



# MOTUORA RESTORATION SOCIETY (INC)

PO Box 100132, North Shore  
Auckland 0745

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

Newsletter No. 55

April 2014

## Pacific gecko

At the end of January we welcomed a new gecko species to Motuora, the Pacific gecko. This was made possible through a project headed by Auckland Council with the support of Ngāti Manuhiri as kaitiaki of both Motuora and Hauturu (Little Barrier Island) and with funding from the Auckland Zoo Conservation Fund. These reptiles are likely to have been present on Motuora in the



the locally ex-  
posed of habitat.  
Pacific geckos  
are the fourth  
reptile species  
to be translocated  
previous

translocations comprising Duvaucel's geckos (2006 and 2013), Shore skinks (2007 and 2011), and Common geckos (2010). Earlier in the month a team led by Su Sinclair collected Pacific geckos from Hauturu for translocation to both Motuora and Crusoë islands. These geckos were then taken to Massey University where they underwent disease screening. All geckos were given a clean bill of health and the go ahead to be released. While the geckos were held at Massey four of the gravid (pregnant) females gave birth. Once on the island these young geckos were released into shelters with their mothers. A total of 48 Pacific geckos (14 males, 26 females and 8 young) were released into shelters on Motuora in an area of regenerating bush. Reptiles are an important part of a healthy ecosystem in New Zealand: they pollinate plants, disperse seeds, predate insects and are also prey to some birds. NZ gecko species usually only have two young per year which means the spread of geckos on Motuora will be relatively slow. But hopefully in 20 years time the island will be teaming with reptiles!

## Gannets -

### the first juveniles to mature on Motuora

In 2010 we created an artificial gannet nesting site and set up solar charged speakers playing gannet colony sounds by day and fluttering shearwater call at night. In the first year there was interest from gannets flying by, in the second year gannets were observed on the ground preening, last year two eggs laid and hatched but neither fledged; this year we had more than 30 gannets regularly visiting the site and at one time there were 17 eggs being incubated. Two survived through to juvenile stage and have, we believe, fledged successfully. Gannets are large birds with a wing span of about 2 metres and weigh about 2.3 kg. They keep their juvenile plumage for about a year and over 3

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## Pycroft's Petrels translocation – second year of three planned transfers completed successfully

On the 4<sup>th</sup> March the team of 6 set out for Red Mercury Island for the collection of Pycroft's petrel chicks. Our experiences last year suggested that bad weather could disrupt our travel plans so we had arranged to make all this year's journeys by helicopter.

After clearing biosecurity at DOC's Coromandel office, we headed to Whitianga and by Skywork helicopter to Red Mercury. Two trips were needed. The first landed our personnel and the second all the food and equipment needed for a 10 to 12 day stay camping on the Island. Red Mercury is covered in native



Adult Pycroft's Petrel

bush and the Pycroft's petrels breed in burrows spread thinly all over the Island. We planned to search in two areas where the burrows were more concentrated. We split into three teams of two and began our systematic search. Many burrows were quite obvious with fresh soil, droppings and feathers near the entrance, which is a hole about ten centimetres in diameter. However, when parents leave the nest to go to sea on feeding trips, they often conceal the entrance with leaf litter and these burrows are then harder to spot. Once a burrow entrance had been found, the next step was to feel for a resident chick or adult in the chamber. Each chick found had its wing length and weight measured and recorded and a metal band fitted to its right leg before being returned to its burrow. Our aim was to find chicks which, when transferred to Motuora, would spend between 10 and 28 days there before fledging. On transfer day we selected chicks based on their wing length and weight which we judged would meet this aim. So, when we

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first encountered a chick on Red Mercury, we estimated what size it would be on transfer day and tied a length of coloured flagging tape to nearby bush indicating whether we expected the chicks to be just right (pink), marginally small (red) or marginally big (blue).

By the 10<sup>th</sup> March we had checked about 2,500 burrows and located over 200 chicks of which about 108 were considered candidates for transfer on the 12<sup>th</sup> March. On the 11<sup>th</sup> we assembled all the plastic pet carrier boxes and visited the candidate burrows to place two match-stick-sized twigs in the entrance to each one. On transfer day we were up and breakfasted before dawn to begin the collection. We first checked the stick fences. If the fence was intact then the chick had not emerged overnight, nor had its parents arrived to feed it (important information for the feeding team waiting on Motuora). Next, each chick had its wing length and weight measured and checked against our transfer criteria.

If the chick was the appropriate size, had no signs of illness or injury and had not emerged from its burrow overnight, it was placed in a pet carrier and its details were written on the lid.

After checking all 108 candidates, we had 92 birds available for transfer. The helicopter flight to Motuora took about 25 minutes and the chicks were welcomed there by the first feeding team, Helen Gummer, Kay Milton and Morag Fordham. Each bird was checked, re-hydrated if it was light or hadn't been fed on the previous night, and placed in one of the artificial burrows on Motuora.

Over the next few days a feeding programme was devised for each chick based on its stage of development and likely nutritional requirements. Pycroft's petrels feed their chicks about every two to four days and a similar regime was adopted on Motuora where the chicks were fed liquidised sardines via a syringe and crop tube. At first the chicks were confined to their burrows by blocking the tunnel entrance, but within a few days the more advanced chicks were allowed to come out at night. These birds climbed trees, practiced their take-off technique and exercised their wings. After about seven to twelve days the birds finally took off and headed out to sea. We don't expect to see them again for three years.



Seabird specialist Helen Gummer feeding a chick by a crop tube with Chisholm Whitney Trustee, Ken Whitney, observing



Pic. Ray Lowe

## Weta punga !

Early in April Auckland Zoo released 150 giant weta onto Motuora. This comes after a successful breeding programme (from 6 males and 6 females, transferred from Little Barrier to the zoo in 2012) to boost numbers of the endangered insect. Chris Green of DOC said this is part of the Weta Recovery Group's plan to establish several populations around the Hauraki Gulf to improve the chances of the species surviving in the event of a catastrophe on Little Barrier wiping them out for ever. These weta punga were close to adulthood and not far off producing babies of their own. The species, NZ's largest weta, dates back more than 190 million years. The insects sometimes weigh as much as a sparrow.

Charities commission registration number CC 10250

**Motuora Restoration Society**  
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>	Kit Brown	09 446 0618	Helen Lindsay	03 528 4020
<i>Treasurer</i>	Gillian Thomas	09 426 1481	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
	Robin Gardner Gee			



## HELLO FROM THE ISLAND

SIAN POTIER and TOBY SHANLEY

### Island Managers

It has been hot, dry and calm on Motuora which has been great for boating but not so great for the island's plants. The large dam at the top of the island was dry by mid-December after never fully recovering from last summer's drought.

As well as campers we have been getting lots of day visitors a few unfortunately try to bring their canine companions along with them. These few people are quickly reminded about the importance of keeping the island dog and pest free so the shorebirds, kiwi and other native wildlife can flourish in the absence of introduced mammals.

January saw the arrival of Pacific gecko through a translocation of animals from Hauturu undertaken in co-operation with Auckland Council

We have had around 20 kiwi chicks released on the island this past spring and summer. Each chick has arrived at the island accompanied with an entourage of 5 to 15 people all keen to get a glimpse of New Zealand's iconic bird. Some notable kiwi release attendees included Sir Graham Henry and Ruud 'the bugman' Kleinpaste. A capture of approximately 40 kiwi is planned to happen in the next few weeks and these birds will be released at Maranui, a privately managed reserve in the Brynderwyns and Mataia, a privately owned farm in South Kaipara.



The gannet site has been a hive of activity since last September. Up to 35 birds were observed at the site and 17 eggs were laid during October to early December. In mid-December four hatched. Unfortunately however, due to the inexperience of most of the breeding pairs, only 2 of the gannet chicks that hatched have made it to fledging age. (see photo taken by Toby). Both chicks fledged in the last week of March. Although this doesn't sound like a lot it is a huge milestone for the project and looks promising for the future of the Motuora gannet colony.

This year we were both lucky enough to be selected for the collection team to Red Mercury Island to collect Pycroft's petrel chicks. The team collected 92 chicks which were then transferred to Motuora by helicopter. These birds were cared for by

Helen Gummer and her team of hard working volunteers who checked their health and progress daily and feed them by hand until they fledged and left the island. It has been great to be involved in this project once again. Credit goes to John Stewart for organisation which has been so crucial to the success of this project so far.



Pycroft's Petrel collection team Tim Butcher, Donal Smith, project leader John Stewart., Sian Potier, Su Sinclair, & Toby Shanley

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years get progressively more white and the distinctive yellow head, reaching maturity after 3-4 years. The Maori name *Taakapu* comes from *taa* 'to strike' and *kapu* 'hand' which means 'to strike with hand' an action that produces a splashing noise a bit like the sound of a taakapu hitting the water. Gannets dive for fish and often dive vertically from up to 30 meters so they hit the water at a tremendous speed. Just before they hit the water they fold their wings back over their tail and a third opaque eyelid closes to protect the eye. Inflatable air sacs beneath the skin on their breast and lower neck cushion the entry shock. When these juveniles fledge they will most likely end up with other juveniles in the coastal waters of Australia returning to the Gulf when they are mature birds.

### SHEARWATERS VISIT

First we have found feathers that could be fluttering shearwater, then a night-vision motion sensor camera set up at the site captured this image which we believe to



**WORK TRIPS TO THE ISLAND DURING 2014  
— LAST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH**

*Motuora Restoration Society appreciates the support of loyal members who donate an annual subscription of \$25 to support the project. Your contribution will advance the restoration of this very special place.*

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

*Please join us on the monthly work trips. Visit our website and record your interest to be sent the monthly reminder.*

**Trip days (Sunday – depart 8 am– return 4ish)**

25/5/14—AGM to be held on the island weather permitting

29/6/14 Planting

27/7/14 Planting

31/8/14 Planting

28/9/14 nursery & track clearing

26/10/14 – (Labour weekend ) nursery & track clearing

30/11/14 nursery & track clearing

**NOTICE OF  
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**The Motuora Restoration Society's  
Annual General Meeting  
will be held on Sunday, 25 May 2014  
on Motuora Island (MRS Potting  
Shed). Start time - 1.30 p.m.**

If the work trip to the island is cancelled due to bad weather the meeting will be held at  
St. John Ambulance Hall, Silverdale Street, Silverdale

**AGENDA**

1. Minutes of the May 2013 AGM
2. Matters arising from the Minutes
3. Financial Report
4. Chairperson's Annual Report
5. Election of Officers and Committee Members\*
6. Subscriptions for the 2014/2015 year
7. Any other Business

\*The officers of the Society comprise the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary, and the Constitution calls for at least two other committee members. Nominations for all these positions will be accepted by mail, to be received by the Secretary at PO Box 100132 North Shore, Auckland 0745, by Thursday 22 May 2014. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor at the meeting. All nominees, proposers and seconders must be financial members of the Society.

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Address Block