



# MOTUORA RESTORATION SOCIETY (INC)

PO Box 100132, North Shore  
Auckland 0745

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

Newsletter No. 59

July 2015

## Motuora Island Bird Count – Mike & Sharen Graham

On 28th June we did a slow walk around the perimeter of the island counting all birds seen or heard along the way. The count lasted 3 hours and 11 minutes and weather conditions were good. In all 296 birds were counted of 28 different species.

The most abundant bird counted was the Whitehead – 70 birds in total – which is very pleasing given it was only in 2007 when just 42 birds were introduced from Tiritiri Matangi island. The birds were seen in small groups and were widespread – seen everywhere along our route. Given we did not count the large areas in the centre of the island and given it is very likely we missed birds in the flocks we counted we believe the total population could well be as high as 200 birds.

One bird was seen with leg bands and would have been one of the originals brought to the island. They have been recorded living for as long as 16 years.

Whiteheads are what birders describe as “tree gleaners” – that is they forage through the leaves of the forest canopy searching for caterpillars, spiders, moths, flies, beetles and sometimes small fruit such as mahoe. They seldom if ever venture down on to the ground.

The second most common bird with 60 records was the Silvereye and in third place was the Grey Warbler with a very good 28 records. Like the Whitehead they too are tree dwelling insect feeders – although fruit features more prominently in the Silvereye diet.

The reason these three species top the charts is a good reflection of what bird food is currently available on the island. The advanced state of the plantings has produced a thick canopy and good cover and clearly the insect and invertebrate life is thriving. It will sustain these bird species until the warmer weather brings different food from plants such as karo, kowhai, flax, mahoe and pohutakawa. Another interesting aspect of these healthy numbers of whitehead and warblers is they are the respective hosts to the Long-tailed Cuckoo and the Shining Cuckoo, so given some time these two species may also benefit from their success.

Brown Quail	3	Whitehead	70	Tui	12
Pied Shag	3	Red-billed Gull	3	Grey Warbler	28
Little Pied Shag	1	Black-back Gull	1	Skylark	1
Harrier	2	Caspian Tern	1	Welcome Swallow	2
Pukeko	20	Kingfisher	3	Silvereye	60
Black Oystercatcher	3	Rosella	1	Blackbird	8
Fantail	20	Starling	9	Song Thrush	2
Yellowhammer	3	Chaffinch	18	Greenfinch	1
Goldfinch	5	House Sparrow	5	Spur-wing Plover	2
NZ Dotterel	3				



Whitehead



Kiwi capture on 20<sup>th</sup> April saw 13 birds caught and destined for new homes in Mataia and Manaia. One female with microchip was 12 years old, having had Motuora as her home for all those years.

## From the Island—Vonny Sprey

The island, even in mid-July, remains largely dry. Testament to this is that the top dam, which was full in July 2014, has only a small amount of water in it. This year it is a paddling pool even for the pukekoes and not nearly up to standard according to visiting paradise ducks. Campground occupancy has tailed off with the variable weather and sea conditions, though a couple of kayaking school groups did take advantage of calm weather windows to visit and enjoy Motuora.

### Nursery

I have taken a few seed collecting forays off the island. With valuable advice and assistance from Shelley Heis-Dunlop, Jan Velvin and Trevor Stones (on Motutapu Island) I returned to Motuora with a heap of fresh seeds, knowledge and enthusiasm. All seeds collected are now cleaned, sown, and wait in hopeful anticipation.

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## New Homes for Fluttering Shearwaters

Island visitors who venture to the north end of Motuora will be well aware of our solar-powered loudspeaker system which broadcasts gannet calls and has been part of our successful strategy to encourage them to settle and breed. However, unless visitors stay overnight, they would be unaware that the sound system plays a different tune during the hours of darkness.

Instead of gannet calls, we've been playing the sounds of fluttering shearwaters and they have been visiting some wooden

nest boxes buried near the speakers. Vonny has managed to photo some birds using our night-time camera and a fertile egg was laid last year, but failed to hatch after it was damaged during a fight between two birds.

This initial success has led us to reconsider the best location for a new fluttering shearwater colony. The speakers were originally set up very close to the cliff edge where there is only room for a few boxes to be dug in and where it's rather hazardous for night-time checking of the birds' progress. Fortunately, this possibility had been considered at the time the trees were being planted and a bare patch was left in a much safer spot just south of and below the site of the solar panel. This site has much more room to install nest boxes for the birds.

On our June work day we moved the two speakers to new locations and dug in nine artificial burrows just in front of them. As fluttering shearwaters have already adopted burrows at the original location we have left those ones in place. They are still being visited occasionally. Fluttering shearwaters begin their pre-breeding visits to their colonies in August and lay their eggs between September and mid-October so we will be making regular checks hoping for an early success at the new site.

**The Annual General Meeting** was held at Silverdale as the weather prevented the planned trip to Motuora going ahead.

The Chairman's Report highlighted amongst other things Vonney Sprey's very successful first year as Island Manager, the 100% successful translocation of 100 Pycroft's petrel chicks, the fledging of 10 gannet chicks from the artificial colony, the planting of 1900 pioneer and 500 canopy trees, and continued attacks on the island's weeds. The Chairman also drew attention to the excellent work by the Harker family on shore skink monitoring and reporting.

On the financial side the Society's capital had dwindled during the past year and this trend would continue unless another major sponsor can be attracted.

Future Management of Motuora: The Chairman indicated that discussions are being held with DOC about the future management of the island. He reminded members that the Society had had a Memorandum of Understanding with DOC since 1998 which had later morphed into a Management Agreement which sets out the Society's responsibility for managing the island. However, growing responsibilities placed on the Society (and in practice on the Chairman) are becoming too onerous, particularly in relation to the employment of the Island Manager and other compliance issues such as the anticipated changes to the legislation affecting the health and safety.

Committee roles. Chairman – Ray Lowe, Treasurer – Nattu Nataraj, Secretary – Peter Swedlund;

Committee Members - Kit Brown, Les Buckton, Colin Cordes, Helen Lindsay, Liz Norquay, Bruce Ross, John Stewart and Kevin Hawkins. The Committee was authorised to make an appointment to the position of Deputy Chairman at any later stage.

To mark 20 years since the founding of the Society, Les Buckton, representing Warkworth Area Forest and Bird, the branch of Forest and Bird that had been instrumental in getting the Motuora restoration project started, presented the Society with a book "From Penguins to Parakeets" and a donation cheque.

Charities Commission Registration Number CC 10250

<b>Motuora Restoration Society</b> The Society is undertaking the restoration of native forest to create habitat for endangered and absent common species on the island, and translocating such fauna and flora. Membership is \$25 per year for individuals or families, and \$5 for students.	<i>Chairperson</i> Ray Lowe	09 426 6900	Bruce Ross	09 445 1140
	<i>Secretary</i> Peter Swedlund	09 446 0618	Helen Lindsay	03 528 4020
	<i>Treasurer</i> Nattu Nataraj	09 624 6247	Liz Norquay	09 424 7444
	Les Buckton	09 425 9619	John Stewart	09 833 7059
	Kevin Hawkins	09 424 7444	Colin Cordes	09 638 7726
	Kit Brown	09 446 0618	Island Manager	0274 928 586

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**Stephanie Lowe & Amber Kettle helping with pricking out and potting up of seedlings.**

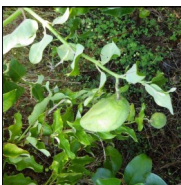
**Nursery web spider**  
(don't look if you are arachnophobe!)



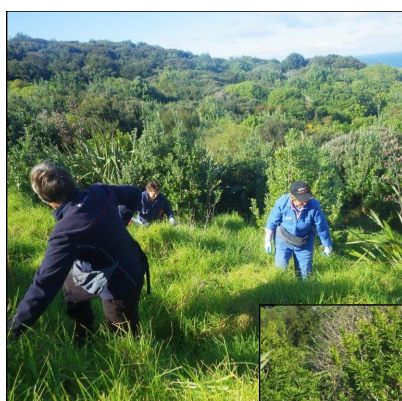
### Weeding

A concentrated effort has been made on the weeding front with a range of targeted weeds located and dealt to.

Kevin Hawkins and I weeded cliff areas by abseiling; and pruned trees from the gannet flight path into the colony.



**Moth plant** (fruited but thankfully not seeded)

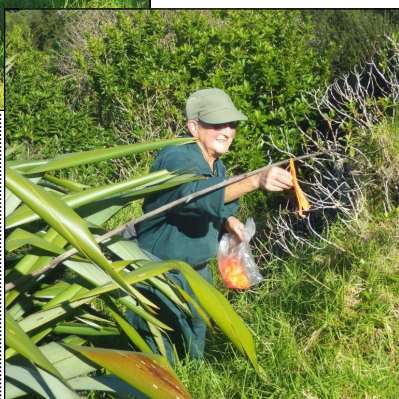


### Birds

Ten gannets fledged from Motuora this year and the colony site has been cleared of obstructing trees to allow an increase in colony size next season. On the bank adjacent to the gannet colony new borrows suitable for fluttering shearwater have been installed. A sound system playing their call may help to anchor visiting birds.

Grey faced petrel visited in May to spring clean their burrows, solve disputes and match make. Expect be see returning birds in 60 days time to lay their one egg of the year.

### Reptiles



**Introduction to Weeding 101 for DOC Volunteer group Ngaire, Bev, Jenny and Noelene who were prepared to tackle flaxes head on and go through gorse bushes backward (literally) awesome! Pics. Vonny Sprey.**

I took advantage of colder weather to have a sneak

**A Pycroft's Petrel caught on night motion camera as it climbs a tree to launch, probably on its fledging flight. Pic Vonny Sprey.**



check in the shore skink and gecko refuges and found the following :- 18 shore skinks of various ages, 2 moko and 1 copper skink, 16 young common gecko and 2 young Duvaucel babies- so that was cool to know.

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS - NOW DUE

Membership subscription reminders are being sent out now. We look forward to your continuing support.

## WANTED - A FUNDRAISER

Kit Brown is stepping down from the role of fundraiser, and we need a replacement. This work is absolutely critical to the continued functioning of the Society, as subscriptions and donations don't anywhere near cover the costs of our activities. If you think this might be a job you could take on please contact Kit on 09 446 0618 for details.

## Summary of progress of population of shore skinks translocated to Motuora

In February 2015 the monitoring team of Roger Harker, Nicholas Harker, Timothy Harker and Liz Maire surveyed the site at Home Bay where 24 shore skink were released in February 2011.

Monitoring this year resulted in the capture over six days of 43 skinks (of all species) which compares with 54 in 2011, 77 in 2012 and 40 in 2013. The total of 43 skinks comprised of 18 coppers, 7 mokos and 18 shore skinks. The condition of the individual shore skinks is good: the mean snout-to-vent length (SVL) and mean weight for adults (non-gravid) has been constant at ~60 mm and ~4 g over the entire study. Overall, the shore skink population is increasing, but at a slow rate. Recommendation is to continuing monitoring the population at yearly intervals.



*For those with a keen eye did anyone see the above photo on the TVONE weather news?  
Spirit of New Zealand at sunrise taken by Vonny*

## THANK YOU

**Bridgestone Ltd.** for sponsorship.  
**Terranova Planning,** for sponsorship.  
**Agpro NZ Ltd** for herbicides.  
**Yates NZ** for ongoing support with propagation supplies.  
**Kawau Cruises** for support with transport costs.  
**Auckland Zoo** for support with Newsletter production.  
**Ron and Edna Greenwood Environmental Trust** for donation for upgraded diving petrel acoustic attraction system.

## WORK TRIPS TO THE ISLAND

26 July  
30 August  
27 September  
No workday in October  
29 November

There are many tasks that depend on input from volunteers. Get 'hands-on' and join us on the regular work trips.

Opportunities for on-going volunteer work in the following areas of interest -

- planting
- weed monitoring
- track clearing
- bird monitoring
- lizard monitoring
- administration

Visit our website and record your interest to be sent the monthly reminder about trips.



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Address Block