

# Flight



ISSUE 159 - APRIL 2014



**Clean streams**  
**Wetland Champions**  
**Whio care**



# From the President

The late spring - summer across most of New Zealand has been significantly wetter than last year and this is good for wetlands and waterfowl with greater survival of young birds.

Although most of the large permanent lakes (Waiholo, Ellesmere, Wairarapa, Hatuma and Whangape) still exist, many of them suffer from water quality problems which reduce their productivity in terms of plants, birds and fish. The ephemeral wetlands around their margins are also under pressure. The excellent work of DU and other organisations is going some way to address the habitat issues but there is much more to do. Much of the DU effort is supported by donations and subsidies which we are extremely grateful for.

There are also good results being achieved from many of the whio and pateke projects around the country which DU has supported. With these endangered species there often is sufficient habitat but introduced mammalian predators play a major role in limiting numbers and even causing local extinctions. Where ongoing predator control is carried out 300 percent increase in whio numbers is regularly being recorded.

Our AGM is being held near Martinborough in the Wairarapa on August 1-3 and an interesting programme and field trip is being organised. Please mark your diaries. (See information page 2)

Look forward to seeing you all then.

**John Cheyne**



## An apology from the Editor

The great picture of the bittern on the front of the January 2014 issue of Flight was taken by Peter Langland.

Not Peter Lackland. If there is one thing I have learnt about Peter Langland it is that he lacks absolutely nothing.

Sorry Peter, it must have been my dyslexic fingers, **Editor.**

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(Please make an effort to send some hunting stories)

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**Cover photo:** Royal Spoonbill/*Platalea regina*, or kotuku ngautu papa, came to New Zealand from Australia about 60 years ago. This regal specimen was visiting Huritini when it was photographed by Will Abel.

# AGM – August – at a great venue

Planning is well underway for our AGM/Conference at Brackenridge Country Retreat & Spa, Martinborough, Wairarapa, Friday August 1 to Sunday August 3.

A three minute drive from the Martinborough Square, Brackenridge sits within view of the iconic Haurangi ranges. Reminiscent of early New Zealand station dwellings yet with welcoming stylish interiors, the cottages and studios offer relaxing accommodation. The main reception venue with open fires and covered verandas complete the picture.

Brackenridge can accommodate up to 64 guests in a mix of two (up to 4 guests) and four bedroom (up to 8 guests) cottages and studios. They have been very generous to DUNZ and

discounted their usual accommodation rates substantially so if you can share you will be able to further reduce the rates. Rates include continental breakfast provisions plus free range eggs, plus full use of the gym, spa pool and 20m indoor heated pool.

The Spa Brackenridge is open all weekend for appointments – bookings are essential.

At this stage we are planning to have a BBQ Dinner Friday evening for those who can get there.

On Saturday the actual AGM in the morning is followed by a bus trip to Wairio wetlands with lunch at Lake Ferry Hotel.

That evening is Buffet dinner at Brackenridge

with the DU fundraising auction.

On Sunday we have organised several speakers.

I visited the facilities in January and they are wonderful.

## Request:

If anyone has auction items they purchased at a previous DU dinner and no longer like or want, please feel free to recycle them back into the organisation.

Or if you have other items suitable for the auction, just email me and I will organise someone to pick them up – [info@ducks.org.nz](mailto:info@ducks.org.nz)

Many thanks

**Jan Abel, Administration**

## New members and administration

### New members

A very warm welcome to DUNZ:

Marcus Edge of Featherston  
Steph Schellingerhout of Albany  
Murray Fenwick of Whakatane  
Alister Fowke of Matamata.

Many thanks for your support.

### Administration, reminders and membership renewals

A friendly reminder, membership renewal time is coming for the year April 1, 2014 – March 3, 2015.

No change in membership fee this year.

Please remember if you bank directly into our account to put either your name, membership number or invoice number as a reference.

Believe me it is a great help!!!

### Events by email

Could everyone who is interested in receiving information regarding various events via email please ensure I have your correct email address. I am getting several returned each time I send anything out so if you have changed your email address lately please let me know.

Just send me an email – [info@ducks.org.nz](mailto:info@ducks.org.nz)

Many thanks,

**Jan Abel, Administration**

## wetland care NEW ZEALAND



Our business is to harness community, business and government resources to restore and develop lost wetland areas within New Zealand.

Wetland Care members recognise that wetlands are vital to the wellbeing of the environment, acting as huge ecological sponges by soaking up pollutants and filtering water before it reaches streams, rivers, lakes, aquifers and the sea.

Our initiatives focus on matters as far-reaching as groundwater replenishment, flood control, nutrient and contaminant management and climate change – all critical factors for the conservation of freshwater and saltwater wetlands and marshes.

We want to preserve and conserve the flora and fauna of our most endangered ecosystem so that vibrant wetlands are our legacy to future generations.

Funding for projects comes from the Waterfowl and Wetlands Trust established by



**Ramsar site:** Whangamarino Wetland, Waikato - a Ramsar wetland of international significance. One of the wetlands DOC is working to protect and restore. **Photo:** Courtesy of DOC.

Ducks Unlimited New Zealand Inc in 1991, as well as from membership, donations and corporate memberships.

Central to Wetland Care New Zealand's mission is forming partnerships with people and organisations with similar aims. Money from our partnership with Banrock Station Wines has been given to wetland conservation projects done by, among others:

**Tutukaka Landcare Coalition**  
**Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Society Inc.**  
**Ducks Unlimited Operation Pateke**  
**Port Charles release 2005 at Coromandel**  
**Henley Trust, Masterton**  
**Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, Wellington**  
**Kitchener Park, Feilding**  
**Manawatu Estuary Trust, Foxton**

**Mangaone Wetland, Raetihi**  
**Masterton Intermediate School**  
**Steyning Trust, Hawke's Bay**  
**Travis Wetland Trust, Christchurch**  
**Wairoa Wetland, South Wairarapa**  
**Wetland Trust New Zealand, Rangiriri**  
**Waitakere Branch Forest and Bird**  
**Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust, Dunedin**  
**Cape kidnapers pateke release, 2008 and 2009**  
**Fiordland pateke release, 2009.**

For further information, please contact:  
**William Abel** - Director, Wetland Care  
New Zealand, phone 06-362 6675  
PO Box 281 Levin.



# That time of year – again

Game bird hunters are probably all checking their equipment ready for the May 3 Saturday start to the hunting season.

No 1 on the list should be the game bird hunting licence. Check your bank account, the full season licence has gone up one dollar. That's right \$91 this season.

Why the extra dollar? Fish & Game tell me the extra dollar will be going toward Mallard research.

Hunting has become so hi-tech in recent years the ducks really don't stand a chance. Some hunters spend thousands of dollars in preparation for the season.

The camo gear, the special maimais, and even the decoys mean the ducks are duped into thinking there are real ducks on the water. Special paint on the decoys makes them look lifelike. Some decoys are made to look as if they are sleeping or feeding.

There are also decoys that paddle and splash the water. Then there are electronic callers. The ducks don't really stand a chance... It is just as well there is a bag limit.



**Sky search:** John Pukaloski scans the sky.  
**Photos:** Liz Brook



**Decoy:** One of those fancy wing flapping splashing toys.

## Some reminders for your pre hunting list:

- Game bird hunting licence, regulations booklet.
- Carry firearms licence at all times.
- Confirm access with landowners.
- Get permit to hunt on Fish & Game and DOC land.
- Fix the maimai: leaks, rotten boards seating etc.
- Clean decoys.
- Vaccinations and worming for the dog.
- Check regulations for the region you are hunting in.
- Hunt ethically and responsibly.
- Don't drink and hunt. Alcohol impairs judgement.
- Be a tidy kiwi – take your rubbish when you leave.

## Basic safety rules:

- Shotgun in tip-top condition. Check sighting.
- Treat every firearm as loaded.
- Store firearms and ammunition safely.
- Always point firearms in a safe direction.
- Load only when ready to fire.
- Always, always - identify your target.
- Check the firing zone.



**Retrieval:** No gain without pain – someone has to pick them up.



**Spent cases:** Shotgun cases tell a tale.

*Farmers and residents of the Mangaone West Stream (lower Manawatu) see their farms and places as habitat and would like to maximise the biodiversity within the habitat while remaining commercially and domestically productive and sustainable.*

## Change attitudes and improve the environment

The Mangaone West region is typical of many farming districts where remaining indigenous cover is very limited and the balance is in productive farmland.

Into this area a few years ago stepped Ducks Unlimited member Ossie Latham, and his conscious was pricked by the degradation he saw in the waterways near his home.

Growing up on the banks of the Oroua River downstream from Feilding, part of a third generation on both maternal and paternal sides of his family he remembers: "During that time the Oroua had gone from a pristine small river where kids could swim in deep holes, dive off the road bridge, catch eel, trout and flounder, to a gravel choked conduit for industrial, town and farm waste. A dead waterway, the greatest degradation happened in my time as a kid," said Ossie.

Then came concern for the Manawatu River and its' tributaries of which the Oroua is one. The Manawatu River Accord was set up and out of that spun the Oroua Catchment Care Group. Ossie attended their meetings and the Oroua Group decided the best way to tackle the problems was to think catchment wide but act local to address whatever issues may be in any given area. The Mangaone West stream where Ossie and wife Mary live is a tributary of the Oroua. Ossie volunteered to be champion for that area.

As a local champion his job was to gage the support of residents for a collective effort to address issues of farming and lifestyle practises that degrade the environment.

"Once sufficient interest was identified, we called a community meeting and established the Mangaone West Landcare Group. Knowing that what we do on our land eventually affects water quality in our area and downstream, we chose to take a holistic view of our catchment and deal with our habitat as a whole, be it farming practises or lifestyle choices."

Ossie said it was fortunate that some residents in the lower catchment had come together 15 years ago and as a group had investigated and in many cases implemented, more sustainable farming practises.

This group ran out of puff after four years but two of the group's successes were a widespread possum control programme



**Ossie Latham:** Along with his faithful hounds, Ossie and Mary Latham have turned their section of the Manawatu into a haven for water birds, along with running the farm.

**Photo:** Liz Brook

that is still going today, and the other was recognising the detrimental effect of pugging by wintering mature cattle on wet soils.

Neil Managh, coordinator of the original group gave his support to Ossie who then called on the leading farmers in the area, the local school principal, known environmentalists, friends and acquaintances and got their commitment to the scheme.

"We organised a community wide pamphlet drop calling a public meeting and away we went," Ossie said.

Is this something DU members should get involved with? Ossie said: "Given that whatever we do to our landscape sooner or later affects our wetlands and waterways, I think it is worth DU members thinking about what happens upstream from their favourite dam, wetland or waterway.

"The primary benefits are thinking of being more sustainable in what we do for the benefit of the habitat as a whole. This includes the best way to keep our soils in situ, the nutrients on the property and a flourishing diversity of which we are part."

Although initial funding came from the Government through the Ministry for the Environment to the Regional Council to the group; they also applied to Trusts with an interest in what they are doing and they asked

Landcare to come on board to provide the governance and institutional expertise.

About 60 percent of landowners are part of the group. All major farmers bar two are committed and interest is growing. There is a diversity of views on what best practise is and just what is sustainable but Ossie said they cope with this by agreeing that "Sustainability is the ability of the current generation to meet its needs, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs."

"I'm not sure where I got the quote from but it gained widespread acceptance to what we are on about.

"We recognise it's taken over 100 years to get where we are now, so we expect our work to improve our chosen living spaces to be intergenerational. While the stream is our common bond, we love our landscape which the stream and we are part off."

### (Afterthought)

"After doing the question and answer bit for you I got to thinking, what is the key for many of the settler families who are part of our group? Many of them are 3rd and 4th generation; they have a strong sense of stewardship, a concept that is evolving as our knowledge of interdependence grows. It's good to be part of their efforts."

## Sad news for DUNZ

Dave Johnston – a DUNZ Board member for a great many years, very loyal supporter and great friend passed away in his sleep on the weekend of March 22/23.

Dave and Ann built an extensive wetland on their dairy farm at Reporoa. It has been an inspiration to many and they have

welcomed interested visitors over the years.

Our condolences go to Ann and family at this sad time.

Ducks Unlimited has lost a very important member and a source of knowledge second to none.





# Tossi field day



**Weeding gang:** Volunteers busy around the Bird Hide at Tawharanui Regional Park.

**Photo:** Patte Williams.

At the recent Volunteers Day at Tawharanui Regional Park, one of the tasks was to weed the new plants that had been put in last year beside the Bird Hide.

The Lagoon at Jones Bay has been very busy now with various water bird life and they are not at all worried about the Hide built there in 2013. It's a great place to sit and enjoy the scene.

With the grassy area behind the Hide, a decision was made to disguise it with bush. So the

volunteers planted low shrubs there last year. Sadly a family of rabbits moved into the area and many of the plants have been eaten badly. So now netting has been used around individual plants. Also many of the rabbits have been discretely removed.

A trailer load of mulch has also been useful to place around the plants to keep them moist in the extreme summer heat.

**Patte Williams**

# Editor's request

Some few issues ago I asked members to send me photos of their dogs. Working, or not, with a few notes about the dog. Now with the game bird hunting season coming up, if you can find a space to carry a camera, there should be some chances to capture a few great shots of dogs on the job.

Even a puppy picture of two would be okay.

A few very short weeks ago one of my dogs died. She was only three. I loved her to bits, one of my best dogs. Shortly after I got her she had a fit, epilepsy as it turned out.

The vet said there was a chance she would not live long, and even medication would not have saved her. In the end it was a massive seizure that ended her life.

Of course I had taken photos of her, but now I wish I had taken more.

So send in your pictures of your dog on the job bringing back the game, or just relaxing. Send as a jpg not less than 500kb, or you can post a print. I will return it. And please send a short (or long) caption.

For those of you with special dogs for sniffing out birds, this is your chance to get their picture in print...

**Liz Brook,**

**Editor.**

**Email to:** [liz.brook@farmside.co.nz](mailto:liz.brook@farmside.co.nz)

# Riparian plan helps BoP farmer

Jim Coster has been farming Mataiwhetu Station for almost 60 years (his family purchased the property on his 21st birthday) and now his eldest son, Allen, manages operations.

The farm was originally rundown with leaky fences, rudimentary sheep yards, a basic woolshed and no cattle yards. About a quarter of the 300ha was covered in fern and manuka, and plenty of gorse.

Today the sheep and dairy grazing station has been heralded as a sustainable success. The former Meat & Wool Board monitor farm, and supreme winner of the Bay of Plenty Ballance Farm Environment Awards, has benefited from technology and environmental practices.

Jim said measures had been put in place on the farm located in the lower Kaimai Ranges, to preserve the fauna, flora and Mangakaiwhiria Stream that meanders through the property.

Thousands of trees were planted, most waterways fenced and land around the stream

was retired to take advantage of the Bay of Plenty Regional Council riparian programme.

However, Jim said the process takes perseverance and hard work.

"When you retire land from grazing, you can have real problems. First, you need to have a substantial fence that is stock proof, and it's advisable to run a hot wire at shoulder height to deter cattle from reaching through."

Noxious animals and weeds were other problems, and although the gorse had been beaten any spraying done had to be judicious as there was the risk of killing replacement plantings. Regional council natural resources operations manager Warwick Murray said the council has been working for decades on land and waterway management.

Since 2009, 569 farmers have taken advantage of regional council assistance to improve water quality and farm productivity, he said. The riparian programme uptake was increasing year on year.

Between 2001 and 2005, it averaged 224m of waterway protected annually per landowner, compared with 379m in 2009/10 and 541m in 2012/13.

"This response has been terrific but we'd love to have more landowners on board," Warwick said. "Up to 25 percent funding is available for most work the under a riparian management plan and there is a 'trees at cost' option, for landowners to get plants and trees for propagation from nurseries."

The Western Bay of Plenty District Council also provides funding for fencing in certain circumstances. Figures show stock has been excluded from 87 percent of the stream length within the Tauranga Harbour catchment, 83 percent of Ohiwa Harbour catchment streams and Nukuhou and Waitotahi Rivers, and 93 percent of stream margins in the Rotorua Lakes.

**Carmen Hall**

# National Rural Wetland Champions for 2014

Combining good farming practices with proactive steps to look after the wetlands on their beef and dairy farm, has earned Ducks Unlimited members in the Wairarapa, Jane Donald and her family, the title of “National Rural Wetland Champion 2014”.

To celebrate World Wetlands Day this year, the National Wetland Trust and the Department of Conservation (DOC) worked with regional councils to find New Zealand’s most wetland-friendly farming families.

Wetlands are important to maintaining a healthy environment, playing a key role in water purification and flood control. Protecting wetlands and minimising the impact of farming benefits everyone.

Seven regional councils submitted nominations. The judges - National Wetland Trust founder Gordon Stephenson, National Wetland Trust trustee Keith Thompson and Jan Simmons – were impressed with the wetlands conservation work being done by farmers throughout the country.

They named the Donald family as the National Rural Wetland Champion for 2014. The family has been farming alongside Lake Wairarapa, at Big Haywards Lagoon, for more than 150 years. The judges said: “This farm ticked just about all the boxes for environmental best practice.”

For several generations, since 1856, the Donald family has been working to protect and restore more than 300 hectares of nationally significant wetlands, on the eastern side of Lake Wairarapa.

In their nomination the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) described Jane Donald, daughter Paula Gillett and their family - present and past - as role models for wetland restoration.

The GWRC praised the Donalds’ ability to marry their farming and conservation of their wetlands.

“Canny initiative and perseverance describe Jane and Paula’s approach to wetland development and protection. This land has a long association with farmers, hunters, conservationists, and local councils. The majority of the land farmed by the Tairua partnership is protected by a QEII covenant with actively managed functioning wetlands.

“Areas of remnant native forest have been and continue to be fenced off with a programme of weed and animal pest control in and around the wetlands. The farming operation is strategic, with the beef farming associated with the wetlands and lakeshore and the dairying occurring inland separated from the wetland complexes. The farm and integrated wetlands provide a show case for not just protecting biodiversity and water quality but enhancing it in a most practical and innovative way by clever land managers using agricultural tools.”

The Donald family have had the wetlands permanently protected by a QEII National Trust



**Wetland protection:** Jane Donald and daughter Paula Gillett and her son, on the Wairarapa family property.

**Photo:** Greater Wellington Regional Council.

covenant and as part of their farming operation they also:

- keep stock out of waterways and other sensitive areas
- plant native wetland plants to restore habitat
- manage pests and weeds to enhance native wildlife
- design their culverts to ensure fish can move freely
- carefully manage fertiliser and dairy shed effluent to minimise runoff and return nutrients to the land
- use a feed pad to reduce trampling by stock and erosion.

One example of the how they incorporate conservation into their farming is the use of cattle as weed control agents. They graze open areas in summer to control weeds such as wild tall fescue and maintain waterfowl habitat. This shows that farming and wetlands can coexist. Wildlife and water quality can be protected while maintaining farm production.

## Pioneer

Jane Donald has also pioneered aerial application of herbicide to control plant species such as willow and alder which were encroaching on the wetland her father had protected. This is now a commonly used, cost-effective method for hard-to-reach wetlands. Done correctly, it controls the spread of introduced plant species enabling native plants to flourish and provide a habitat for native birds and other native wildlife.

The Donald farm is proof that this is a recipe for success. Jane and her family have been rewarded for their conservation work with abundant native wildlife in their wetlands. This includes the rare Australasian bittern (*matuku*), the first record of royal spoonbills (*kōtuku*

*ngutupapa*) nesting in the Wairarapa, and the highest diversity of native fish species among wetlands in the area.

National Wetland Trust founder Gordon Stephenson said: “There’s a heap of initiatives and best practices here, in both farming and conservation. The Donald family are excellent role models for farmers. I’m delighted to see they share what they’ve learnt on their farm with the wider community.”

## Highly Commended

The judges awarded a Highly Commended Certificate to the Gilder family of Otago for their work to protect wetlands on several Landcorp dairy farms they manage at Paretai near Balclutha. They have QEII covenants on the wetlands and fenced them as protection from stock. The Gilders are also planning wetland conservation measures on their own recently purchased block.

The judges were impressed with the Gilder’s best practice farming and involving their community and schools in their conservation work. Helen Gilder said, “It’s important to sow the seed of environmental importance into future generations.”

Jan Simmons of the Department of Conservation was delighted at the high quality of the nominations spanning the country. “These farming families show that profitable farming and environmental stewardship can go hand in hand. They are an inspiration.”

World Wetlands Day is celebrated on February 2, the anniversary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance held in Iran in 1971. The theme for this year’s National Wetlands Day was ‘Wetlands and Agriculture: Partners for Growth’.

To learn more about wetland restoration visit [www.wetlandtrust.org.nz](http://www.wetlandtrust.org.nz)



# Picture Gallery



## Above

**On the wing:** This great flight of mainly Shoveler, Teal and Scaup at the Pharazyn Reserve just north of Waikanae (Kapiti coast) show the importance of such areas of permanent open water where the birds can congregate

**Photo:** Ian Jensen.

## Left

**Black & White:** A graceful black swan and her three white chicks.

**Photo:** Liz Brook

## Below

**Cohabitation:** Spoonbills and mallards happily share the food basket.

In March Tony Silbery, DOC, saw 30 Spoonbills feeding at Wairio. They are new to the area.

**Photos:** William Able







#### Above left

**White faced heron:** On the lookout for food.

**Photo:** William Able

#### Above

**Nesting:** A black swan keeps her chicks close.

**Photo:** Liz Brook

#### Left

**Favourite duck:** Scaup are by far the Hayes' favourite duck. They reared large numbers in their back yard aviary in Wainuiomata in the 1980s.

**Photo:** Neil Hayes

#### Right

**Beautiful barons:** At Hurlinui there are Cape Barron Geese, and this is the first time they have bred for about four years. They are not wild.

They are named for Cape Barren Island, where they were first sighted. They are one of the rarest of the world's geese. It is gregarious outside the breeding season, when it wanders more widely, forming small flocks.

Strictly speaking it is not a goose – its closest relative is the Paradise shelduck. It is a strong flier and comes in grey with soft darker spotting, long pink legs and black feet. Its bill is covered with a fleshy, yellow-green cere (wax like membrane).

**Photo:** William Able







**Dinner time:** Just a small number of the shelducks that had been eating up large on a recently mown paddock.

**Photo:** Liz Brook.

## Pre season practise for hunters

Game bird hunters were invited this year to help farmers disperse big flocks of Paradise shelduck from paddocks and crops on private land in the Wellington region.

The special three weekend hunting season starting from Saturday, February 8 took place in the Manawatu/Wairarapa areas.

Fish & Game introduced the special season to assist landowners who have groups of birds feeding on new grass and crops. The idea was to disperse the ducks more than to bag them.

Paradise shelduck are known for moulting in groups on open water in

January, and once the birds can fly again in February they tend to gather in large groups. They can often be seen in mobs of 200 or more on the lookout for food, and cause problems for farmers.

This special season was restricted to private land only. Public areas including DOC and Fish & Game land were not open during the special season. There was a five bird a day limit so the kill was modest.

The hunt succeeded in spreading out the birds and was seen as a good result.

## Letter to the Editor

# Lack of ducks – Where have all the mallards gone...?

A Wairarapa Times Age article (March 3) regarding the dramatic drop in the number of ducks that can be hunted during the forthcoming season makes depressing reading!

But lack of habitat and the impact of predators are certainly not the main reasons why our main gamebird – the mallard – has almost disappeared from the Wairarapa; because thousands of acres of wetlands have been created and protected over the last 20 years and, thanks to the Greater Wellington Regional Council, vast numbers of bird predators have been eliminated at well over a dozen key sites in the Wairarapa. For example, at 30-hectares of Taumata Lagoon over 4500

predators have been eliminated – feral cats, ferrets, stoats, weasels, rats and hedgehogs – but from 6000 mallards flocking at the lagoon each February between 1990 and 2007 we now see only 100 - 150 arriving!

This is because in 2006 the use of lead shot was banned in 12 gauge shotguns and it is now known that steel shot – an inexpensive alternative – has increased the crippling factor from 6 percent with lead shot to over 50 percent. Which means that a shooter who has retrieved a Limit Bag has actually shot three limit bags, with 50 percent of the birds shot not being recovered.

The ban on lead shot was introduced because

it was believed that ingested lead kills ducks, but this is now known to be simply not true!

The mallard situation is now so serious that the 12 NZ Fish & Game Councils will be lucky to survive the inevitable massive drop in licence sales; with North Island Councils being the first to close up shop!

On top of this it is now known that the aerial bombardment of 1080 is killing trout – and at the same time eliminating a highly lucrative tourist fishing industry and the huge income from the sale of trout fishing licenses by Fish & Game Councils.

**Neil Hayes QSM CEnv**



# Bird numbers up at Lake Ellesmere – annual census

An “all wetland species” census of Lake Ellesmere was carried out on February 22 by 12 teams of observers: Ornithological Society NZ, Department of Conservation, Christchurch City Council rangers, Fish & Game, Environment Canterbury, Ngai Tahu, Rotoract, Waihora Ellesmere Trust, and others. There were 55,033 birds counted thanks to the hard work of the many people involved.

BirdingNZ website tells us that February 22 was one of the hottest days of summer, over 40 people from a range of organisations undertook the counting of all the wetland birds on Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere. You can see some of those photos on their Facebook page.

The 12 teams each took a section of the lake margin. Each team included experienced OSNZ birders, supported by staff and volunteers from the various organisations.

Three teams led by Christchurch City Council Rangers counted the sections of the lake located within the city boundary – from the Halswell River towards Kaituna and along Kaitorete Spit. The other teams covered the remainder of the lake margin which is in the Selwyn District.

The count is a snapshot of the birds present on a specific day and for the species which occur in large numbers such as the ducks and geese, the numbers are estimated by experienced counters.

The total number of birds recorded is slightly down on last year, with just over 55,000, compared with around 55,700 in 2013. The numbers of waterfowl were down with just under 42,000 this year compared with around 45,000 in 2013. However, the numbers of waders were up with over 7300 recorded, compared with around 6100 in 2013.

Also notable is that 45 species were recorded in 2014 compared with only 39 in 2013. This

More information on the count is published on the WET (Waihora Ellesmere Trust) website. [www.wet.org.nz](http://www.wet.org.nz), but count totals were as follows:

Aust Crested Grebe	3	Spur-winged Plover	328
Black Cormorant	615	Pacific Golden Plover	45
Pied Cormorant	240	Wrybill	243
Little Cormorant	51	Banded Dotterel	1496
Spotted Shag	4	Bar-tailed Godwit	120
White-faced Heron	92	Red Knot	44
White Heron	3	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	18
Royal Spoonbill	871	Pectoral Sandpiper	6
Mute Swan	14	Curlew Sandpiper	18
Black Swan	7473	Red-necked Stint	44
Canada Goose	3777	Sanderling	2
Feral (greylag) Goose	443	Common Greenshank	1
Paradise Shelduck	5148	Pied Stilt	4959
Mallard/Grey Duck	5173	Black Stilt	2
Grey Teal	12504	Black-backed Gull	691
NZ Shoveler	5893	Red-billed Gull	38
Shoveler/G Teal	780	Black-billed Gull	2359
NZ Scaup	12	Black-fronted Tern	61
duck sp.	696	Caspian Tern	386
Australasian Harrier	67	Gull-billed Tern	16
Pukeko	97	White-fronted Tern	175
SIPO	17	NZ kingfisher	6
VOC	2		

year’s count recorded many more Arctic migratory species, e.g. greenshank and sanderling that were not seen in 2013.

With the very low lake level, the habitat for birds was of variable quality with some areas of the lake edge too dry. However, the lake

edge is extensive and the habitat was very good in places leading to a redistribution of birds around the lake. Overall the bird numbers seem stable.

This copy courtesy of BirdingNZ, and Peter Russell. See [www.birdingnz.net](http://www.birdingnz.net)

## Pukaha Mt Bruce news

### Paintings at Pukaha

It started in March but continues to June 22 so you can enjoy an exhibition of native bird paintings at Pukaha Mount Bruce.

Entry to the exhibition is free of charge.

### Mauriora update

In October 2013 Mauriora, the second white kiwi to be hatched at Pukaha Mount Bruce, was released into the Pukaha reserve. A close eye was kept on him and in February it was decided that his weight wasn’t being maintained. He was taken to Wildbase at Massey University where it was discovered he had ‘grass burrs’ in the roof of his mouth. They were removed and his appetite quickly recovered.

He’s back in the Pukaha reserve and we’ll continue to keep an eye on him.

### New website!

A refreshed website went live at the end of February and staff at the reserve are really pleased with the new look. Have a look at [www.pukaha.org.nz](http://www.pukaha.org.nz)

Two key areas focused on were ensuring that opening hours and prices are clearly stated on the front page, along with “where we are” directions. They have made this website mobile friendly as more people are using mobile devices such as iPads and smartphones to make decisions about where to go and what to do.

If you have any feedback email - [helen@pukaha.org.nz](mailto:helen@pukaha.org.nz)

## Baz the boss



**My chair:** Baz is the real boss at the Hayes’ home, and here he is sitting in the boss’s chair. It is a rocking chair and Neil said Baz can even do “high fives” while he is rocking. Which is all down to Sylvia’s training Neil said.

**Photo:** Neil Hayes.



**Whio:** Enjoying the water in a fast running Tongariro stream.

**Photo:** Kerry Oates

### **Blue duck/whio, Ruapehu area**

**Population:** Under 3000.

**Threat status:** Nationally vulnerable.

**Found in:** Clean, fast-flowing rivers in the North and South Islands.

**Did you know:** Rarer than some species of kiwi, the whio features on

our \$10 note. It is one of a handful of torrent duck species worldwide and only lives on fast-flowing backcountry waterways. Nesting along the riverbanks, they are at high risk of attack from stoats and rats.

This year Blue duck/whio is at risk from a predator plague caused by high levels of seed production ('beech mast'). Battle for our Birds protects whio and other native species from predators.

## **Finishing school for whio**

The Whio Forever partnership is adding another tool to its arsenal of protection this year with funding to build a new whio rearing facility at the Tongariro National Trout Centre near Turangi.

National Whio Recovery Group leader Andrew Glaser said the North Island whio rearing facility will help recover the national whio population by allowing whio ducklings to 'grow and train' in a more natural environment. "It's like a finishing school for whio, where they can learn to swim and feed in fast flowing water, giving them a better chance of survival when they are released back into the wild.

"A facility like this will mean more ducklings survive the transition from captivity back to the wild, so they can establish their own territories and find mates. This will help us boost the population in the wild," he said.

Andrew pointed to the success of restoring the whio population in Egmont National Park which has been achieved through a combination of predator control activities and the release of captive reared birds over the

past nine years.

"We've been able to bring whio back from local extinction, and develop the tools and knowledge to enable us to do this in other areas of the country.

"This is the first successful restoration of a whio population in New Zealand. It is a credit to the Taranaki community and shows what can be done with an effective trapping regime and WHIONE (lifting eggs and hatching and rearing in safe captivity)."

The whio population in Egmont National Park has grown from almost nothing to 24 pairs of whio since 2005. This breeding season a record 36 ducklings hatched in the park, although it's not yet known how many of these will survive into adulthood.

Two whio rangers on the Manganui o te Ao River – searching for whio travel on unique water craft manufactured by our multi talented DOC rangers!

The Tongariro National Trout Centre's rearing facility will give more whio ducklings a fighting chance of making it to fledglings in

a safe secure environment. Using existing infrastructure at the centre the facility will be constructed on one of the redundant trout raceways and will give visitors the chance to see whio and learn more about the iconic bird.

Existing whio rearing or hardening facilities are located at Te Anau and at Peacock Springs near Christchurch. Using South Island facilities means extended travel for North Island whio ducklings. Constructing a low cost facility in the North Island reduces the risk and expense associated with this.

The facility will cost an estimated \$110,000 with funding from the Whio Forever partnership, DOC and the Central North Island Blue Duck Charitable Trust.

Construction should be completed for the arrival of the first ducklings in September this year.

The support of Genesis Energy is enabling DOC to double the number of fully secure whio breeding sites throughout the country, boost pest control efforts and enhance productivity and survival for these rare native ducks.



# Whio care pays off

A successful breeding season for whio included 16 juveniles that arrived safely in the North Island from Peacock Springs. They were collected from the airport by DU member and Palmerston North aviary keeper Peter Russell.

Peter said that 33 captive birds have been bred this summer.

“It’s also been the best season in the wild that we’ve had.”

The birds had been hardened to fast flowing water at Peacock Spring ready to be introduced to real fast flowing rivers.

A hardening facility is planned at the National Trout Centre (see story page 12) which means less travel for North Island birds.

Each of these new birds has been micro chipped so they could be identified if found again.

The birds were released on the Manganui o te Ao River in an area protected by the Kia Wharite biodiversity project.

**In safe hands:** Peter Russell, Palmerston North aviary keeper, with a whio chick that has since matured and been released.

**Photo:** Liz Brook



## Wetlands to protect

Before human settlement (from around 1250–1300 AD), freshwater wetlands covered about 670,000 hectares of New Zealand. Now it is 89,000 ha – a loss of 90 percent. Fertile lowland swamps have been lost in greater numbers than those that were infertile or at high altitudes.

Wetland importance is often under-rated. Groups like our own DU, Wetland Care and the National Wetlands Trust are working towards reversing this trend.

There is a great diversity of wildlife in our wetlands with more native birds, fish, invertebrates and plants than most other habitats, yet many wetland species are threatened with extinction. Wetlands have high recreational values, and perform vital ecosystem services such as improving water quality and reducing flood risks.

They have a big role in managing climate change. Healthy peat bogs are year-round sinks of 2-5 tonnes of carbon per hectare – locking it up in their soil indefinitely.

Wetlands are of cultural and spiritual significance to Maori. They provided Maori with food (wildfowl, eels and other freshwater fish), taro cultivation, harakeke (flax) for weaving and other materials for medicinal, food, building, and craft use.

### A plethora of wetland to visit

Farewell Spit - at the northern most tip of the South Island is one of our most important wetland areas. Part of the spit forms a Ramsar Wetland site of significance and is an important staging area for migratory shorebirds on the East Asia - Australasia path.

Just two hours from Nelson, the area has been a wildlife sanctuary since the 1930s and is a haven for over 90 bird species.

### Whangamarino

Whangamarino - 62km south of Auckland is the second largest bog and swamp complex

in the North Island - another Ramsar site. Managed by DOC, the 5923ha of peat bog, swampland, mesotrophic lags, open water and river systems, is an important habitat for threatened species like Australasian bittern, grey teal, spotless crake, the North Island fernbird and black mudfish.

### Firth of Thames

At the base of Coromandel Peninsula, the Firth of Thames has 8500ha of wide inter-tidal flats which attract thousands of migratory wading birds. Some make the arduous 10,000km journey south from the Arctic in spring and fly north again in the autumn; others fly 1000km north from the braided rivers of the South Island in the autumn and return in the spring.

### Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park

Lake Wairarapa, Lake Onoke and their associated wetlands make up the largest wetland complex in the southern North Island, supporting native plants and animals of national and international importance.

The diverse habitats within Wairarapa Moana attract a wide range of wetland birds - about 100 species including international migratory birds. The area is also of national importance to fisheries. Among 10 native species, which migrate between the sea and fresh water, are long-finned and short-finned eel, brown mudfish and giant kokopu.

### Lower Kaituna Wildlife Reserve

Northeast of Te Puke, western Bay of Plenty, Kaituna is a reminder of how the country used to be with an abundance of cabbage trees and flax, pukeko prowling through raupo, numerous ducks, shags and pied stilts foraging for food in the waterways.

### West Coast wetlands

The South Island’s West Coast has a variety of large and valuable wetlands, including lakes, swamps, fens, bogs, marshes, lagoons,

estuaries and pakihi / poorly drained, infertile land. Most are fully protected and are important breeding grounds for rare species.

The only kōtuku / white heron breeding colony in New Zealand is located on the Waitangiroto River close to Okarito Lagoon - north of Franz Josef glacier. The region is one of the last strongholds for the Australasian bittern and a large part of the habitat is suitable for crakes - a rarely seen shy bird.

### Ō Tū Wharekai wetland

Ō Tū Wharekai, covering the Ashburton lakes and Upper Rangitata River in Canterbury, is an unspoiled, intact, intermontane wetland system and is nationally important for wildlife.

### Otago wetlands

Lake Waipori, Lake Waiholā and their associated wetlands are the most significant waterfowl habitat in Otago 40km south of Dunedin. The lakes are shallow and drain through an extensive swamp into the Waipori River and then the Taieri River.

Over 60 species of bird live in or visit the wetland. It is now privately owned by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and protected by a QE II National Trust Open Space Covenant.

### Southland wetlands

The waters, mudflats and marginal vegetation of Southland’s large tidal estuaries and coastal lagoons - Jacobs River Estuary, New River Estuary, Bluff Harbour and Awarua Bay, Waituna Lagoon and Toetoes Harbour - make up the most important bird habitat areas in Southland.

More than 80 bird species have been sighted in the area, 65 of which are dependent on the estuarine environment.

Southland’s estuaries rank alongside Farewell Spit and Lake Ellesmere as the top three wading bird habitats in the South Island.

# Trapline volunteers

Eleven volunteers from the New Plymouth branch of PricewaterhouseCoopers spent a day out of the office as they helped replace over 90 stoat traps along the Curtis Falls Track in the Egmont National Park.

The old traps came out of the boxes and new stainless steel ones went in. Replacing a line like this can take a couple of weeks so the volunteers really made a difference. With each person carrying six traps in and another six out as well as some tough climbs along the way, it was a big day.

This trap line protects the whio living along

streams and rivers such as the Maketawa and they form a network that covers around 7000 hectares. Last year was a record year for whio ducklings in the Park with 33 ducklings hatching in the wild.

Another volunteer, Ian Street enjoys the Onaero Domain where he spends a lot of time at his Onaero beach batch and helps out by looking after a trapline and keeping an eye on weeds in the local reserve.

A whitefaced heron also enjoys the Onaero Domain and batch dwellers say he's been around for about 14 years. "He had a mate,"

said Ian, "but she died some time ago. Recently though he's found another."

The heron seems to know when Ian's at home. He walks up to the front door and taps on the door. "He visits regularly," said Ian. "I give him a little bit of fresh mince sometimes and away he goes."

Whitefaced herons are New Zealand's most common heron. They arrived from Australia in the 1940s so they're considered native. This one's been around long enough to be called a local.

## Black swans, introduced or native?

Before the arrival of the Māori in New Zealand, a subspecies of the Black Swan known as the New Zealand Swan had developed in the islands, but was apparently hunted to extinction. In 1864, the Australian Black Swan was introduced to New Zealand as an ornamental waterfowl, and populations are now common on larger coastal or inland lakes, especially Rotorua Lakes, Lake Taupo, Lake Wairarapa and Lake Ellesmere, and the Chatham Islands. Black Swans have also naturally flown to New Zealand, leading scientists to consider them a native rather than exotic species, although the present population appears to be largely descended from deliberate introductions.

With its elegant long neck, the black swan (*Cygnus atratus*) is our largest wetland bird, around 1.2 metres long and weighing 5–6 kilograms. On the water, it appears all black with a bright red bill; however, in flight the bird shows wide white wing margins. It has a bugle-like call, and hisses to defend its nest.

About 100 black swans were brought to the South Island from Australia in the 1860s, and the species has traditionally been regarded as introduced. However, numbers have increased faster than expected, suggesting more birds arrived independently – in which case it should be considered a self-introduced native.

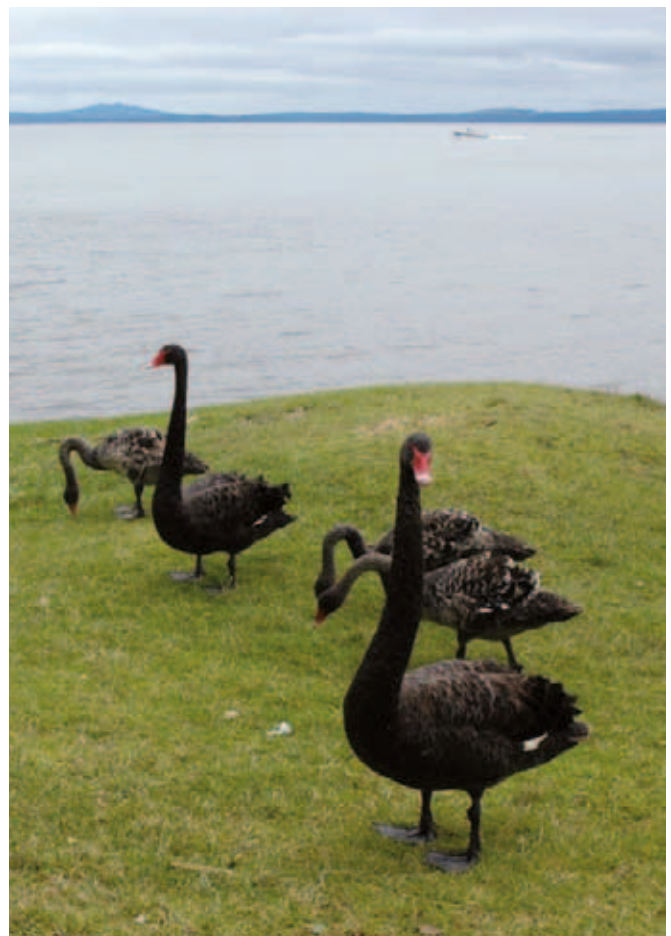
To add to the intrigue, the extinct native swan, mentioned in paragraph one, previously named *Cygnus sumnerensis*, is now thought to have been the same species as the black swan.

Black swans breed either in pairs or in colonies. Their nests are huge mounds of long foliage, built near lake edges. Females may lay up to 14 green eggs, but six is the average. In colonies, up to 40 cygnets gather in large crèches guarded by a few adults.

Juveniles leave their natal lake and spend several years in estuarine or coastal sites, returning to take up permanent residence once they reach breeding age at between two and four years old. Not all birds breed every year. The oldest known swan in New Zealand was at least 29.

Black swans are partially protected, and are hunted in season according to regional limits. About 5000 are shot each year.

Thanks to Te Ara Encyclopedia and Wikipedia.



**Lake family:** Black swans at Lake Taupo.

**Photo:** Liz Brook

## Hands off our kiwi

**It could have lived here for 60 million years!**

Those Aussies are trying to steal our things again!

There have been claims that the Kiwi actually originated in Australia.

To make it even trickier it was a New

Zealander, Trevor Worthy who's involved with research at Flinders University in Adelaide, who put this theory forward. Four years ago he discovered a fossil at St Bathans in Central Otago, and he says the DNA shows the kiwi are related to the emu. Not the moa as had previously been supposed as the common ancestor.

However Department of Conservation bird expert Hugh Robertson said that for more than a decade established thinking was the kiwi was closely related to the emu. But that did not mean it had flown here. He said it could have been in New Zealand since the land split from Gondwanaland about 60 million years ago.



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