



NEW ZEALAND
FAIRY TERN
CHARITABLE TRUST

TARA-ITI

No. 1: 2024
10th. February, 2024

P.O. Box 401072
Mangawhai Heads 0541

Our website: www.fairytern.org.nz
Email: info@fairytern.org.nz

Dear Members and supporters,

**In this issue: Fairy tern news; Volunteer stories; Mangawhai Harbourmaster;
Advocacy on the beach; Waipu Christmas.**

Fairy Tern News

Summary of breeding results for 2023-24 season (2022-23 season in brackets)

TOTALS: Eggs laid: 22 (22) Eggs hatched: 14 (13) Chicks survived: 13 (1)

This year looks like being a bumper breeding season! In stark contrast to last year's storms, cyclones and overwhelming rain, this season has been mostly calm with warm, settled weather, enabling fairy terns to get on with producing chicks, most of whom have survived. Currently there are nine wild chicks, one each at Waipu and Papakanui with seven at Mangawhai and four aviary chicks.

Waipu: The Waipu pair, WM-KW and K-M laid a one egg nest on 8 December. With harriers active around the site, it was decided to transfer the egg to Mangawhai, leaving a dummy egg which was replaced with a different egg from Mangawhai once the harrier threat was over.

This egg hatched on Christmas Day and has been well fed by its parents.



Photo:
Darren
Markin

It was banded KL-LM (L=Lime, K=Black) on 17th January and is now flying well, but still being fed by its parents. The other pair at Waipu, R-YM and KM-BK didn't make a nest this season. Ranger, Kallan has now finished at the site, but the Waipu volunteers will keep watch while the birds are still around.

Mangawhai: What a busy season it's been for the Mangawhai Rangers, Shannan and Harry! After the first nest was laid in a site subject to tidal inundation, the seven later nests have all been in the safer site known as the Dredge. The three eggs from the first nests, two from Mangawhai and one from Papakanui were returned from the Zoo and put under sitting birds at Mangawhai as they were close to hatching. The parents must have been pleasantly surprised by the short incubation period as they hatched 9th – 11th December! Unfortunately, one of these chicks was later found dead, but the other two have gone on to fledge successfully.



One of the first chicks at the estuary - originally from a Papakanui egg *Photo: Darren Markin*

At the same time, six eggs were taken from three Mangawhai nests for the captive rearing programme. One egg died and a chick later died, but the remaining four became the aviary birds.

Three chicks hatched in quick succession on 26th and 27th December and 1st January and two more later in January, making a total of seven chicks. The two youngest were banded on Auckland Anniversary Weekend. All is now quiet at the nest site, with the chicks being seen around the estuary and at Te Arai.



Just banded *Photo: Lucile Guion*

Pakiri: It's been a disappointing season for Pakiri Ranger, Lucile Guion as the egg that was laid early December on a newly created shell patch, failed to hatch and the nest was finally released early January. It must also have been disappointing for the dedicated parents, RB-YM and RM-K, who kept on with incubation until the nest was released.

Lucile has been continuing with advocacy and compliance work at the site and protecting dotterel and oystercatcher chicks. She organised an enjoyable, family-friendly bird watching event on Anniversary Weekend.

Anniversary Weekend Event



Lucile sharing the joy and excitement of bird-watching *Photo: Pakiri Beach Holiday Park*

She has also been helping at other sites, particularly the aviary. On seeing the Pakiri parents roosting and flying with the aviary chicks, she remarked, "Perhaps they get to be parents after all!"

Lucile has now packed up all the fences and signs at the Pakiri site.

Papakanui: The birds, (B)-RM and (W)M-W, as well as the Rangers, John Nielsen and Kat Siegers deserve a medal for perseverance!

Their first nest, on 16th November was at risk of being swamped by high tides so the egg was taken to the Zoo, then to Mangawhai where it hatched and fledged. (See photo on P2). Their second, a two egg nest was predated shortly after laying on 6th December. Black backed gulls are suspected.

Nothing daunted, the pair put down their third nest late December. It was in a site vulnerable to dune movement, so with wind forecast, the egg was removed to safety overnight and returned next day. The chick hatched on 7th January has been well cared for by its parents.



Can you spot the chick?

Photo: Kat Siegers

The parents have found a plentiful supply of mullet in the Waionui Inlet and have kept the chick well fed. It was banded BW-RM on 26th January and is now busy practising flying while still being very well fed by its parents.

The well fed Papakanui chick

Photo: John Neilsen



Zoo/Aviary: Of the six eggs taken from Mangawhai to the Zoo for captive rearing, four chicks hatched and have survived, with the fourth chick hatching just before Christmas. In early January the chicks were moved to the aviary where they soon learnt to get fish from the paint trays.



The aviary set up, with the open pen behind

Photo: Alex Wilson

After a successful trial fitting trackers to white fronted terns, the four chicks were all fitted with trackers, three radio tags and one satellite tag, so that their movements post release could be followed. They were banded at the same time: YM-LY (Yellow), LM-BW (Green), RM-YW (Red), BM-WB (Blue).

Green chick sporting its new tracker

Photo: Ayla Wiles





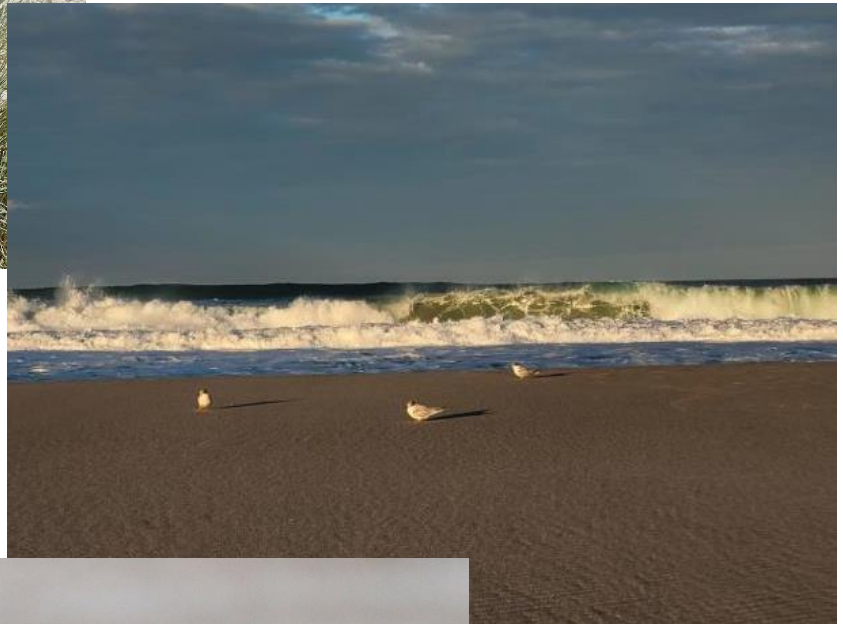
Volunteers were brought in to supplement DOC and Zoo staff and three interns: Alexandra and Robin from France and Georgia from Otago University. The volunteers were shown how to use the telemetry tracking equipment and joined the team doing dawn to dusk monitoring of the birds.

Georgia checking the telemetry tracking.

Photo: Heather Rogan

The chicks on Te Arai beach

Photo: Lucile Guion



Green coming in to land

Photo: Darren Markin

It was fascinating watching the chicks taking their first tentative flights and then finally venturing out of the open aviary, or pen as it was called. It took a bit of problem solving and trial and error



to work out how to get back into the pen initially, but that was accomplished and by late January, all four chicks were competent fliers, spending much of their time at Te Arai Stream mouth, returning to the pen for regular fish top-ups.



BM-WB (Blue) showing off his satellite tracker

Photo: Darren Markin

They were also seen interacting with adult fairy terns and chicks from Mangawhai. By the beginning of February they were all hovering and diving over the estuary and out to sea, at times with the Pakiri pair. There have been a few confirmed catches, but fish is still being provided in the pen by Zoo staff.

All the chicks have been on longer exploratory flights, sometimes disappearing for long periods and keeping watchers on tenterhooks until their return. The bird with the satellite tracker (Blue) has even made it as far as the Kaipara!

Zoo and DOC staff and interns, Georgia and Robin are still monitoring the birds, sometimes having to go further afield to find them.

As all the young birds disperse from the breeding sites, the Tara iti team is keen to hear of any sightings.

Please email Taraiti@doc.govt.nz if you have any sightings of fairy terns.

The rangers have finished monitoring the breeding sites and are busy writing their reports, summaries of which will be in the next newsletter, when they are available.

Volunteer stories

The Trust's boat skippers, Debbie and Guy report on their latest trips to the Mangawhai Sandspit....

Debbie's Tale of the Lost Jandal

30th Jan. I took the opportunity to spend a morning out on the spit with Lisa, before all our fairies have gone.

We had perfect weather, with an incoming tide so I didn't have to worry about getting the boat stuck in the boggy sand.

Shannon asked us to monitor 483 and 485, the two chicks that were banded last weekend.

Lisa spotted 483 while I was setting up, so I focused my scope on the russet head, crouched down by a small piece of weathered timber - not quite big enough for the chick to get shade under, but certainly favoured. I got bands as soon as it got up to stretch wings - WB-LM. Over the morning she (looked so like a girl chick to me) was fed at least 6 fish, by both parents.

She stretched her wings a number of times, preened like an adult, and moved further to the right to pingao, and then another small piece of wood, but mostly returned to the small plank awaiting the next feed. All seemed well with WB-LM.

Lisa spent some time finding her chick, 485, but eventually established the one she thought was 485 was another older visiting chick from Darlene zone, and hers was identified as LM-YK. There were a few "chasings" of at least 3 adult FTs flying over and around the chicks, but nothing to worry about, and her chick was fed fish as well, but not as many times as WB-LM.

I left at 11.45, to ensure I could save the boat from going aground when the tide turned, and the southerly wind rose, and managed to get through the hot sand without needing my jandals.

However, Lisa called and texted me asking if I had her jandals! She was stuck in the hot sand with scalding feet, so after I'd retrieved the boat safely, I walked back to meet her with my pair.

Unbelievably she must have thrown them out of the boat and walked off without them. We conducted a thorough search up-river, then downstream as the tide had turned, and Lisa finally found them a few 100metres around the corner, washed up in the flotsam and jetsam a few metres apart. She cheered - holding them up in the air.

We had a lovely day - even though I had to change from sunglasses to binoculars to reading glasses to scope, then back to reading glasses to see the time and make notes, and back and forth and around.....it was worth it! (And on Sunday I had walked along Te Arai beach to the stream at high tide and saw all 4 captive FT chicks standing together by the ocean).

It feels like it's been a very successful season for Fairy Terns this year - thank you to all concerned.

Debbie

Guy's Observation Trip Sunday 4th Feb

Lisa and I headed out on a beautiful calm morning (see attached photo) relieved that the conditions weren't the same as yesterday. The wind had been intense and we came across examples of its impact



walking to the Dredge. One was a DOC200 trap that had been almost completely submerged by wind blown sand (photo attached).

We had been asked to go to the hide called Donna and observe the last two unfledged chicks at nests 483 and 485. When we got there the sand had built up against the hide door (photo attached). We had to scoop the sand away to get the door open to get inside.



Trap and hide covered by sand

Photos: Guy Folster

Once inside we set up the scopes with me observing 483 and Lisa 485. Lisa pointed out the location that the 483 chick was on Tuesday and he/she was still there in the same spot. It was a bit longer before we were able to locate the chick at 485.

The 483 chick was being fed very frequently with a total of 17 feeds in the three hours I was observing it. It took three flights around the dredge but at one stage for a while it was hardly moving at all and I wondered whether it was in a food coma - haha.

The 485 chick wasn't being fed anywhere near as often but the frequency picked up towards the end of our Obs. It also took several flights around the dredge.

It was with a sense of achievement but a hint of sadness that we left the dredge for the last time this season. Here's hoping that we get to see all this season's new additions back here next summer.

Au revoir, Guy



Mangawhai Harbourmaster

A new and welcome sight on Mangawhai Harbour this summer has been Northern Regional Council's



new Harbourmaster boat.

Harbourmaster, Barry has been making sure everyone keeps to the speed limits on the harbour – very helpful for fairy terns trying to forage to feed themselves and their chicks.

Photo: Debbie Stone

Advocacy on the beach

Jane Vaughan reports.....

I took part in advocacy on the beach at the end of North Ave by Alamar Crescent a number of times during the holidays this tara iti season which I enjoyed. It is very rewarding to be able to let people see what is normally just out of sight.

Most people who stopped asked questions and enjoyed looking through my telescope or binoculars. Oyster catcher chicks were seen easily just across the channel and the red billed gull colony further along the spit was very busy with plenty of birds coming and going. There were always godwits up to the end of their long beaks in sand hunting for worms and dotterels bobbing about.

Fairy terns were not seen frequently but we were treated to two hovering and diving just off shore in the channel where children were fishing in a dinghy with an adult. The tide was just coming in and I am sure bringing small fish in which the birds were gobbling up! Those in the dinghy were completely oblivious to the sight, but it was delightful for the watchers.

One gentleman was very scathing about New Zealand and was returning to the Gold Coast where he had lived for many years and felt more at home. He could not understand why the sand dunes, the spit where hundreds of shore birds were currently nesting, was not covered in high rise apartments!

Waipu Christmas

Held on Christmas Eve, the Waipu Christmas parade is a firm favourite with locals and visitors.

This last Christmas fairy tern/tara iti featured on the Piroa Conservation Trust's float, which won a \$200 prize for the best conservation float.

Congratulations to Piroa Conservation Trust!

Photo: Susan Steedman

