

Flight

ISSUE 163

April 2015



Whio updates
Bittern secrets revealed
Grey teal – game bird in waiting

From the President

Wetlands need water to function and here we are again engrossed in another dry summer with severe drought conditions being experienced in a number of regions. This adversely impacts on water levels in our wetlands and the biodiversity they support. We cannot ignore that climate change is having an effect.

What can we do about it?

DU needs to continue its good work with protecting and restoring wetlands, increase our membership, maintain the excellent relationship we have with many partners in the wetland conservation area, and expand our fund raising efforts. These are all key areas which the DU Board will be addressing over the next 12 months.

The dates for this year's AGM are at the Distinction Hotel, Palmerston North, for the weekend of Friday July 31 to Sunday August 2, 2015.

Look forward to seeing you all there.

John Cheyne



New members

A very warm welcome to DUNZ Inc to:

Lara Greaves - Auckland

Peter & Dawn Carter - Lake Rotoma.

And – a message from Jan Abel:

Our very able secretary:

A reminder - memberships subs are coming due and I will be posting these out this month - April.

More and more the organisation is using email to advise of upcoming events – some emails have changed and some we simply do not have.

Please advise me of your new email address at info@ducks.org.nz. I will not be bombarding you with emails.

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Liz Brook, Brightnook Farm, RD9, Feilding 4779.
Email: liz.brook@farmside.co.nz Tel: 06 328 9836.

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Cover photo: White faced heron – possibly after the next meal.

Photo: William Abel.

Flap of joy

Back in water at last.

Photo: Peter Russell. See page 7.



AGM / Conference 2015

The AGM event is happening.

We now have a place, (Distinction, Cuba St, Palmerston North) and the confirmed dates for the venue are July 31 to Sunday August 2. Unfortunately don't have the list of pricing at this stage.

As this April issue of Flight is too soon for us to put any registration flyers in to, and July is too late, we will have to do a separate post out again with all the information you will require – dates and pricing etc confirmed.



Numbers increasing

Grey teal just love those nesting boxes.

See more pictures and read more.
Pages 8/9.

Disney purchases wetlands (USA)

For years, environmentalists have tried to prevent 3000 acres (1214ha) of land called Mira Lago, bordering the Disney Wilderness Preserve, from becoming a housing development. Now, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts have bought the property in Osceola and Polk counties with plans to conserve it.

Environmentalists hail the purchase as a triumph. It also signals major growth on the way: In exchange for saving Mira Lago, Disney World wants permission to develop up to 350 acres (141.5ha) of wetlands during the next 20 years.

Once thought extinct

Cute in the extreme, funny, and special.

The flightless Takahe is back.

Photo: Patti Williams.

See page 13.



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 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
Wairo Wetland, South Wairarapa
Wetland Trust New Zealand, Rangiriri
Waitakere Branch Forest and Bird
Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust, Dunedin
Cape kidnappers 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.



Signal search: Colin O'Donnell locating a bittern through transmitter.

Photo: Emma Williams.

The secret life of male bitterns – finally revealed by DU transmitters

Emma Williams

Last issue I introduced Australasian bitterns, a rare, secretive wetland bird that often lives within a stones' throw of people's houses – yet only the lucky few who spend time in wetlands know this species exists! As our bittern is the rarest in the world, we have several reasons to be concerned about the population here in New Zealand. In the last DU issue I discussed several threats known to limit bittern populations overseas - threats that are unfortunately also present in New Zealand. These threats include habitat loss (here in NZ this loss amounts to a shocking 90 percent!), introduced predators, modified water levels, poor water quality and inconsistent food availability. Unfortunately, despite knowing this, we still have little information about what's happening with the bittern population here in New Zealand. This is mainly because bitterns are almost impossible to find and study due to their camouflage plumage and elusive behaviour. Not being able to find this species also means conservationists can't tell if their efforts to save the species are working.

To solve this problem we've been developing

several monitoring methods that can be used to detect and count breeding male bitterns. This year we wanted to measure how well these methods work. To do this we needed to catch and 'mark' as many male bitterns

as possible on Lake Whatumā, in Central Hawke's Bay. We knew this would be tricky because to-date few bitterns have been caught.

However, as a team we collectively had several years of bird catching experience using



Bittern seekers: Observers set out to do bittern monitoring.

Photo: Emma Williams.

a variety of methods...knowledge of two methods that had been used successfully to catch bitterns overseas...an ability to adapt as we went...and a ridiculous amount of dogged determination...

And it worked!

Since September we've been able to catch six male bitterns at Lake Whatumā. We caught all six birds by luring them into cage traps using a combination of calls and mirrors. Playing bittern booming calls within a bird's territory worked because it tricked the resident male into thinking that a rival male is challenging it. The resident male tries to creep up on this fake rival male intending to see it off. Eventually it sees its own reflection in the back of the cage trap, which it mistakes for the intruding bird, causing it to enter the trap. As soon as the resident male steps on the treadle plate inside the trap, it's weight releases a catch, dropping the cage door shut, and capturing the bird.

Once caught, we banded each bittern with a metal M-band to make them uniquely identifiable in the hand. We also attached the radio transmitters provided by Ducks Unlimited sponsorship to help us locate and identify the bird even when it was hidden from us in the thick vegetation. Before releasing the bird we weighed it, took a range of measurements (such as length of tarsus, bill, wing and tail), and some photos of its bill and feather patterns. Photos and measurements can be used to crudely determine the health of the bird and as a general guide to help us confirm its age and sex. Each captured bittern was named in the honour of a deceased crooner – so by November we had caught Barry White, Bing Crosby, Tama Tomoana, Prince Tui Teke, Howard Morrison and Elvis Presley. Once we'd finished processing each captured bird we released them back into their territories. After that we regularly located birds using the signals emitted from their transmitters. Locations of marked bitterns were plotted to map their territories. We also checked where birds were located during our monitoring sessions and noted if a bird called during monitoring periods, and for those birds that did call we looked to see if observers had succeeded in detecting them.

The results of our monitoring trial are still being analysed but preliminary results already show that breeding male bitterns have high site fidelity during the breeding season, meaning they always boom from the same area. This is good news for our monitoring methods as it allows us to assume that booms heard at the same location at different times during the breeding season were produced by the same bird. There was one exception. Bing Crosby, a bird caught in the northern end of the lake, permanently left his territory in October (midway through the breeding season). However, we have reason to believe that Bing was not as popular with the opposite sex as his namesake – and therefore does not count as a breeding male. Indeed we suspect he left the lake because he was single and wanted to try his luck at wooing a female elsewhere. There are several reasons why



Typical male: Elvis Presley in cage trap looking at his own reflection.

Photo: John Cheyne.



Getting sized up: Measuring tarsus length of Tama Tomoana.

Photo: Daniel Winchester.

we suspect this. Firstly, the quality of Bing's booming, something that's associated with mate attraction, dropped steadily throughout the breeding season. This was not observed with the other marked males. Secondly, we had fewer observations of unmarked non-booming birds (females?) within Bing's territory compared to some of the other booming males. This causes us to suspect that any visiting females were not staying for long. Thirdly, in the final days leading up to Bing's disappearance he became more transient, often appearing in places that seemed well outside of his usual territory. For example, two days before his disappearance he was found in the heart of his neighbour's territory cavorting with two unmarked non-booming bitterns. His neighbour was booming within 100 metres of these liaisons - A final desperate attempt at securing a Lake Whatumā female perhaps?? Finally, after Bing's disappearance we searched his territory for evidence of nest attempts and were unable to find anything to suggest he had attempted to mate with a female. We believe he was a single male trying his luck, but still can't say this with certainty because many of the birds interacting with Bing were still unmarked and the sex of bitterns is difficult to determine from plumage alone. Still, if we had not had the transmitter

on him we would have never known that about these behaviours.

Interestingly we observed similar transient behaviours with the other five marked bitterns. Although for them these observations occurred much later in the season and coincided with the time when we were expecting bittern chicks to fledge. At this time of year (December/January), it makes sense for males to be more mobile, as chicks are supposed to be relatively independent after fledging, leaving few reasons for males to invest time and effort in maintaining their territories.

As you can see we still have much to learn about bitterns, their needs and behaviours. However, just in these last six months, through the use of the transmitters provided by Ducks Unlimited, we've been able to associate some of our observations with individual birds allowing us to put these observations into greater context. All six of our marked bitterns have now left Lake Whatumā – again something we did not (and could not) have known would happen if our marked birds were not carrying transmitters. We plan to continue following these six bitterns over the next six months. Hopefully the more we learn about them, their movements and habitat requirements, the more these observed behaviours will start to make sense.

Captive Whio and new facility

It is looking like another record year of ducklings being produced with hopefully 39 being released. Peacock Springs with 18, Mt Bruce with 16 and Orana with five. Could have been more but you can never count your ducklings till you have them on the ground.

It is really great to see more ducklings produced each year and could be more if all the breeders had new pairs.

This facility has been built at the Tongariro National Trout Centre in some of the trout runs. I did go up earlier in the year and with helping Andrew Smart did the shaping of what you can see in the photos.

There were 12 ducks in the enclosures doing well and a lot flying around and diving into the water. Another 11 birds were put in the other side.

New Hardening Facility

This new facility will make it easier for North Island breeders to send their birds there, rather than the South Island for hardening.

On December 4 last year I took six birds, that came from Peacock Springs, up to the Trout Centre for the opening of the Hardening Facility by the Minister of Conservation Maggie Barry and the CEO of Genesis Albert Brantley, as this was a joint project between Genesis and the Department.

At the opening there was a welcome from Haukainga for the visitors and then a welcome from Mihi/Whakatau to manuhiri/visitors - Ned Wikaira followed by a reply on behalf of the visitors - Pou Tairanghau. We had refreshments by the new facility and heard speeches from Albert Brantley, Maggie Barry and then the National Whio Recovery Group Leader Andrew Glaser.

The Minister and Genesis CEO then cut the ribbon to declare the facility open. This facility was funded by Genesis and the Department of Conservation.

The birds were released into the new enclosure which was great.

Peter Russell

Whio Captive Co-ordinator



Beginning: Andrew Smart in the thick of it.



Official opening: Maggie Barry and Albert Brantley cut the ribbon to open the Hardening facility.

*This is supposed to be a true story.
Take it with as many grains of salt as you like.*

The Chicken Gun

The true story of the Chicken Gun. Too funny not to share! Sometimes it does take a rocket scientist!

Scientists at NASA built a gun specifically to launch standard four pound dead chickens at the windshields of airliners, military jets and the space shuttle, all travelling at maximum velocity. The idea is to simulate the frequent incidents of collisions with airborne fowl to test the strength of the windshields.

British engineers heard about the gun and were eager to test it on the windshields of their new high speed trains. Arrangements were made, and a gun was sent to the British engineers.

When the gun was fired, the engineers stood shocked as the chicken hurled out of the barrel, crashed into the shatterproof shield, smashed it to smithereens, blasted through the control console, snapped the engineer's back-rest in two, and embedded itself in the back wall of the cabin, like an arrow shot from a bow.

The horrified Brits sent NASA the disastrous results of the experiment, along with the designs of the windshield and begged the US scientists for suggestions.

NASA responded with a one-line memo – "Defrost the chicken."

Whio release at Little Maketawa Stream

Freedom at last for the first 17 whio released this year into the Little Maketawa Stream at Egmont National Park. "It went well," said Peter Russell.

A special karakia for all the birds was conducted by Sandy Parata from Ngati Runaui, before the birds were released.

And they were really happy to get into that water.

Mr Parata has been actively involved in the Egmont National Park whio re-establishment programme.

Emily King, Senior Biodiversity Ranger

with DoC said "The success of our project would not have been possible without the support of the Central North Island Blue Duck Conservation Trust as they have been very committed and actively involved in the Egmont National Park whio re-establishment programme."



Gentle hands: The birds go into the water. From left, Gordon John, Ben Erkes, Max Erkes, Greg Evans, Lyn Hassell and Emmal Neal.



Freedom: The whio love that wet stuff.

Photos: Peter Russell.

Pukaha Mt Bruce news

Whio ducklings

There were 16 Whio ducklings hatched this season at Mt Bruce. One of our team, Tara, has taken this delightful photo of the latest clutch of whio to hatch at Pukaha this season.

These ducklings spent a few weeks here and then were sent to a 'hardening unit' at Turangi to ensure that they will be ready for release. Whio live in fast running rivers, so if the ducklings aren't 'trained' before release to get used to the fast water they have a tough time getting used to life in the wild.

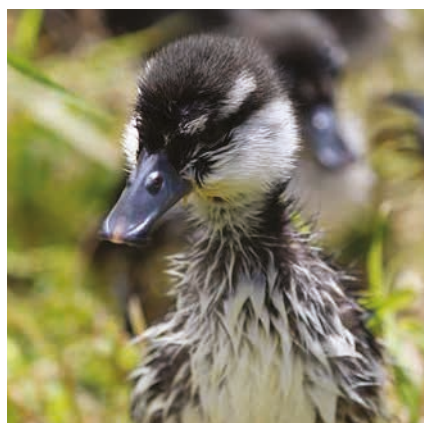
With an estimated 2500 of these ducks left in the wild, 16 new ducklings from Pukaha is a great result and one we are proud of.

Did you know that the whio is on our \$10 dollar notes?

For more information about whio visit www.whioforever.co.nz

More white kiwi

Late February, one of the DoC rangers who regularly monitors the kiwi at Pukaha Mount Bruce found not one, but two white kiwi in a burrow there. This brings the number of white North Island Brown kiwi to be hatched at



Very perky: Good start in life for a whio duckling.

Pukaha since 2010 to five.

The burrow the white kiwi chicks were found in belongs to the father of the three other white kiwi previously hatched there. There is a one-in-four chance that chicks produced by the pair will be white, and as kiwi partnerships have been known to last for decades it's not completely unexpected. But to Pukaha Mt Bruce staff it still feels as if we won the

lottery, again!

The two chicks were given a health check by DoC and Pukaha staff who confirmed the pair were in good health. The chicks have started to feed by themselves and the decision was made that they would remain in the reserve rather than be brought into the nursery.

Having kiwi hatch and survive in the wild is a great indication that the thousands of dollars each year spent on predator control in the reserve is paying off.

Any kiwi chick hatching at Pukaha is a truly special occasion, but the white kiwi are currently unique to Pukaha. Staff will regularly check the two chicks, as their transmitters need to be re-sized regularly as they grow.

Helen Tickner

General Manager, Pukaha Mount Bruce

News Flash

Sadly, as we were about to go to press, we heard one of the white kiwi chicks at Pukaha Mt Bruce had died.

Putting the case for grey teal

In 2014 the Chief Executive of Fish and Game NZ wrote to then Minister of Conservation, Dr. Nick Smith, asking that he, “initiate a process within his department to make grey teal a designated gamebird”. The Minister stated his Department will look into it when their resources allow. This is the same offer made by his Department in 2011 and by Smith’s predecessor, Kate Wilkinson, in 2009. In fact, the government has repeatedly suggested since 1959 that it would make grey teal a gamebird, but has never followed through.

Why is a status change needed?

Grey teal, (*Anas gracilis*), are found primarily in Australia and New Zealand but also in New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. They are an abundant and stable species numbering 1.1 million overall, of which some 120,000 are found in New Zealand - about the same overall number in this country as NZ shoveler. The difference is that NZ shoveler have always been a gamebird in NZ, but grey teal have never been. This would come as a great surprise to Australian hunters who, for instance, in 2014 in the state of Victoria, have a three month long season and a 10 bird limit on grey teal. It is in fact one of the most common ducks in Australian hunters’ bags and always has been. Grey teal are probably the easiest duck in New Zealand to manage and to increase in number through nest boxes. At a time when mallards are arguably climate stressed in some regions, grey teal are instead well adapted to drought in their native land and are perhaps the most future-proof of all ducks in our country. Having grey teal on the licence could take some pressure off mallards. Teal have no known downside; they do not cause crop damage and they do not hybridize with either native or introduced NZ species. Right around the world teal of various species are recognised as extremely sporting ducks and also among the very best eating. So what is there to decide?

A little history

It’s accepted by all that grey teal are an Australian duck that has self-introduced into NZ – but when? It has often assumed that because Maori had a name for grey teal; “tete”, that it must have been common in pre-history, but this name simply means small duck and was equally applied to both grey teal and NZ shoveler. Archaeologists also once assumed that grey teal must have been well established in NZ as their bones were common in excavated middens. But a more careful re-examination since has showed most of these were misidentified juvenile grey ducks. Dr Trevor Worthy has since stated; “The historic records bears out the fossil records that the species was rare to infrequent in pre-European and early European colonisation times”. (pers. comm. 4/08/2014).

Nineteenth century bird authorities had no doubts that the very rarely seen grey teal in NZ were just stragglers and vagrants from Australia. In this country the species bordered on extinction and museums around 1900 would wait decades to get a single example to put on display or to study. It wasn’t until 1941 that the first grey teal nest was officially found in New Zealand. However, surveys by birdwatchers around this



Official nest: The first grey teal nest found in NZ.



Box crew: Grey teal volunteers 2014.

period also showed this small bridgehead of grey teal in the Wairarapa had begun to expand. By the late 1950s they’d also established at Rotorua. Then in 1957, small numbers of a whole variety of Australian waterbird species arrived in this country, fleeing severe droughts in their homeland. When a single banded grey teal from Australia turned up in NZ in 1960, the only one ever to do so before or since, it generated the idea that the increase of grey teal in NZ was due to a “recent influx” from Australia. This ad hoc theory, by Ken Miers of the Wildlife Service, got some people over-excited and they assumed that grey teal must not only be regularly arriving in numbers from Australia every year – actually sustaining the NZ population. However in the 55 years since, not one more banded grey teal has ever made that journey to NZ and been recovered. In the previous century, decades could elapse between one sighting of grey teal in NZ and the next, which is perhaps more like their actual frequency of their arrival. In other words, the population we have here today is governed by local production, nothing more.

First proposed in 1959

As early as 1959 the Wildlife Service signalled that grey teal could be our next gamebird in NZ. This was formally discussed by government’s Fauna Protection Advisory Council in 1967. This considered an application by acclimatisation societies to have grey teal added to the game-bird licence as a ‘mistake bird’ with a daily bag limit of one. Mr Sibson, the Ornithological Society representative stated, “He did not feel the time was yet ripe to put it on the shooting list. It was still virtually unknown north of Auckland. On the whole it was still rather rare and he doubted that the total population of the country would reach 10,000. He felt it needed all the protection possible”.

Mr Cavanagh of the Wildlife Service, Department of Internal Affairs, “could see no benefit in the proposition” as grey teal were very hard to distinguish from grey ducks, “and it is unlikely that, in the event of a genuine mistake having been made, prosecution would follow”. To put the bird on the licence as well, “would be tantamount to exaggerating the kill”.

This decision, while sound at the time, continued to dictate Wildlife Service policy for decades to come. However, over that time the grey teal population increasing 12-fold, (despite Mr Sibson’s predictions), to now number 120,000 nationwide, (Teal, 2000). These concerns are simply no longer valid.

4000 nest boxes

Hunters had not been sitting idly on their hands during this time. At the instigation of Hamilton-based hunter and waterfowl enthusiast the late Jack Worth, Ducks Unlimited (NZ) Incorporated embarked in 1974 on a programme of building and erecting nest boxes nation-wide specifically for grey teal with the stated intention of making them a gamebird. DU President, Neil Hayes wrote prophetically in 1977: “Operation Gretel involves raising the (grey teal) population to 100,000 over a 10-year period by erecting suitable nesting boxes in well known grey teal areas”.

Grey teal – a spectacular success story stopped dead in its tracks.



On the wing: More than 1 million grey teal in Australia.

Photo: SSAA national.

Tom Caithness, one of the Wildlife Services' chief waterfowl scientists, acknowledged in 1982 the pronounced effect that DU's grey teal nest box programme, 'Operation Gretel', was beginning to have: "Teal virtually line up to get into these boxes. In one area of the Waikato, the birds defend boxes by standing on top of them and many of the boxes may be used in succession by two or more pairs. Over 1500 eggs were laid in 104 boxes in one year".

By 1988 Tom Caithness was saying in his annual Wildlife Service report to gamebird hunters: "I've been saying for years that in some areas of the country they could go on the licence, not generally, but in defined areas."

Since then some 4000 grey teal nest boxes have been erected around NZ by waterfowl hunters using their own resources not taxpayer dollars nor gamebird licence money.

DoC and its predecessor the Wildlife Service too could see that teal numbers were increasing as a result. When the population reached 12-18,000 grey teal in NZ, Tom Caithness in his Wildlife Service hunting diary to NZ hunters said grey teal could come on the licence, "as early as 1985".

As rare as kakapo – according to the law

In 1953, under the then new Wildlife Act, if someone was successfully prosecuted for shooting a grey teal, the penalty was a maximum of 50 pounds. In the year 2000, NZ's government was seriously concerned about smuggling of rare and endangered NZ fauna such as tuatara from offshore islands. However on TV, high-profile international animal smugglers simply laughed at these outdated fines. Embarrassed by this, Parliament immediately responded by raising the penalty for possession of any Fully Protected Species to \$100,000 plus \$ 5000 per head – and/or six months in jail. The unintended side-effect was to treat anyone who accidentally shot a grey teal as if they had deliberately smuggled a highly endangered kakapo or takahē. This 1000-fold increase in fines had the effect of stopping DU's Operation Gretel dead in its tracks. Every hunter now realised that annually servicing nest boxes only meant more grey teal flying around and, no matter how careful they were, increased their risk of these hugely punitive fines, or jail or both. Since grey teal routinely fly in formation with other species of ducks, the risk of an accidental shooting was very real. These hunters may as well have deliberately shot a kiwi for all the new law cared.

Despite assurances given to Fish & Game by DoC's advisers at the time

of this Cabinet decision, that hunters "had nothing to fear", there is a saying that, "If a law can be abused, sooner or later it will be". Two hunters soon afterwards found themselves in the Lower Hutt District Court and had to be defended by past-president of Ducks Unlimited NZ Inc, Neil Hayes. Neil explained to the judge the absurdity of such a fine given that hunters had created so many thousands of grey teal themselves. However with all the resultant media publicity, the message about the punitive new fines and/or jail for grey teal was now fully 'out there'. The damage to DoC's reputation was profound as many of the hunter-volunteers felt they had been misled for decades by the Department and by its' successive Ministers.

Recent law revisions

Auckland Waikato Fish & Game Council subsequently petitioned then Conservation Minister Kate Wilkinson to recognise that treating a common duck a like a rare and endangered species when it numbers 120,000 nationwide, (with 1 million more in Australasia), bringing NZ's wildlife laws into disrespect. As a result of this lobbying in 2009, the Minister reduced the maximum fine for shooting a grey teal to that for any other gamebird shot out of season - "just" \$5000. But Wilkinson's efforts were too little, too late to save the grey teal nest box programme by rekindling the by now thoroughly demoralised volunteers hopes and aspirations. They had spent 40 years servicing these nest boxes annually for nothing. In fact, Wilkinson considered that Iwi should next



Banded: Only Fish & Game currently band grey teal.

Continued on page 10

have first dibs on grey teal as a “traditional” and “customary harvest” bird even though there is little to support a claim that grey teal had ever been anything more than a rare straggler from Australia in pre-European times - (i.e., there was no “tradition”).

In centuries past, traditional moult hunts such as are on record as killing many thousands of waterfowl in single hunts and were indiscriminate as to species. What are now protected species were then an inevitable by-catch and some were never seen again. A dog catching moulters cannot be trained to recognise a common grey teal from a highly endangered brown teal. It's a bit late when it's dead to throw it back.

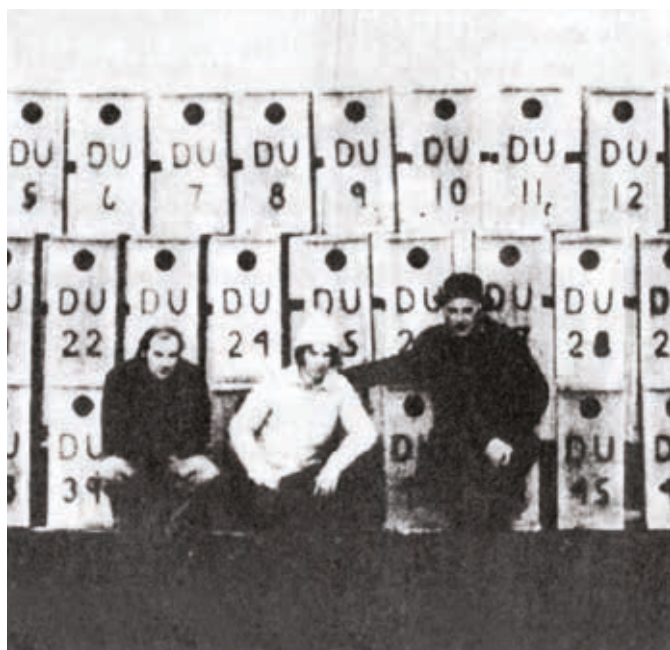
Despite DoCs Schedule Review claiming under the heading “Grey Teal”, that there were, “strong aspirations among Maori to be able to harvest native wildlife”, not a single application has yet been received five years later. In fact, the “strong aspirations” were actually those 58 shooters submissions that the Review deliberately ignored, that wanted this species put on the 1st Schedule as a gamebird. The Review did not seem to have considered that many thousands of Maori already hunt gamebirds using shotguns and have done so for two centuries now. So rather than benefiting Maori, this condescending DoC idea that they can only use “traditional” and “customary harvest” methods to recover “eggs and flappers” with “nets and snares” is a complete failure. About 30,000 grey teal die each year of natural causes if not harvested. Australian hunters state: “grey teal are considered one of our best eating ducks”. Why does our Government like rats to dine like kings in NZ but hunters to go hungry?

What value protection?

Currently DoC spend nothing on grey teal as a Schedule 3 species. No budget is allocated for grey teal research, nor propagation, nor monitoring or indeed, anything else for this common, introduced Australian duck. Obviously DoC have more pressing demands, such as our unique, rare and endangered flora and fauna. But this only proves further that semi-protection has nothing to offer grey teal. So why defend so vehemently the right to do nothing?

As a Schedule 1 gamebird, grey teal would have a new authority responsible for it - the Fish & Game Council. By law (Conservation Act, 1987), F&G need to monitor and manage all the species that they are responsible for. If grey teal were gazetted as a gamebird F&G would need to:

1. Assess and monitor their population, (S.26Q-a);
2. Maintain breeding programmes, where required, (S. 26Q-b); (e.g. nest boxes).
3. Implement research where required, (26Q-e); (e.g. banding).



History: Early DU teal box volunteers, (from Flight).
(Grey Teal Sinclair wetland).



4. Recommend harvest conditions, when local populations could sustain such harvest, (26-Q-b-3).
5. Incorporate this species into regional F&G Management Plans and Annual Work Plans, (S.26Q-3).

US precedent shows the way

Such nest box programmes have demonstrated overseas, in the parallel case of the American wood duck, (*Aix sponsa*), what can be achieved. Exactly like grey teal, the wood duck was considered very nearly extinct in 1900, when spring hunting for commercial purposes had all but exterminated them. Now it is one of the most important of recreational duck-hunters quarry there today, numbering in the millions. It is, in fact, one of the world's greatest waterfowl conservation success stories with no known downside. But this breakthrough was only achieved when wood duck had their protective status taken off them in the 1950s, when it was realised it had nothing more to offer them.

The way ahead

We owe it to the great many old guys who serviced these boxes for 40 years to change that legal status. Grey teal should be a gamebird in every region that has an active monitoring programme in place to ensure a sustainable harvest. Conservative harvest regulations would ensure no more grey teal are hunted than hunters nest boxes actually produce. It's no exaggeration to say that, with the right incentives from Government, nest boxes could double the numbers of this species. The nest box complex at Tony Flexman's farm in Maramarua showed what impressive results can be achieved. Flocks of 600 grey teal used to wheel in the sky over these boxes every spring, where only odd birds had been seen before this initiative was undertaken. Tony, like a number of other life-long, dedicated wetland volunteers, died waiting for Government to honour their promises.

Operation Gretel recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, (1974-2014), but the entire programme will collapse and become consigned to history if the Government fails to honour it's many repeated promises to wetland volunteers to make this species a gamebird.

John Dyer

**Northern Wildlife Manager,
Auckland Waikato Fish & Game Council**



Eggs: Grey teal nest.

A habitat to be proud of

Te Henga, at 160 hectares, as wetlands go it's bigger than some, but smaller than others. We think though it's perfectly formed and so, we hope will the 20 pateke released in late January at the te Henga wetland west of Auckland. Two and a half years of intensive work, then approval from DOC culminated in the release of the young pateke.

The project, Habitat te Henga, involved gaining permission for access from a number of landowners to allow trap lines to be placed. The appointing of a contractor attuned to the sensitivities of several farming landowners was a critical step. By the end of 2014 a trap array of over 220 DOC 200 traps was in place linking some pre-existing traps with over 120 new.

The project linked the successful Ark in the Park project to its east, and predator control at beaches at the west coast. At these beaches, shorebirds such as New Zealand dotterel and seabirds such as grey faced petrel, fluttering shearwater and diving petrel were the focus of the protection.

Fund raising

Along with arranging access, fund raising efforts to purchase the traps, bait and the contractor's salary was needed. WWF, Auckland Council Biodiversity Fund and the Auckland Zoo Conservation Fund came to the party. Towards the end of last year, the 10-month tally of pests caught in the trap array was significant including 45 stoats, 42 weasels, and 284 rats.

With so many new traps being established, a trial of lure was possible to compare the standard salted rabbit that the Pateke

Recovery Group endorsed against the commercially prepared dried rabbit Erayze. Connovation, the company manufacturing Erayze, agreed to supply their product for the comparison so alternate traps have salted rabbit and Erayze. After a year or so we anticipate it will be possible to determine if there are significant advantages in one lure over the other apart from the undoubted ones of ease of use and storage that Erayze has.

Matuku, the Forest & Bird reserve, was to be the site of the pateke release. Its 15 year history of predator control giving both forest edge and wetland habitat a potentially safe setting for the initial release. However the normal access to the wetland portion involved a 30 minute downhill walk and 50 minute return to the ridge so an alternative route was devised taking advantage of a disrupted causeway projecting from the reserve. Two bridges constructed to close the gaps in the causeway were built over three days with the volunteers enjoying the booming of bittern and fernbird calls.

Release day

With yet another fine summer day over 70 guests came to the release day. Transported first across the Waitakere River in an IRB loaned by the nearby surf club, the guests made their way along the causeway and along a path to the shade of a huge karaka where guests and pateke were formally welcomed by Forest & Bird and local iwi te Kawerau a Maki.

It was then on to the adjacent release site where Kevin Evans, Captive Co-ordinator for the Pateke Recovery Group assisted various guests in releasing a bird. A brief view of each scurrying duck before they reached the safety of the reed beds was all most of the guests had but later that night, using red light Matuku reserve caretaker, John Staniland observed several feeding at a supplementary feeder and a "flotilla" on the main river.

All 20 pateke had transmitters attached and will be monitored in the usual manner with hand held aerials but in another trial this technique will be compared with monitoring by unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV or "drone"). An omni-directional receiver will be mounted to the UAV which can rapidly fly over the whole wetland and more rapidly gather fixes on the position of the various pateke. A further trial will be done using the UAV at night to ascertain where the birds might be foraging, as pateke usually are most active at night which poses obvious difficulties in following their whereabouts.

There are 18 birds still in the vicinity of the release site after five weeks with occasional weak signals from the remaining two birds indicating they have moved elsewhere. So far a good result so the monitoring now shifts from daily to twice weekly.

John Sumich



Predator control: Craig Knapp setting a trap.

Photo: J Sumich.



Duck in hand: John Sumich, founder and chair of Habitat te Henga.

Photo: P Grundemann.



Bridge work: All hands on deck.

Photo: L Davies.

Wetland wonders in southern Wairarapa



Visitor interest: Michelle Cooper and other DU members were kept busy at the Wetland Wonders Discovery Day.

Photos: Jim Law.

Wairarapa Moana means “sea of glistening waters”. This largest wetland complex in the southern North Island includes lakes Wairarapa and Onoke, their surrounding wetlands, a scenic reserve and Onoke Spit, all are attractive and interesting destinations.

One Sunday in March the Wairarapa Moana wetlands played host to Wetland Wonders Discovery Day, where visitors young and old, went along to discover more about the species that make this area home. Experts were on hand to share their knowledge and answer the questions.

Visitors were welcomed to the event by Fran Wilde of Greater Wellington Regional Council. Ms Wilde made special mention of the great work Ducks Unlimited and their partners were making with the restoration of the Wairio Wetland.

“It’s a must visit for anyone interested in wetland restoration,” Ms Wilde said.

There was an information kiosk open throughout the morning for wetland information and other queries. Our own DU webmaster and producer of those interesting inserts you find in the Flight magazine, Michelle Cooper, was in charge of the DUNZ stall focussing on Wairio Wetland the DU’s Quack club. Michelle said the kids seemed to love the Quack Club puzzles and colouring brochures. “Hopefully we will get some more recruits.”

DU members Ross Cottle, Jim Campbell, Andrew Fulford and Gill Lundie were there to support Michelle and put visitors on the right path.

The Wairarapa Moana wetlands project began in 2008 to improve and restore the wetlands and enhance the native ecology, recreation and cultural opportunities on public land in the area. For more information go to waiwetlands.org.nz



In praise of the Fenn



A ‘classic’ Fenn elimination - back of the aviaries.

I knew something was up to no good as I removed a partially eaten young rabbit from this Fenn trap three days before!

I suspect that the sudden arrival of mustelids - three stoats and a ferret in a short space of time – probably had something to do with the large numbers of rabbits now rampant on the Waihakeke extension.

Neil Hayes



Aspects of a dam

Paddy Chambers farms sheep and beef, but he has found time over last year to put together an impressive dam. He farms at Raetihi and also leases Graeme Berry's farm next door. That makes a total of 3000 acres or 1214.5 hectares.

Photos: Diane Pritt.



Just wet: In the beginning there was water.



Taking shape: Dirt started to pile up for protection and shelter.



Pipe play: Paddy Chambers and son Wilson could not resist the risk.



Water dogs: Those labs can't resist a swim.



A year on: March 2015 and the labs are still there...

Takahe tracking

Gilbert Barruel and Roger Williams using the telemetry sets to track down newly translocated Takahe into Tawharanui Regional Park. Each bird carries a back pack radio transmitter.

The first lot of the endangered birds arrived October 4 last year and have been monitored ever since.

They are getting really used to seeing us and seem to be enjoying the wetlands of Tawharanui.

Nationally, so far, there are around 280 of these precious birds in New Zealand.

Taking readings from these high places means we often hear the tick, tick, tick of the battery

operated devices, but it's not essential that we site the birds.

Patte Williams.



Takahe at Tawharanui



Other worldly: The amazing takahe.

Photo: Karen Tricklebank of TOSSI.

A new batch of takahe arrived at the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary (TOSSI) at Tawharanui Regional Park and received an official welcome on March 19.

Visitors needed some patience while waiting for the release of the birds as the welfare of the treasured takahe was the priority on the day.

Letters

Pheasant follow-up

I found your “pleasant pheasant” article in issue 162 of “Flight” very interesting. As was the whole magazine.

I too have wild pheasant and California quail living in and around the lawns and garden at my Carterton property “Canada flats”. I don’t allow shooting of upland game. I have liberated pheasants (ringnecks and goldens) twice since about 2005, and the quail lived in the Tararua foothills when I arrived 25 years ago. This last year I have had a similar experience to yours.

Of the photos I attach, is clearly of a group of goldens on my lawn. I would suggest that your bird when young, as you say “pale in colour with brown specks”, and depicted in your top photo, is a golden hen. Compare her to the hens in my photo: A group of Golden pheasant.



Ring neck hen.

As to your pic of the “Older and darker” bird, you have told us she is now at least nine years old. It is my opinion that nature has treated her unkindly as she has aged, and she has changed sex, or more likely is now a hermaphrodite. The pic shows a plumage very close to that of the immature golden cock pheasant.

The other two pics I attach show firstly a hen ring neck pheasant. Again on my lawn, taken in 2008 when she was probably a rising two- year- old. Ringneck hen. That hen was particularly tame and came to be fed with grain every morning for years. I noticed one morning as she fed during a 2014 seasonal moult, that she had developed a couple of darker coloured feathers on her back. Over the next couple of months, I watched that hen pheasant (remember she fed out of my



Golden group.

hand, every morning) gradually change to the plumage of a cock pheasant. That’s her in the final photo. Hermaphrodite ringneck. She even grew a long tail. You’ll note though that she never grew the scarlet face wattles of a true rooster. The average observer would just have seen her as a cock pheasant. Another hermaphrodite. Unfortunately she gradually died of old age. She stopped coming to feed, one day last week. (Eds comment: That would have been early this year)

I had an interesting chat with our Peter Russell, at 2014 AGM. His experience with pheasants has been that old age plumage change happens from time to time.

Thank you Liz, for your interesting story.

Howard Egan.



Hermaphrodite.

Norway votes for lead shot

Norway voted to allow the use of lead shot in all areas except in wetlands.

In February the Norwegian parliament resolved by 79 votes to 16 to reintroduce lead shot for live quarry hunting outside wetlands. The decision follows a lengthy campaign by the Norwegian Association of Hunters and Anglers – the Jegernes Interesseorganisasjon (JI).

BASC chairman Alan Jarrett welcomed the move saying: “BASC firmly believes that all legislative decisions on ammunition should be based on sound science and this underpins our policy on lead ammunition of “no sound evidence, no change.”

In a statement issued on January 29 jointly with Norway’s Weapons Council, the JI had said the country’s four main political parties were supportive of the move to bring back lead shot for hunting in spite of “massive pressure from a smaller group of researchers and veterinarians against lead ammunition. The fact these parties have not been affected by excessive argumentation on the basis of campaign based research commands respect,” the statement said.

Banned in 2005

The JI has been campaigning to bring back lead – which it sees as “the most suitable material in hunting ammunition” – since the Norwegian government brought in a lead shot ban in 2005.

The organisation criticised the ban on the grounds it lacked a solid evidential basis and that the use of alternative ammunition posed animal welfare risks. Non-lead ammunition does not kill as cleanly or as efficiently as lead, and therefore causes unnecessary suffering to quarry, the JI has argued. It also maintains that the potential adverse effects of such substitute materials on health and the environment have not been studied in sufficient detail.

In 2013, a move to bring lead back was defeated by a parliamentary majority.

However, last year, the tide appeared to be turning again, and the JI received statements of support for partial repeal from Norway’s Conservative Party, Progress Party, Christian Democratic Party, Center Party and the Social Democratic Party, which it believes should give the proposals a clear majority in a parliamentary vote.

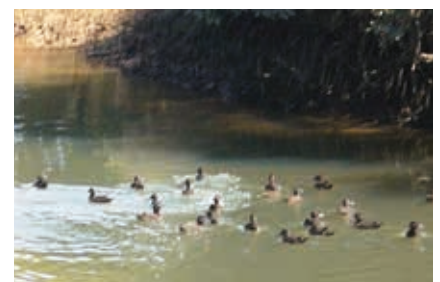
In spite of their optimism over the latest vote, the JI remains conscious that the lead shot issue is still a live one. It said: “The case is probably not over even though parliament now chooses to lift the ban. The pressures from those who want to ban all lead based ammunition are most likely maintained and they will probably try to find new ways to succeed. We must keep up the commitment that our victory is to be a permanent one.”

Pateke in the park

Tāwharanui Open Sanctuary reintroduced pateke between 2008 and 2010, with 148 captive reared ducklings released in total. An earlier release in the 1990s failed due to inadequate predator control, an unfortunately common occurrence for pre 2000 pateke releases. The modern releases within the predator free open sanctuary have successfully established a population of approximately 30 pair, with pateke and ducklings regularly seen throughout the park.

Tāwharanui pateke have also dispersed from the park and have established as two new satellite populations at nearby Christian Bay and Omaha, as well as supplementing remnant population on Kawau Island.

Matt Maitland,
Senior Ranger Open Sanctuaries
Northern Regional Parks
Parks Sports & Recreation



Boggy Pond traps do their job

I completed the servicing round down at the wetlands for January. Predators removed from traps this round: **4 cats, 1 stoat, 1 weasel, 7 rats, 2 mice, 25 hedgehogs, 1 hawk and 1 magpie.**

Traps in the DU block were choked by tall fescue and therefore did not catch a lot since the last maintenance round in December. There were two DOC 250 traps stolen off the stopbank that runs to the lake. I replaced those. With the tall fescue and dense vegetation currently in the Restoration Block, it is becoming hazardous riding the quad so I will be re thinking future trap maintenance until die back occurs. One cat was trapped on Boggy stop bank after the trap had been re baited that day. Another large one was trapped beside Parera Road and two kittens trapped along a shelter belt on Wairio farm.

No sighting of bittern in January and there had been a drop in the water levels within the wetlands.

February trap checks down at Boggy Pond, Mathews Lagoon and the Wairio Restoration Block resulted in predators trapped: **1 cat, 3 ferrets, 1 weasel, 2 mice, 28 hedgehogs, 11 rats and 1 hawk.**

Total predators trapped since July 9 last year: **7 cats, 25 ferrets, 2 stoats, 15 weasels, 52 rats, 107 hedgehogs, 35 mice, 5 hawks, 4 rabbits and 7 magpies.**

Once again no bittern were seen and water levels had subsided greatly with the long dry intervals.

Traps were not serviced over March as I was on Annual Leave but gear will be checked again in April.

Steve Playle



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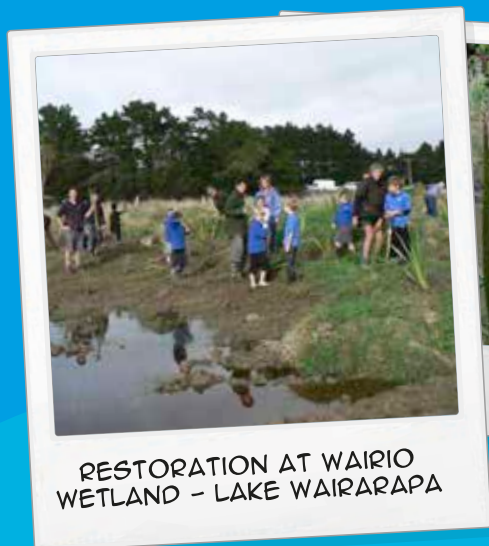
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