucel's geckos to Motuora this summer. The new arrivals will boost the breeder pool of the small resident population that was re-introduced to Motuora in 2006. Duvaucel's geckos are a relatively slow breeding species. Females can produce a maximum of two offspring per year and it takes between four to seven years for the young lizards to be able to reproduce themselves. It may take several decades, even centuries until these geckos could be as abundant as they are on some New Zealand offshore islands. The supplementation is a step in the right direction to help establish a large viable population that

can persist in the long-term.

The Duvaucel's geckos on Motuora originate from Korapuki and Kawhitu islands (Mercury Group). A third of these lizards were born and raised at the Massey University Reptile Facility and the remainder were collected from

young chicks might cause their parents to abandon their burrow for the next year's breeding and also, using an artificial diet, it is difficult to keep the chicks in good condition for more than about four weeks.

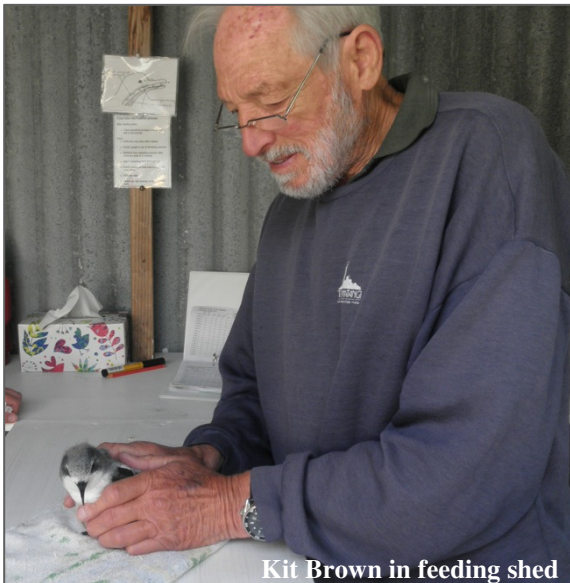
Our initial selection criteria were based on wing length and weight. Candidates for transfer were also given a physical examination and the burrow entrance was checked for the presence of lots of downy feathers, which, if present, suggest that the chick had already been out of the burrow and so should not be taken.

The transferred birds were placed in wooden nest boxes set into the ground and were fed through a crop tube on delightful 'sardine smoothies'. We had a great team of volunteer feeders, led by our consultant seabird expert Helen Gummer. The chicks were fed at intervals of one to four days, depending on their condition and whether they were gaining or losing weight. The heaviest chicks were over 300 grams when transferred, but as they mature, they lose weight and fledge at about 175 grams.

In the nights between 12th March and 8th April the growing chicks ventured outside their burrows to explore their new surroundings, climbed trees to take small "test flights", until, driven by instinct, they departed the island for a life at sea for the next 2/3 years.

This transfer forms part of the Motuora Translocation Plan and is the first of three transfers planned to take place over the coming years.

John Stewart, Biodiversity Committee Chairman



### Why Pycroft's petrels?

Pycroft was, – a naturalist, ornithologist, taxidermist and collector of early New Zealand books. Born in 1875 and educated at Auckland Grammar School, Arthur Pycroft joined NZ Railways at 15 and worked his way up to a senior position until, at the age of 50, a substantial inheritance enabled him to retire and pursue his true enthusiasms. He had already done this in periods of extended leave from the Railways, exploring Hen Island, Little Barrier, the Kermadecs and Melanesia. He joined the Auckland Institute at the Auckland Museum in 1896 and served on its council for 40 years. He was a member of the "Moa Searching Committee", which searched for skeletons at various sites, and a newly-discovered seabird was named in his honour: *Pterodroma pycrofti* - Pycroft's petrel.

### You can support this project

Motuora Restoration Society would be delighted to receive [donations towards the purchase of an outdoor sound system](#) which will be used to broadcast recordings of a Pycroft's colony every night for years to come. This will encourage the birds to return and nest on the Island. Contact Chairman Ray Lowe on 027 268-1092.

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wild populations. This is the first time that captive bred Duvaucel's geckos were used in a translocation. The population will be closely monitored by MRS volunteers and MU researchers over the next five years for post-translocation responses, behaviours and population ecology. The information gained will help to assess the use of captive breeding for release as an option for restoration projects.

Please contact [m.barry@massey.ac.nz](mailto:m.barry@massey.ac.nz) for project inquiries.





# HELLO FROM THE ISLAND

## Sian and Toby Island Managers

The busy summer period has been and gone. Everyone has enjoyed the spectacular boating conditions and abundant sunshine.

The campground was visited by the regular families as well as quite a few first timers to the island. The end of 2012 was celebrated with a pot luck dinner involving the whole campground on New Years Eve.

This summer's drought has been a stark contrast to last summer's persistent wind and rain. The

top dam and the twin dams have been dry for over a month now. Luckily we still have one dam with some water which has attracted the island's resident pateke. Despite the dry conditions the vegetation on the island seems to be doing okay with only a few trees succumbing to the lack of water.

The dotterels had quite a successful breeding season with 7 chicks fledging. The oyster catchers were not so lucky with no chicks successfully hatching, and to our surprise one pair was observed incubating pinecones for 2 months!

We have had a number of kiwi releases this summer which has boosted the island's population. It has become common for campers to report seeing 5 to 10 kiwi when walking around the island at night. 15 kiwi will be taken off the island in April to a new home on the mainland at the Brenderwyns.

The gannet site has been a hive of activity since September last year. We have observed up to 25 individuals at the site and in December we observed 2 birds incubating eggs. One of the eggs hatched and the chick survived for only 3 weeks, the other egg was abandoned before it hatched. It is quite common for gannets to be unsuccessful at their first attempt at raising a chick and it is likely the birds that nested on Motuora are first time breeders. However we have seen quite a few gannets pairing up at the site which could be a good sign for the next breeding season. The sound system playing recorded gannet colony noises and decoys birds have undoubtedly helped to attract birds to this site.

We have had a number of translocations to Motuora Island in the past few months. Massey University translocated 90 Duvaucel's geckos to the island, the geckos came from Stanley and Korapuki Island's and some came from a captive bred population at the university. We have also had the recent Pycroft's Petrel translocation which was very successful. All 70 birds brought to Motuora seemed to adapt well to their new homes and fledged in good condition.

We are ready for the coming planting season this winter with the nursery full of plants. Fingers crossed we get some decent rain in the next few weeks.

Sian and Toby

## WORK TRIPS TO THE ISLAND—LAST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH

*On-going seed gathering, nursery and tree work, track maintenance, weeding as well as monitoring of sea birds, forest birds, lizards and insects are tasks that depend on input from members and volunteers.*

*Please join us on the monthly trips*

**28<sup>TH</sup> APRIL**—Aquatic weed clean out of twin dams, track clearing

**26<sup>TH</sup> MAY**—AGM: Grey face petrel burrow count, weta punga monitoring

**30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE AND 28<sup>TH</sup> JULY AND 25<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST**—Tree planting, track clearing, nursery work

**29<sup>TH</sup> SEPT**—Nursery work and weed monitoring

## LIZARD LINES

### Shore Skink—monitoring

Monitoring team Roger, Nick and Tim Harker undertook the third of the programmed series of annual trips to monitor the establishment of a population of shore skinks at Home Bay in February. The number of shore skinks was the same as last year 13 (of which 6 were gravid females and 1 was a neonate), but we are optimistic that the shore skink population is continuing to grow.

### Pacific gecko—planned

The translocation proposal for Pacific gecko is about to be resubmitted to DOC. Extra information was required for the new template format especially in the disease management section. DOC staff and the reptile TAG group are still supportive of the translocation which is intended to take place in November or December this year.

### Duvaucel gecko—monitoring

Nick Harker with Duvaucel's Gecko caught during night monitoring believed to be one of the originals released 7 years ago – the prints in the tracking tunnels suggest they are reproducing on the Island. Tim Harker undertook a

school science fair project to develop a method to calculate gecko length from the size of footprints. His project won him a number of prizes. View at <http://www.realisethedream.org.nz/participant-projects.htm>



Pic: Roger Harker

### NOTICE OF AGM

#### **The Society's Annual General Meeting**

**will be held on Sunday, 26 May 2013  
At 1.30 pm  
on Motuora Island**

Motuora Restoration Society appreciates the support of loyal members who donate annual subscription of \$25 to support the project. You may be receiving this newsletter because of past donation but please consider rejoining as a member again. Your contribution will advance the development of this very special place.

For detailed stories, pictures and news updates visit the Motuora Restoration Society website [www.motuora.org.nz](http://www.motuora.org.nz)



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