

Flight

OCTOBER

1997

ISSUE 93



DUCKS UNLIMITED NEW ZEALAND INC.

For Wetlands and Waterfowl.

OBITUARY

TED HANSEN

Ducks Unlimited lost a great supporter with the recent passing of Ted Hansen. One of his favourite hobbies was using his trusty D2 bulldozer to construct wetland habitat and examples of his work can be seen at Home Lagoon in southern Wairarapa and at Henley Lake east of Masterton.



Ted was instrumental in setting up the sporting clay field at Eketahuna Gun Club which will always be a popular fundraiser for Ducks Unlimited members and friends. His shooting ability was well respected and his untiring services to the Eketahuna Gun Club will be sadly missed.

Ted's work on the retirement patch, "Tidsfordriv" at Matahiwi, was a great source of satisfaction to him in recent years during his battle with ill health. His wetland creation will inspire many Ducks Unlimited friends for years to come.

All Ducks Unlimited members extend sincere condolences to Glenys and family.

THE BILL BARRETT TROPHY

The Bill Barrett Trophy is awarded annually for an outstanding contribution to Ducks Unlimited. Bill Barrett, an Australian who made an outstanding contribution to wildfowl and wetlands, was DU's first life member. He pioneered the use of nest boxes for chestnut teal in Australia and helped design boxes used in New Zealand. Although he never visited New Zealand, Bill Barrett made a substantial donation to DU here and the trophy was instituted in his honour.

It was with great pleasure that the Board of Ducks Unlimited presented Glenys Hansen with the Bill Barrett Trophy recently. The presentation was in recognition of Glenys's work as National Treasurer for many years. As well as being instrumental in setting up the Eketahuna Chapter, she makes an enormous contribution to Ducks Unlimited at Board level. She always supports local fundraising activities with great energy and enthusiasm and her slogan has always been "For the Ducks". But this one is "For Glenys".



DU President Alan Wilks presenting the Bill Barrett Trophy to Glenys Hansen. Photo: Di Wilks.

Alan Wilks
President

As you read this in early October, spring will be well and truly here. At the time of writing, the sun is producing some warmth, the grass is growing and broods of ducklings are appearing.

It would be fair to say that DU has its winter behind it, too. Earlier in the year I predicted that a difficult twelve months lay ahead of us but if I may parody the Bard's Richard III, "Now is the winter of our banking debt / Made glorious summer by this sun of sale." I refer to the Pearce Wetlands and the confirmed sale at the end of this month and the subsequent debt retirement.

The organisation is also running pretty smoothly. Membership renewals are ahead of target, we are well under budget halfway through the year, Flight is coming out on time, we've had a successful Annual Conference weekend, Eketahuna Chapter an enjoyable dinner and Manawatu about to hold one. So it is fair to say we are on track. Our accounts for the last financial year are with the auditor and the Sinclair Wetlands local committee are co-operating to provide the information he needs. Past Treasurer, Glenys Hansen, apologises that circumstances beyond her control prevent us from publishing a set of audited accounts in this issue.

On behalf of DU New Zealand, I would like to congratulate DU Inc. in the USA on reaching the ripe old age of sixty. They were officially incorporated on January 29, 1937.

I wonder how many members are aware of how it all started? Joseph Knapp, printing magnate and philanthropist, and one of America's most influential conservationists, founded DU Inc. with a group of friends dedicated to rebuilding North America's dwindling waterfowl population. This had been considerably depleted by the massive "dustbowl" drought of the mid-1930s. Knapp wanted to call the organisation simply "Ducks" but fellow founder Arthur Bartley pointed out that in Canada this would become "Ducks Limited". Knapp snapped: "We don't want limited ducks." "All right," said Bartley, "Ducks Unlimited." And so it was born.

As DU Inc. celebrates its 60th Anniversary year of operation, it has raised in excess of \$1 billion and conserved nearly eight million acres of waterfowl habitat throughout the USA, Canada and Mexico.

DU Inc., your achievement is an inspiration to us all.



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OUR MISSION

We are a voluntary membership-based society dedicated to the conservation of New Zealand wetlands through:

- wetland restoration and development;
- conservation programmes for threatened waterfowl;
- advocacy and education of wetland values.

By these means we seek to ensure the ethical and sustainable use of wetland resources by all existing and future users.

Cover Photo: Conservation Corps servicing nest boxes, Barton's Lagoon, Wairarapa. Photo: Neil Richardson.

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	Dale Stevens, Cambridge	

OUR People



PHILIP BUDDING

Philip is a Senior Technical Officer with Agresearch (formerly DSIR) at the Ballantrae Hillcountry Research Station near Woodville. He is involved mainly in hill country research.

Philip has been a DU member and Palmerston North Chapter Committee member for many years and has assisted in several major wetlands in the district, including one at Woodville which contains black swan and Canada geese.

Past activities include mountaineering, caving, and canoeing and he is now flying microlight aircraft for which he holds pilot's and instructor's licences. Philip is also actively involved as an ambulance officer with the Order of St John.

Philip is married to Linda and has two children, Natalie, 5, and Scott, 2.



NANCY PAYNE

Nancy Payne has pursued an active, life-long interest in natural history and conservation. A member of DU for some eleven years, she is also active in the Forest & Bird Society, the Tongariro Natural History Society, the Auckland Entomology Society and, among other organisations, the Tiritiri Matangi Supporters Club. Nancy was in the group attending the DU Canada Convention in Edmonton in 1993 and was thrilled by the wildlife she saw on her travels as part of that trip.

She says her introduction to wetlands came as a child with her experiences on the Waitoa River, and since moving to Howick, where she now lives, she can pursue her love of waterfowl along the tributaries of Cascade Creek. She is active in organising and leading field trips for the Forest & Bird Society, and as well as interests in botany, entomology, ornithology and geology, she lists her hobbies as embroidery, painting, reading and gardening.

Somewhat wistfully, Nancy says that because she's always been an urbanite, she hasn't had the opportunity to have a wetland area of her own. But her involvement with the brown teal programme on Tiritiri Matangi through DU enables her to always think of them as "my little ducks".

MEMBER PROFILE: DIANE PRITT

John Bishop was back on leave from Pakistan recently. He visited Diane Pritt at her Mitredale property and was pleased to see the Bill Barrett Trophy on her mantelpiece. He wrote the following profile so that more DU members might appreciate Diane Pritt's contribution....

At the AGM in Masterton in 1996 Diane Pritt was awarded the Bill Barrett Trophy for outstanding service to Ducks Unlimited in New Zealand. For those who missed the AGM, or who may have joined DU recently, here is some background on a person who has given an enormous amount of time, energy, and commitment to the organisation.

As a 16 year old, and still at school, Diane used to shoot with her father Bill Pritt. A few years later they could be seen at the Wanganui and Waimarino gun clubs.

Bill Pritt was a keen sportsman and conservationist. He served on the council of the Waimarino Acclimatisation Society, and in time the society became a member of the Central North Island Conservancy. These organisations were responsible for most of the subsidised dams in the Waimarino. In turn, Diane also became a council member of the Central North Island Conservancy. Following another organisational change, the conservancy became known as the Fish & Game Council and Diane served on the inaugural Taranaki Fish & Game Council for a year.



Diane Pritt with the Bill Barrett Trophy. Photo: John Bishop.

Neil Hayes and Bud Jones, two of the original directors of DU when it started in 1974, gave Bill and Diane Pritt a supporters' membership in 1975, and in 1978 Diane became a director, taking on the sales portfolio. Her boundless energy and enthusiasm have always been wonderful examples to directors and members alike.

Packing her car with T-shirts, pens, ties, caps, books, prints and so on, Diane became very well-known as she attended all the chapter dinners, all AGMs, the Wanganui Home Shows, the Clevedon Game Fair - fully realising the revenue generated by the sales was vital in the establishment and maintenance of the organisation.

Diane took over the family farm, Mitredale, in 1989. It is here that the visitor sees the marriage of Diane's and DU's principles of conservation and hunting at work.

The farm, named after a small Cumbrian valley in the Lake District, is 362 acres, mostly grazing cattle and sheep with some cropping. In keeping with its distant namesake, the farm has forty-one acres of ponds and wetlands. The waterfowl abound, as those of us who have visited Mitredale can attest. Diane, as she has done over many years, has further plans for new wetland habitat. As she explains, "Conservation and hunting go hand in hand. Conservation is the middle ground between preservation and use. Extremes of both are equally detrimental.

"There is no conflict. The wildlife continues to flourish, we

harvest the surplus. Strategic conservation not only provides waterfowl habitat but also enhances my stock water needs on the property

"Since 1982 Mitredale has spent in excess of \$40,000 on wetland habitat and conservation."

Although disappointed that after twenty years DU in New Zealand has a relatively small membership, Diane nevertheless is optimistic about the future. She points out, "Wetland is now in the vocabulary. People recognise the term and have some understanding of what is involved and the advantage to birds and hunters. DU needs to be more visible and it does need to spend more money on wetlands."

The last word also belongs to Diane: "I have had a lot of fun as an active member of DU and highlights for me would have to be the Clevedon Game Fair, the Hamilton Hootnanny where we duck called and duck plucked and did not go to bed! And releasing brown teal on Matakana Island.

"Really, it's the people. We all have to be a little eccentric to look at a patch of swamp and see the beauty!"



DU News

THE LIFE MEMBERS LIST

We are currently updating our Life Member register and in the interests of space in Flight we suggest that in future we will publish a revised list annually and details of new life members as they appear. Your comments, please.

In this respect, we are pleased to welcome **Dale Stevens**, Cambridge, to our list. Dale has been a Director since being elected to the Board in July 1996.

OLD FASHIONED REMEDY

A member has sent us a piece from an old English poultry book: "If any species of duck acts off colour, then add one thin slice of raw onion very finely chopped to their mash once." Maybe try it on difficult in-laws first!

MEMBER NETWORK

How about this for an idea from one of our members?

A hospitality scheme similar to the International Friendship Force where DU members would offer accommodation to other members who were into the scheme for, say, two nights maximum on a minimal per head cost. Some of our people are into homestays anyway and could they possibly offer a discount to DU members?

Let us have your thoughts on this one and we could publish names and addresses and what's offering in Flight. We could call it DUMAS - Ducks Unlimited Member Accommodation Scheme. Please send your views to the Editor, Flight Magazine, c/- Gallery Books & Crafts, P.O. Box 99, Carterton.

EKETAHUNA CHAPTER

The chapter held a very successful fundraising dinner auction at Solway Park in Masterton on September 6 and over seventy members and friends had a most enjoyable evening and raised \$3,500.

Our thanks to Ross Cottle and his committee, and particularly to auctioneer Paul Percy who extracted the last dollar with a great deal of humour.

The annual DU sporting clay shoot in association with the Fish & Game Council Sos Savage Memorial Trophy will be held at the Eketahuna Gun Club on Sunday October 26 starting at 10.00am. This will be a 100 target competition.

Just a reminder - Ross still has grain screenings available for duck feed at \$5.00 per bag. Phone (06)378 7408.

MANAWATU CHAPTER

Short notice, but they are holding their annual fundraising dinner/auction at the Coachman, Palmerston North, on Saturday October 4 at 6.30pm. Any enquiries and offers of auction items should be directed to Neil Candy (06)353 6132 or Dave West

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(06)357 5716. Please support this one - they want the Chapter Challenge again this year.

SWAP

2 female Shoveler for males. Nga Manu Trust Ph (04) 293-4131.

RAFFLE

Just a reminder : our raffle organiser would really appreciate return of butts or unsold books now. The raffle has closed.

LEAD SHOT UNDER SCRUTINY

We note with interest that the Ministry for the Environment's

Sustainable Management Fund is funding an investigation by the Canterbury Regional Council into the environmental impact of spent lead shot at gun clubs and wetlands.

As a conservation organisation caring about wetlands and wildlife, it is important for us to be aware of the significance of this investigation and its implications for wetlands and waterfowl. We are aware of studies which appear to indicate that as many birds would be lost through wounding with the use of steel shot as could die with ingested lead. We will keep members informed of developments on this issue.

1997 ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT

From comments made by members who attended, the Annual Conference over the weekend July 11 to 13 was an outstanding success. Our thanks to the small hardworking Auckland team (Graham Gurr, Michelle MacKay, Lance Dickey, Chris Bindon and David Smith) for their efficient organisation which ensured that the whole weekend ran like clockwork.

The only glitch of the whole programme was the Happy Hour on Friday evening where members had the chance to renew old acquaintances and make new ones. Three members sadly were unable to find the "watering hole", but we managed to meet up and have a very congenial dinner together.

23rd AGM Proceedings

Following is an edited version of the Minutes of the Twenty-third Annual General Meeting of Ducks Unlimited New Zealand held at the Waipuna Hotel, Auckland, on July 12, 1997 at 9.30 am.

Alan Wilks, President, welcomed those present. Apologies were called for and recorded. Alan then asked that the Minutes of the previous AGM, published in the October 1996 issue of Flight, be confirmed. (Moved Pritt/seconded Johnson).

As there were no matters arising, Alan moved to the business reports published in the July 1997 issue of Flight and asked that someone move that the reports be taken as read. (Cook/Payne).

Discussion on the reports was brief, regarding lack of co-operation relating to the provision of financial information required for audit forthcoming from the Sinclair Wetlands Technical Committee. A motion was moved from the floor that the situation is, from the members' point of view, totally unsatisfactory and the Board is to take whatever steps are necessary to resolve the situation as soon as possible. (Pritt/Payne).

There was further discussion regarding the financial situation. David Smith made the point that DU was substantially better off than it was a year ago. All costs

are under budget for the year to date. Alan Wilks answered a question from the floor about the Pearce Wetlands and advised that as of September 1 the grazing lease will cease to exist, as Mark Pearce had sold his farm. David Smith commented on his Operation Whio report, noting that since the time of writing another female has become available from the wild.

Craig Worth, who has succeeded Glenys Hansen as Treasurer, proposed a motion for the appointment of a new auditor: Coopers Pascoe, Hamilton. (Worth/Stevens).

The President paid tribute to Glenys Hansen's work as Treasurer over the years before moving to the election of directors. Ken Cook, David Johnson, and Dale Stevens offered themselves for reappointment. As there were no further nominations, these were declared reappointed. Alan Wilks gave a brief outline of the production of Flight and explained the move to Wairarapa for editing and printing. He asked all present to help with copy or information for Flight.

As there was no other business, Alan read a letter from DU Australia announcing their conference on July 25-27 and their change of name to Wetland Care Australia. The meeting closed at 10.05 am, the President noting that this has been the shortest he could remember.

Conference Excursions

The Saturday morning timing of the AGM was a popular scheduling which left the rest of the day clear. After post-meeting coffee, it was time to board the bus generously organised and donated by Craig Worth's Blue Worth Coachlines of Hamilton. David Smith gave informative commentaries throughout the day as we passed wetlands of note and places of interest.

First stop was the infamous Whangamarino Weir. A joint Fish & Game and DOC project, this was planned to create hundreds of hectares of open water in the Whangamarino Swamp by raising the level of the Whangamarino River. Farmers near the swamp had grazed parts of it and their objections to the weir cost hundreds of thousands in legal fees. The weir - a simple dam across the river - washed out in the first flood. The whole project cost \$400,000 (including \$250,000 in legal fees) and has achieved only a small part of what was intended.

Then on to Rongopai Wines where we were met by DU member Tom van Dam. He owns and operates his winery in the historic former Government viticultural research station at Te Kauwhata. Tom showed us through the three-level winery and explained the winemaking processes. In the visitors' lounge he opened a considerable number of bottles of different types which we sipped happily under the guise of tasting. Meanwhile, our pleasant driver Les barbecued steak, sausages and onions over a fire of vine prunings. We departed having eaten and drunk our fill and bought bottles of Rongopai wine. Rongopai had lived up to its Maori name, translating as "good taste, good feeling". Thank you, Tom, for your hospitality, and for your generous donation of the wine for Saturday night's dinner.

The next location of interest on the tour was Lake Whangape. The lake level has been reduced by drainage and subsequent wind-created wave action stirs up the lake bed. The lake is virtually dying because this, along with mine tailings which have been dumped at one end, prevents light from entering the water, killing the weed beds.

At the Opuatia Wetlands Trust property we walked along to the Churchill Wetlands Game Conservancy. Both are privately owned by syndicates which are developing the swamp areas and creating a maze of open waterways. Although not immediately impressive, as a whole they will be excellent waterfowl habitat in the future. DU life member John Lindeman and a couple of his partners discussed their predator control programme with us before we returned to the bus and the Waipuna Hotel around 5.30pm.

After an interesting and enjoyable day there was just time for a cup of tea and a shower before pre-dinner drinks and a viewing of the auction items Michelle had set out during the afternoon.

It may be worth thinking about some of the constructive comments from some members that the auction items tend to have a sameness about them. Longtime supporters who've attended many auctions don't have room for more prints or decoys and so on. Might we not include greater variety and some items with appeal to women?

Seventy-four members and friends attended the excellent dinner.



Conference party viewing the Whangamarino Weir. Photo: Diane Pritt.

Afterwards, the President presented the Chapter Challenge Shield to the Manawatu for the best fundraising effort for the year of \$8,900. Well done again.

The Bill Barrett Trophy was awarded to Glenys Hansen, who was unable to attend, for her major contribution as Treasurer over the years (see inside front cover).

Then the indomitable Mark Cederman got to work with the auction. This man could extract teeth from a hen! A highlight was when he was caught running the bidding and was stuck without a genuine bidder. That just added to the fun. His managing to raise \$2,700 for the eight-night hunting-fishing-shooting trip to the United States was the real highlight. Thank you, Mark, for your professionalism and humour which made the fundraising event so enjoyable. We

cleared \$6,700 nett for the Conference weekend.

Sunday Workshops

Sunday morning saw two excellent workshops. Phil Thomson conducted a workshop on predator control and demonstrated his Philproof feeders and traps. Tim Lovegrove of the Auckland Regional Council Parks Division followed with his workshop on wetland plants and planting illustrated with informative overheads and slides. Between the two workshops, Dick Tyson from Fish & Game talked to us about Game Habitat Duck Stamp prints. Our thanks to the speakers.

Everything wound up by midday with everyone in agreement that the twenty-third Annual Conference had been a winner.





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CONSERVATION WITH ATTITUDE:

The Conservation Corps in Wairarapa

Neil Richardson is the supervisor of the Masterton YMCA Conservation Corps. His background is in farming and he has always had a strong interest in youth and conservation. He is a Mountain Safety Council instructor in bushcraft and firearms. He's a keen duckshooter, deer stalker and trapper, and also an ardent fly fisher in backcountry rivers. Neil writes about the aims and achievements, and lighter side, of the Conservation Corps in Wairarapa....

The Conservation Corps scheme was set up by the Ministry of Youth Affairs in 1989. There are approximately 80 Conservation Corps schemes around the country, funded by the ministry, the different sponsor organisations and the community. The YMCA tends to be a very big sponsor because the scheme fits so well with the YMCA mission statement.

There are normally ten corps members in each group and each programme lasts for twenty weeks - ten weeks of project work, five weeks of education and five of recreation. Corps members are selected from their applications and are interviewed to select those I feel will benefit most from the programme, remembering that fifty percent of the course must be made up of NZ Employment Service Youth Action clients, i.e., those aged 16 to 20 and unemployed for thirteen weeks or longer. Corps members are paid a training allowance by the Ministry of Youth Affairs while they are on the course.

In the course of each programme, corps members acquire valuable skills and attitudes - using tools, planning a job, an appreciation of team work, and self confidence. In the recreation elements, they cover a range of activities from abseiling, firearm safety and shooting, to tramping, kayaking and rafting. We achieve a building of skills, teamwork and motivation in the members and complete a range of projects which would not otherwise get done without Conservation Corps involvement.

Because the Masterton YMCA course runs with a wetlands focus we will take on any wetland enhancement work, provided it is on conservation estate or has a QEII covenant. Wairarapa's is the only Conservation Corps focusing on wetlands. In the past we have planted



Conservation Corps members rebuild a walkway at Carter's Reserve, Wairarapa.



Servicing nest boxes, Barton's Lagoon, Wairarapa, April 1997.



Photos for this article supplied by Neil Richardson

trees, serviced grey teal nestboxes, carried out mud fish surveys and weed transects, weed control, fencing, predator control and activities such as track building and creating picnic areas.

In the course of this work, the YMCA Corps has had several "finds". Notably the mud fish at Carters Scenic Reserve in the Carterton district and at the Elm Grove kahikatea swamp forest just out of Greytown. There was also the discovery of mistletoe, *Korthalsella clavata* and *Illeostylis mycanthus* at Boggy Pond. The *K. clavata* was of particular importance in that it has never been found in the Wellington Conservancy before and is known in only two other sites in the North Island.

The work has not been without its lighter side.

There was a memorable trip into the Tararuas, in which we intended heading for Cow Creek over the Blue Range. After a delayed start, because I was unsure of the weather, we decided finally to press on. By the time we got to the top of the Blue Range, we were already behind schedule with several of the group struggling.

I selected three of the fitter ones who were not experienced but who had shown a lot of common sense, to go on ahead to the junction and then to come back for packs.

I carried on with the tail end. When we reached the junction, there was no sign of the advance party. The junction sign says "Waingawa River" one way and "Cow Creek" the other. I pressed on, in what had become torrential rain, with the tail end and we had to cross the river in a wire cage in the dark with several terrified members. Still expecting to see the advance party at the hut, and mentally preparing the lecture they were going to get, panic set in when I found they were not there. The radio was set up and the outside world informed. It was decided to make contact again first thing in the morning.

In the morning there was still no sign of the others, so I elected to take the cellphone and head back to check Blue Range hut, leaving the group at Cow Creek with the radio. Half way back to Blue Range, I received a phone call saying they had arrived at Cow Creek. So I headed back to the hut. On arriving at

DU Life Member Andy Gurney(left) previously serviced nest boxes on several lagoons by himself. He says this proved a difficult task but over several years the Conservation Corps have got on top of the work and the birds have additional nesting sites they otherwise wouldn't have had. He's loaned a boat for the work and found the corps members have shown an interest in the task. It's been a valuable undertaking because the birds won't use damaged or damp nest boxes. Andy notes that the work isn't without its excitement, especially when corps members have been unpleasantly suprised by possums who've taken up residence in nesting boxes.

the river crossing which had to be made in the cage, I found it on the other side of the river. With it was one of the "lost" members saying he would only let me cross if I promised not to go mad.

During the debrief, when we were all reunited, it transpired that the missing part of our party had got to the junction and, after reading the sign, the consensus was to carry on. "Neil said we were going to Cow somewhere." So they had headed to Cow Saddle. When they realised they had it wrong, they bush bashed according to their map for Cow Creek and ended up spending a cold, wet night about 100 metres from the hut.

Then there was the incident involving a member who was late one morning. I had given this guy a hard time about his car which had no registration or wof. It turned out he had been stopped by the police on his way to the course. Apparently, he ended up in some heavy debate with the officer after he asked him to point out where in the road code it said you needed a wof and registration on your waka. It went to court and he lost.



HOW YOU CAN WRITE FOR FLIGHT

Flight keeps you in touch with what your organisation is doing in the area of wetland restoration and development and conservation programmes of threatened waterfowl. It's also part of DU's advocacy of and education in wetland values.

Each issue of Flight needs three or four feature articles with photos, news from the chapters, and at least two member profiles for the "Our People" column. You can help.

You can alert the editorial team to possible features and shorter articles and help by suggesting ideas for future articles: things you'd like to see covered in Flight; past stories you'd like to know more about; events relating to wildfowl and wetland conservation in your area (which need not necessarily involve DU); people doing work which you feel is worthy of mention;

information you'd like to know and which might be of interest to other DU members.

Other material which will be welcomed includes yarns, cartoons, news of useful products, wanted and for sale items, details of successful fundraising schemes, humorous snapshots, newspaper clippings which may contain the idea for a followup article. We've published poems - there's no reason why we can't use handy hints and tips material.

The editorial team will help, too. Using fax and phone, it's easy to take the bare bones of an article and work them into useable form. The Rangiwahia wetland feature in the last issue started life as a newspaper clipping, some notes from Mike Bourke, and an envelope of photographs. A phone call and a letter were all that was needed to produce the final result.

BULLDUST AT THE LAST FRONTIER



by Howard Egan

In mid-April Pearl and I left "Canada Flats" for Australia. We planned to travel overland from Cairns to that vast piece of country in the far north of Australia below the remote Gulf of Carpentaria. It is truly a land of raw and untamed beauty - a last frontier.

The Gulf Savannah covers 200,000 square kilometres and stretches across to the Northern Territory border. People are a relatively rare sight. There are barely seven thousand permanent residents in the whole area.

The climate in the Gulf is monsoonal. The summer wet is life-giving and is the only reason such barren country can support human habitation as well as its diverse wildlife. Without the monsoon, the country quickly dies.

Road travel in the Gulf can be undertaken with certainty only during the dry season, from about late April until October. The dry season is well accepted as the best time to visit the Gulf Savannah. There is daily sunshine and very little rain. The countryside is golden and the days are warm with cool nights. We found the temperatures of just over thirty degrees to be pleasant rather than stifling.

But even in the dry, we found travelling on the dusty or bulldust roads required



Gulf saltpans.

huge care - even in the purpose-adapted and airconditioned Landrover we travelled in for eight days inland. The bulldust holes can cover most of the road. Like fine talcum powder, it can be feet deep. In the rest of the year, roads are likely to be cut by floods - sometimes for days, weeks and months at a time.

We flew back to Cairns from Karumba, a Gulf port (population 500) where the prawn fleets work from. Our objective on the trip was Lawn Hill Gorge, based on a photograph we had seen. The gorge is near the Northern Territory border. It is an incredibly long way from anywhere - about five hours over mostly dusty roads from the closest "centres" of Burketown

or Mount Isa. It is rated by travel professionals as one of the most spectacularly beautiful places in Australia. Truly an emerald oasis in the dusty wilderness.

The Lawn Hill Gorge system has superb 60 metre sandstone walls, and in the valley floors below, deep crystal clear waters fed by permanent springs reflect the giant palms which have grown on the gorge walls from time immemorial. Fifteen million years ago the Gulf Savannah region was covered in steamy rainforest. Canoeing in that gorge was one of my most serene life experiences.

Though we mainly headed for the Gulf Savannah because of our fondness for the Australian outback, Flight readers would share our interest while there in the water birds. The Savannah country is endless flat grassed plain stretching as far as the eye can see. There are salt pans, too, 130 kilometres of salt-encrusted seemingly lifeless plain.

Once the rains come, though, the area becomes a wetland and a breeding ground for millions of birds. These are not necessarily waterfowl as the populations are largely waders. Not surprisingly, these are birds of the remote areas. It was common for us to see groups of up to twenty brolgas and sarus cranes, up to nearly two metres tall, strutting around the edges of wet areas. Driving through a water course we would put to flight egrets and herons by the dozen. Ibis were



Lawn Hills Gorge.



Wandering whistling duck.

common, as were royal spoonbill. At the Gulf itself came the big surprise - great lumbering pelicans flying really high in v's of six or eight, wheeling and twisting with grace.

As for ducks and swans, we saw very few. Even though two weeks before our arrival the areas were flooded, the habitat was not really right. We saw magpie geese close to Cairns - ungainly coastal birds,

black and white, looking like long-legged muscovy. The only plentiful duck was the wandering whistling duck - distinctive with an upright stance. The only other duck were a group of some ten shoveler I spotted on a stock water-hole beside the dust highway through the Savannah. We saw a flock of some eighty in a typical habitat, a beautiful lotus flower lagoon of about ten hectares.

The birdlife of the Far Outback Queensland is superb. The black cockatoo, the finches, lorikeets, the scarce bustards, and the brolgas. The Gulf Savannah was memorable. Queensland's palm-fringed beaches giving way to grassland plains and eucalypt scrub, salt pans, lizards and snakes. A last frontier.

Photos: Howard Egan and Pearl.



A BIRD OF A DIFFERENT STAMP

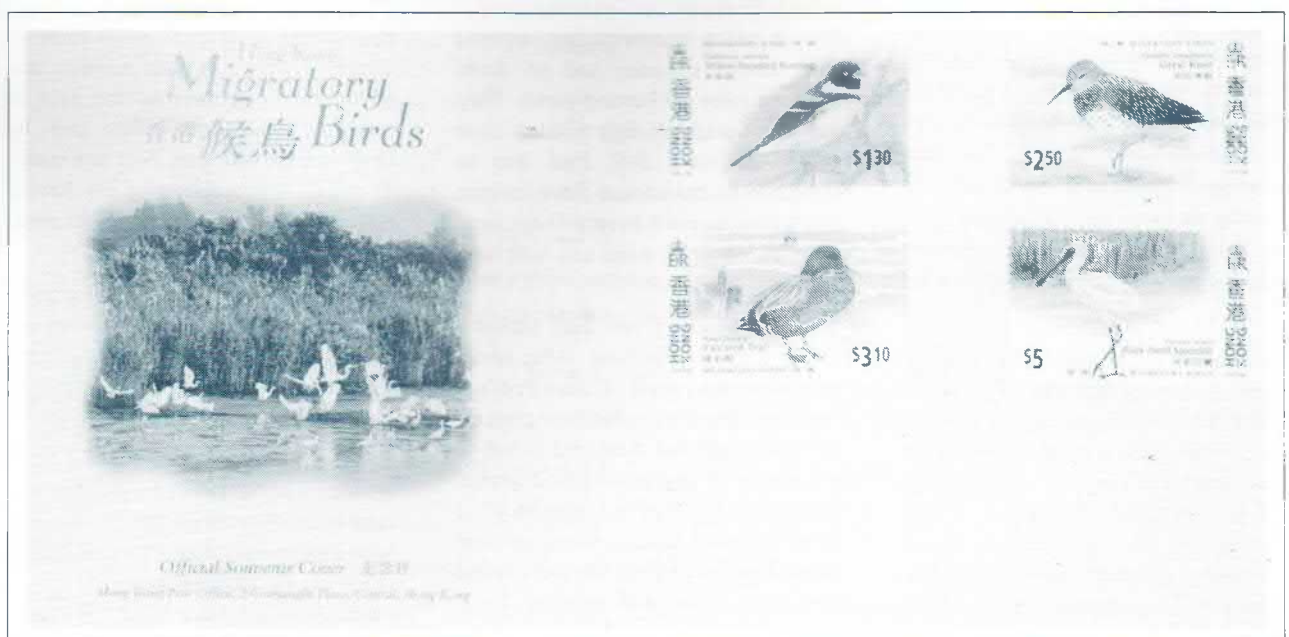
Borders may change and colonies like Hong Kong be handed back. But migratory species pay little attention to political boundaries in their annual migrations.

Margaret King (an Upper Hutt DU member) visited the Mai Po area of Hong Kong near the Chinese border several years ago. There she saw thousands of migrating birds resting there during their pole-to-pole migration. She happened to notice an unusual duck and pointed it out to the curator. The duck turned out to be a falcated teal, *Anas falcata*, and this was only the second sighting of the bird

on that part of Mai Po. Her sighting was recorded, and she writes: "I now have my name up on the board!"

Falcated teal migrate from northern China. Information on the reverse of the 1997 first day cover kindly loaned by Margaret, and which is reproduced below, notes that the falcated teal (at lower left) has a large glossy dark head and long drooping feathers over its back, and fine scaly markings on the breast.

"Falcated" means sickle shaped.



Eight Days of Hunting, Fishing and Shooting with

THE SULLIVANS

No, not the popular 70s Australian TV series but our American guests. Paul and Suzanne Sullivan (from Washington State) were here at the end of June for an eight-day hunting-shooting-fishing trip purchased at a DU Inc. Seattle Chapter dinner/auction (see DU News, July Flight).

The Sullivans were met at Auckland airport very early on a Saturday morning by Graham Gurr and David Smith and transported to the Smith household for a bite, a shower, and a snooze. The afternoon saw them on the Gurr/Smith property at Opuatia where they enjoyed some shooting and Paul scored his first black swan.

Sunday morning, Paul was back at the swamp and Suzanne at church, then doing the Auckland second-hand marts. After lunch, Paul was hosted by Grant and Michelle MacKay on their Waiuku property. Paul's an archer and he saw a number of deer. Just as the light was fading, he got on to a fallow hind. At thirty-five metres he wanted to get closer for a clean bow shot. He said it was taking him three minutes to make a metre and, when he was within range, he decided, as it was a hind, to walk away. He is a real conservationist and the thrill of the stalk was enough for him.

Graham Gurr drove the couple south on Monday to do the tourist thing in Rotorua. Then it was on to the Broadlands Wildfowl Trust where they were hosted by Anne and David Johnston. They tried some pond fishing after lunch and some evening shooting, then dined with Anne and David and spent the night in Norman Marsh's cottage right on the edge of the wetland.

The Sullivans shot and fished again on Tuesday morning and after lunch David took them to Huka Falls, then on to Di and Alan Wilks' cottage by the shores of the lake, south of Taupo. That evening, Steve Yerex, a professional Taupo hunting and fishing guide, called to discuss the next day's plans. Steve was to take Paul into Poronui Station off the Napier-Taupo road to hunt sika deer.



The Sullivans after a successful paradise duck shoot, Ohakune. Photo: Diane Pritt.

After a convivial candlelit dinner with Di and Alan, cooked in their oldtime coal range, it was early to bed for Paul as he had a 5.30am start with Steve Yerex next morning.

Suzanne spent Wednesday morning walking the Hinemaiaia River and talking to local fishers who advised her that the famous Taupo trout were pretty elusive at that time owing to a dry spell. Di took her shopping in Taupo after lunch as she was keen to buy some lambswool slippers, which she achieved most successfully - green ones "that I can wear outside to feed the dogs."

Paul and Steve arrived back at the cottage about 5.30pm like a couple of youngsters who'd been on an exciting picnic. They'd had a wonderful day, enjoyed each other's company and no doubt swapped some tall hunting yarns. They saw three stags, though nothing close enough to stalk. Still, Paul was so impressed he has booked Steve for next April when he plans to return with some of his bow-hunting mates and, with luck, also catch some trout.

Thursday morning saw Paul valiantly trying to tempt a rainbow. After lunch, Alan drove the couple to Diane Pritt's at Ohakune. The weather had been great for late June, cold and clear, but closed in completely as they drove past Ruapehu. That evening, guided by Diane, they had an exciting paradise duck shoot, and were hosted for dinner by DU member Graeme Berry who owns and operates Turoa Lodge in Ohakune.

Next morning, there was Ruapehu close up - a magnificent icecream against a frosty azure sky with a backdrop of breathtaking mountain views. And they had another successful shoot, followed by an evening one and a Di-and-Audrey (Di's mum) dinner.

On Saturday morning Paul was back in the mai-mai with Di, while Audrey took Suzanne round the local second-hand shops. We never pursued her fixation in this area and can't report on her purchases but she appeared happy with them! After lunch Paul fished the Mangawheo River with no luck and then the Sullivans, who had enjoyed the hospitality at Turoa Lodge so much, took Di and Audrey back there for dinner.

Paul was out again for a Canada goose on Sunday morning without success, and after lunch they were on the train to Auckland where they were met by Graham Gurr who took them to a motel. They flew out the following day, having had a packed eight days of hunting, shooting and fishing.

One thing we found hard to come to terms with was their American propensity for eating toast and marmalade in one hand with their bacon and eggs, but we must accept that "Folks is different"!

Paul and Suzanne Sullivan were wonderful ambassadors for DU Inc. and were an absolute delight to host. We only hope they enjoyed their time here half as much as we enjoyed having them.



DRAWING: The New Zealand Shoveler

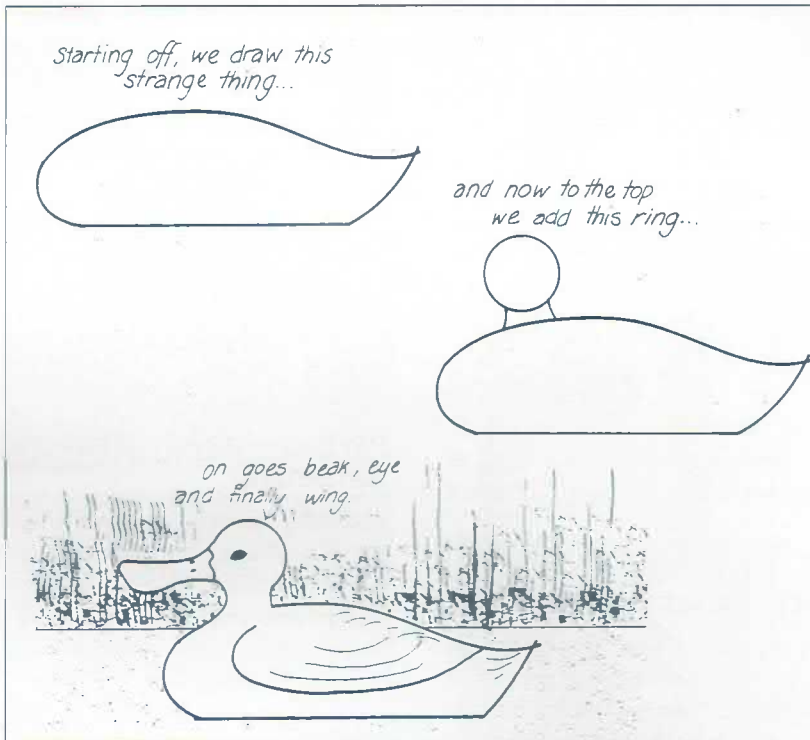


Illustration republished courtesy of Alan Fielding.

...A regular feature introducing a simple drawing technique for budding wildlife artists.

The New Zealand shoveler, *Anas platyrhynchos variegata*, is found naturally in New Zealand. Also known as the spoonbill or spoonie from the shape of its beak, the Maori name is Koro Whengi.

The shoveler is about 480mm from beak to tail. The edges of its beak have fine growths, called lamellae, through which the shoveler sifts soft foods such as small freshwater creatures and seeds. The shoveler is widespread on shallow wetlands below 350m and will feed on worms and insects on flooded pastures.

The female usually nests at the same site each year, having travelled around the country in the meantime. A bird banded in the Manawatu at the breeding season was recorded in Otago some 800km away. It returned to the Manawatu the following year. Shovelers are the first New Zealand ducks to have taken to the ocean as a refuge from hunters.



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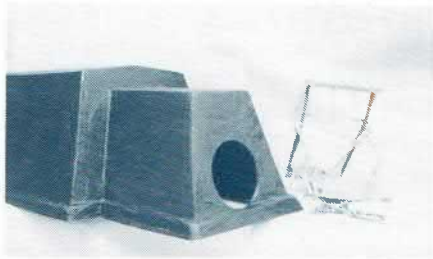
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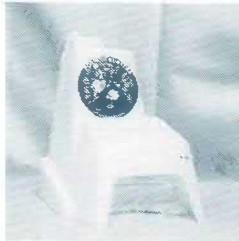
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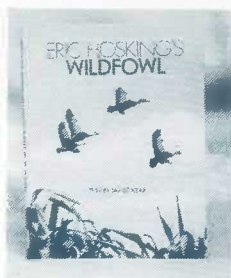
ESSENTIAL READING

NEW ZEALAND WETLANDS: A MANAGEMENT GUIDE

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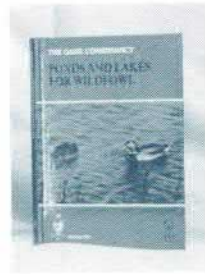
ERIC HOSKING'S WILDFOWL

A must for anybody interested in wildfowl this book is full of magnificent photographs by one of the world's foremost wildlife photographers. **\$20.00**



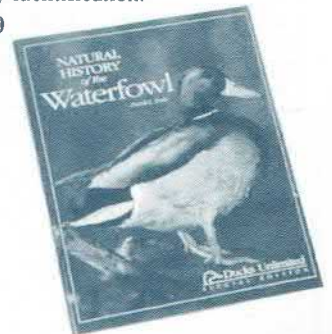
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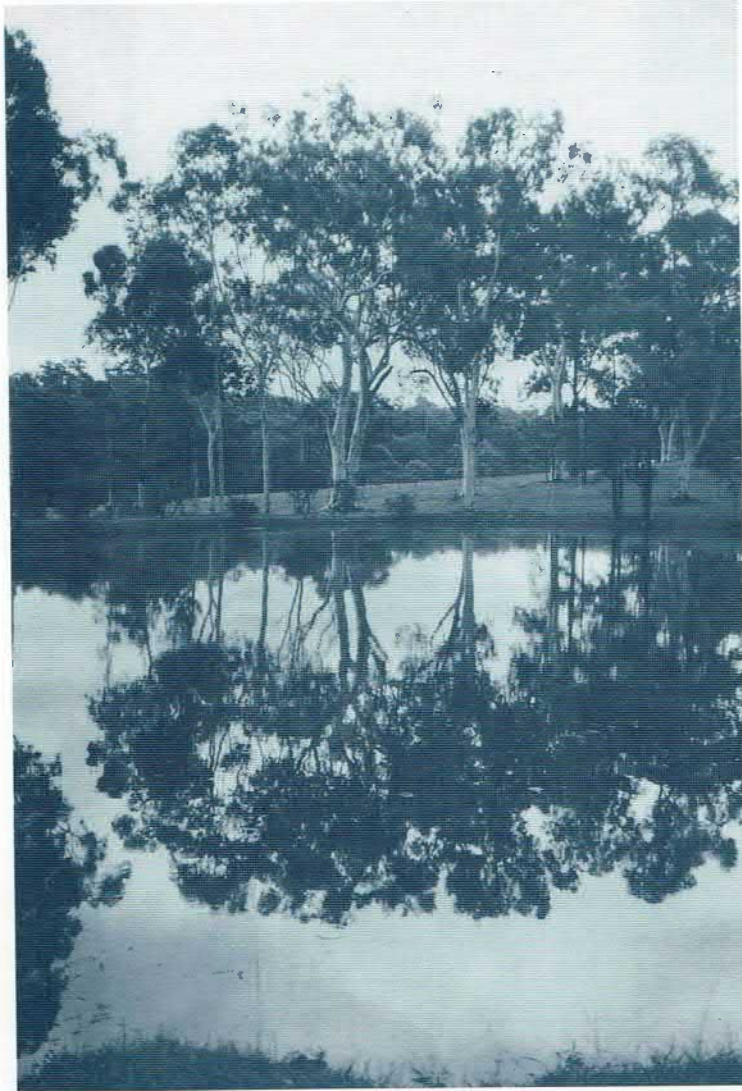
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