

Wet & Wild!



NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL WETLAND TRUST

No. 7, Autumn 2003

Chairman's Report

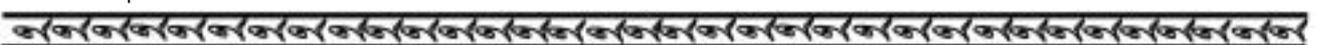
There have been some major achievements for the Trust since the previous newsletter in Spring. Some of these will be more fully reported elsewhere in this newsletter but I will provide a summary of the key points for the benefit of members.

The concept plans for the proposed National Wetland Centre have now been presented to and approved by the Trust Board. These show four pavilion style buildings comprising the wetland centre each with a different key focus and joined by a covered walkway/spine leading from the road directly to the wetland behind. This style of building opens all sorts of exciting possibilities and enables the external landscaped portions of the site to be incorporated within the built environment. This means that visitors to the Centre will move from an internal room to an external room passing from display panels to outdoor planted wetland displays. Rather than go to one large building and then to a large garden area this will enable the various components to be broken into smaller portions and hence be more easily comprehended.

The concept plans will shortly be placed on our website and I would urge people to regularly check the site for progress reports. It will also be seen at the website that the Ministry for the Environment have released some reports relating to wetland monitoring and these are available directly from our site. This website is hosted by Wave Internet and we thank them for the sponsorship of this useful communication tool. If you have not already checked the site then I believe that you should at www.wetlandtrust.org.nz. If you have any queries regarding any aspects of the Trust then most of the answers are provided on this site or by using the contact information available.

World Wetlands Day on 2 February was celebrated at a number of events throughout New Zealand. This event, which is coordinated by N Z Fish & Game Council, is a good opportunity to highlight the good and bad things happening to wetlands throughout New Zealand. The National Wetland Trust hosted an event at Rangiriri when over 120 people attended and were taken on a guided bus trip around Lake Waikare and the Whangamarino Wetlands. The route of the bus trip and the various stops were organised and a commentary provided by Keith Thompson and he was ably assisted by officers from the Department of Conservation and the Auckland/Waikato Fish & Game Council. Following the practical aspects of the tour a barbecue was hosted in the grounds of the Rangiriri Hotel with the luncheon being cooked by club members from the Eden, Papakura, Clevedon, Miranda and Franklin Fish & Game clubs. Wetland Trustee Gordon Stephenson then unveiled the concept plans mentioned above.

Meanwhile the Trust Chairman was present at the event held at the Flaxmill Wetlands just north of Dargaville where the Minister of Conservation opened a wetland recently restored by Northland Region Fish & Game Council. There were 80 people present at that event, most of whom following the speeches were able to undertake a walk around the wetland and view the restoration works and the bird and plant life that it contains.



Meanwhile other events were held throughout the country with Philippe Gerbeaux organising public displays in Hokitika. This is an ideal opportunity for smaller groups working on wetlands to publicly display their works and raise their profiles. I would suggest that you contact your local Fish & Game office to be included in the events calendar for 2 February 2004.

I am continually being amazed at the number of wetland projects being undertaken throughout New Zealand. These range from small projects being undertaken by individuals to sophisticated restoration projects being undertaken by Trusts or local and central Government agencies. I would challenge these various organisations to utilise the Wetland Trust newsletter as an agency to let people know what is being achieved. It is one of the Trusts objectives to provide some co-ordination to all of the wetland projects and utilising our newsletter is one of the ways that people can learn from others successes and failures.

During January the agencies dealing with wetlands in Southland organised a week long seminar to examine opportunities and threats to wetlands in the Southland Regional Council area. Two of the wetland Trustees were present for the course, Bev Clarkson and Philippe Gerbeaux. I also had the opportunity to attend for one day during a visit to Big Lagoon and other nearby wetlands. I also had the opportunity to visit the wetland project on Ron and Gay Monro's property just outside Invercargill. I was most impressed at the effort being put into wetland enhancement works by the agencies and individuals involved. It is most heartening to see that level of commitment even in an area where the pressure of population is less than that in the Auckland region. It was also interesting to see wetlands that were not totally choked by willows even if they are threatened by other weed species.

The Annual General Meeting of the Wetland Trust will be held in Hamilton on 16 June 2003. While further notices will be provided to members this may be an opportune time for people to start considering putting their names forward for consideration. It would be really good to have two or three Trustees from the south Island to support Philippe who at times feels a little lonely even though it is possible for him to participate in meetings by way of a telephone link. However it would be much better to have some real live contact for him. Another area where some expertise will be required by the Trust over the next two or three years will be in fundraising. This will clearly require some business acumen to firstly develop a marketing strategy and then to implement it in the market place to try and attract the major capital required to build the Centre. It has been estimated that approximately 3 million dollars will be required to build the whole complex and complete the fitout and landscaping.

While the remaining areas of wetlands are still under threat from actions of drainage or land modifications and increasingly from invasion by weed species I do not believe that it is all doom and gloom. There are really exciting enhancement projects being undertaken and while these cannot replace natural unmodified wetlands they do give opportunities for wetland flora and fauna to survive for the next generation to cherish.

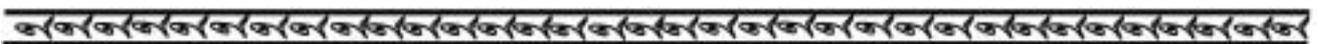
David Lawrie
Chairperson

Your support helps us to achieve what we do

SUBSCRIPTION DUE:

A gentle reminder that the annual subscriptions are due for this financial year. Please fill in the form on the back page of this Newsletter and send this to us with your \$10 subscription fee.

Doug Emmett
Treasurer



NATIONAL WETLAND CENTRE
 National Wetland Trust of New Zealand
Preliminary Development Concept
 January 2003; Scale 1:25

□ **CONCEPT PERSPECTIVES**

Plan developed with a grant from Trust Waikato



VIEWING DECK
 INTERPRETIVE
 PANELS SET IN
 THE WETLAND
 LANDSCAPE.

Chow-Hill
 architects

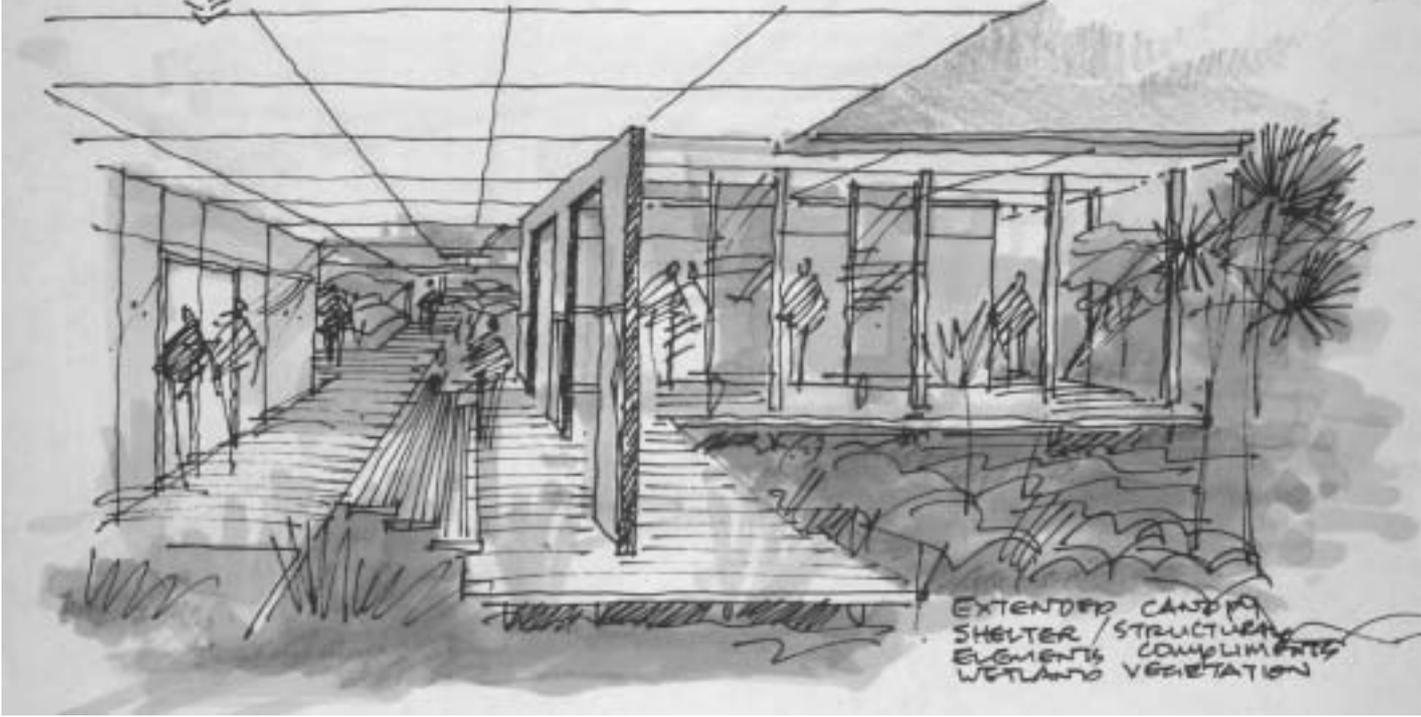
DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS

129 Collingwood Street, PO Box 10208 Hamilton
 Phone 07 834 0548 Fax 07 834 2104

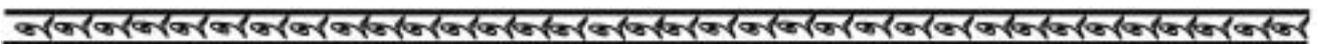
PRIESTMAN SERGER & GRAHAM
 LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS



DECKS / PAVILION / 'ROOMS'
 SET IN THE WETLAND
 LANDSCAPE

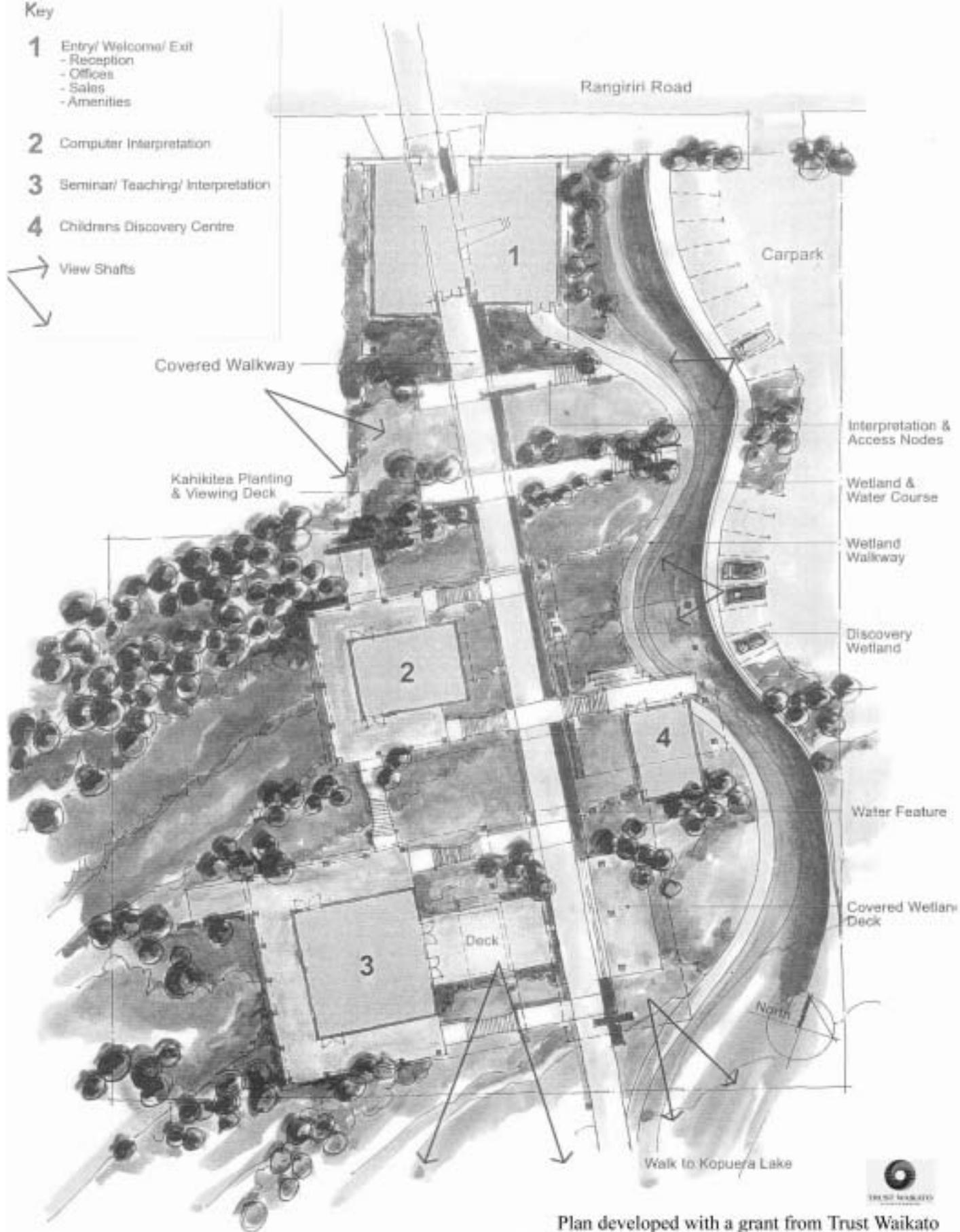


EXTENDED CANOPY
 SHELTER / STRUCTURE
 ELEMENTS COMPLEMENT
 WETLAND VEGETATION



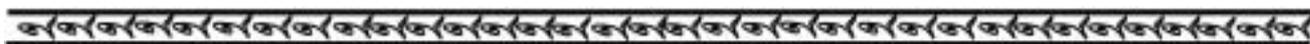
Key

- 1 Entry/ Welcome/ Exit
- Reception
- Offices
- Sales
- Amenities
- 2 Computer Interpretation
- 3 Seminar/ Teaching/ Interpretation
- 4 Childrens Discovery Centre



Plan developed with a grant from Trust Waikato

NATIONAL WETLAND CENTRE
National Wetland Trust of New Zealand
Preliminary Development Concept
January 2003



David's Bird Corner

David Lawrie

Australasian Bittern (Matuku) *Botaurus poiciloptilus*

This is a bird which is found in fresh water wetlands throughout New Zealand. Even though it is widespread it is not often seen because of its secretive nature and being partially nocturnal and inhabiting areas of dense cover.

It is more often heard than seen as during the breeding season from September to February its mateship call is a deep booming sound. This booming noise reverberates around wetlands and often signals the birds' presence even though they are not easily seen.

These birds are present throughout NZ but a large percentage of the population is located in the lower Waikato wetlands where there are large tracts of less modified wetland. Recent restoration works such as the Whangamarino weir and other impoundment projects have led to an increase in populations and the birds are now more commonly seen in these areas. There have also been several reports of birds well out onto pastureland, particularly in the early morning or in the dusk.

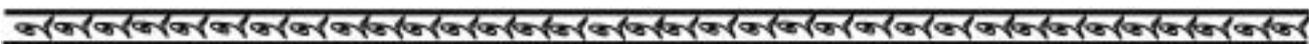
Bitterns feed on small fish, frogs and aquatic insects and generally are seen around the fringes of vegetation adjacent to open water areas.

Bitterns tend to freeze when disturbed with the head and bill pointing skywards with the cryptic light and dark streaks on their plumage blending into the rushes with which they are often associated. In this pose they have almost 360° vision which gives them a good sense of impending threats. However they can fly if flushed rising on their rounded wings with slow lazy wing beats with the head tucked back onto the body.

The Bittern is synonymous with fresh water wetlands in NZ and it is an endorsement of a wetland restoration project to have a pair of Bitterns set up home. Surely that is something that we should all strive for as a crowning outcome of any project.

Update on Black Kite

Further to the report on the Spring 2002 edition it has now been confirmed by the Rare Bird Committee of the Ornithological Society of NZ that the sightings reported have now been accepted. This is officially the fourth record from NZ and the first from the North Island. The bird has been subsequently seen on several occasions and appears to be frequenting the northern Whangamarino wetland area or the Mangatawhiri wetlands, but generally around the Koheroa Road area.



Wetland Snippets

With the opening of the Flaxmill Wetland Northland F&G has recently restored some 100ha of wetland, which was purchased in 1972 by the then Hobson Acclimatisation Society from the Northern Waioa Flax Company. During the 1970's and 1980's the wetland deteriorated with the spread of pampas grass and alligator weed and the failure of the wetland stopbanks.

After the establishment of Fish & Game NZ in the 1990's Northland F&G region developed a Management Plan for the wetland and went about to raise funds to restore it. The project has grown steadily as the removal of pampas grass revealed more and more work that needed to be done. The development has involved the building of a series of ponds interconnected by a canal system that allows for water to flow through the wetlands aided by gate valves, which allow for the manipulation of water levels – very much the same as Auckland/Waikato F&G's Cocks block wetland restoration commented on in the previous Wet & Wild.

The wetland is not only ideal habitat for waterfowl species, but also for threatened species such as bittern, marsh crake and banded rail. The construction of a spillway allows for water flow during much of the year and has been designed in a manner so as not to prevent fish movement.

The wetland has also seen plant species threatened nationally remain viable.

Public access into the wetland is through a legal right-of-way crossing a newly constructed foot bridge.

Wetlands Return to Former Glory

The Awhitu Regional Park (1,114ha) lies on the south west shores of the Manukau Harbour. Extensive restoration undertaken by the ARC has been a huge success, providing the largest area of restored wetland habitat remaining in the regional parks.

One of the ARC's environmental roles is the protection and restoration of significant areas of wetlands, which has seen the ARC Natural Heritage Team working to restore regional parks wetlands in Tawharanui, Shakespear, Whatipu and Awhitu Regional Parks to their natural ecological state.

\$7.3 Million for Waikato Hydro System

For the 12 months leading up to last November, the Department of Conservation, Fish & Game, Forest & Bird, and ACRE have spent an incredible amount of time and effort meeting monthly (and sometimes twice monthly) with Mighty River Power to try and reach a satisfactory agreement relevant to their consent applications for their dams on the Waikato River system. The parties involved had initially lodged objections to the consents to counter the potential damage to the river system and adjoining wetlands due to the operation of the hydro system.

In November a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with MRP which will see a Trust established, funded by MRP, that will manage a sum of \$7.3 million (inflation adjusted) over the 35 year period of the consents.

Part of the agreement also includes the establishment of an "expert panel", comprised of independent expert scientists who will monitor MRP's operations so as to ensure that these do not have a significantly detrimental effect on the existing ecological system.

The outcome of what has been an extremely long arduous process sees the establishment of a Trust with all parties having a firm commitment towards wetlands which will ensure the \$7.3 million will be directed to good use, protecting, restoring and enhancing wetlands.

Lake Waikare

A 35 years legacy of waterfowl and wetland destruction is hopefully starting to be redressed.

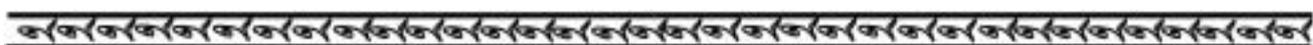
Prior to the 1965 Lower Waikato Flood Control Scheme that saw Lake Waikare lowered by approximately 1 metre the lake was home to some 15,000-17,000 swan and approximately 50,000-60,000 ducks with the eel catch being around 200 tonnes per annum. Since the food control works lowered the lake we have seen:

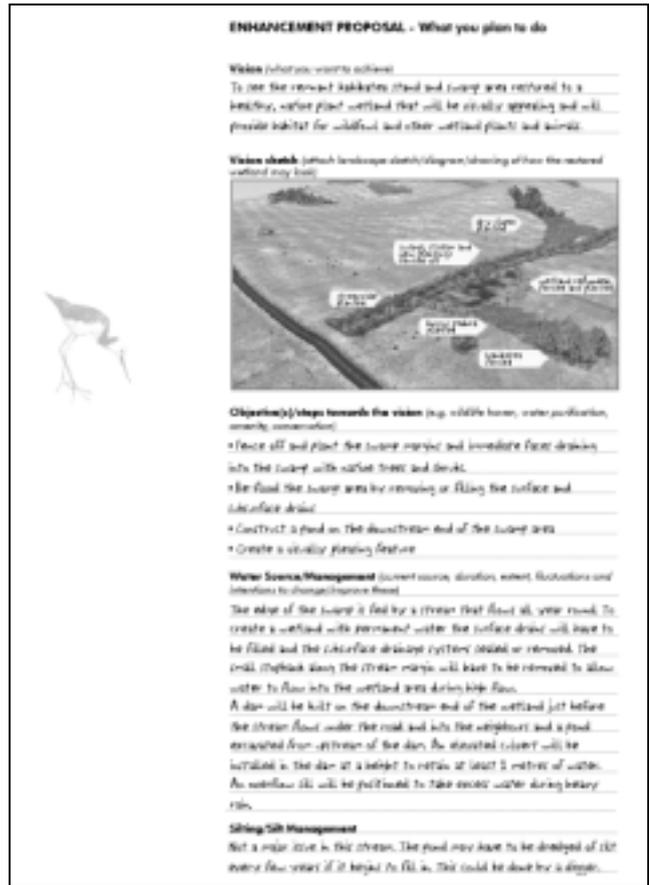
- 800ha of shallow wetlands around the lake dried out and lost
- macrophytes (weeds that waterfowl and fish need to survive) subsequently collapsing,
- silting changing the lake water from clean and clear to muddy brown 365 days of the year, with visibility less than an inch
- swan and duck numbers decline by 90% - 99%,
- eel catch similarly declined by 95% over the same period.

Also each year some 15,600 tonnes of silt enters and pollutes Lake Waikare – a large proportion of which finds its way into the adjoining Whangamarino wetland with equally horrendous effects.

When the consents for the scheme came up for renewal F&G and Ducks Unlimited objected to them. Both parties were not satisfied with the outcome of the Consents Hearing and so lodged an appeal to the Environment Court.

At the eleventh hour the issue was settled via the creation of a "Lake Care" type group, which will see \$180,000 over the next two years directed at attempting to rehabilitate the lake and stop the flow of silt into the Whangamarino Wetland. Many opinions about as to what the problem is, and thus the initial purpose of the group will be to clearly identify what the problems are and then to determine practical cost-effective means of overcoming these.





Write Your Own Wetland Plan

Environment Waikato has produced a template to help landowners develop a management plan for wetlands on their land. Many landowners are keen to create wetlands for their property, or restore and better manage the wetlands they have.

Landowners value wetlands for many reasons including:

- the wildlife they contain
- the role wetlands play in water management
- their attractiveness as an on-farm feature
- their potential as a recreational area.

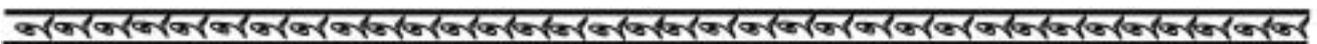
The blank template guides users to fill in the appropriate sections, to ensure that all aspects have been thought through and costed out. There is also a completed example to give an idea of how to fill in the template. The template is designed to be used with Environment Waikato's wetland restoration factsheets.

The template and a completed example can be viewed or downloaded from:

<http://www.ew.govt.nz/ourenvironment/water/wetlands/restoringwetlands/plan.htm>

The information in Environment Waikato's wetland factsheets is repeated in a series of web pages available at:

<http://www.ew.govt.nz/ourenvironment/water/wetlands/restoringwetlands/index.htm>



News From The South

When I became a member of the Trust I offered to bring a South Island perspective and representation. It has certainly proved to be a challenge at times being remote from my Waikato colleagues. I attend most monthly meetings by conference call and this enables me to contribute effectively to the discussions. I also make a trip to Hamilton whenever I can, alas not more than once or twice a year. Besides this type of support to our team, my main current job is to develop a wetland trail around the South Island. My list is nearly complete and I hope to load it onto the website (as a draft) within the next few months.

Our Trust recognises the importance to have some South Island representation and this new column in our newsletter is a reflection of that. From now on I will therefore attempt to include snippets from the Mainland in our newsletters.

New Wetland Reserve in North West Nelson.

Across from Golden Bay (and nearby one of our five Ramsar sites – Farewell Spit) on the West Coast lies the magnificent Wanganui Inlet (also known as Westhaven Inlet). Just south of the inlet is the largest remaining freshwater wetland in North West Nelson. This new reserve has been recently bought, with help from the Nature Heritage Fund (NHF), by the New Zealand Restoration Trust. It is a fine example displaying distinct ecological changes between the fertile/infertile areas which in turn reflect the surrounding ecology. Mangarakau is 40km beyond Collingwood via Pakawau. Truly a great place to visit (as I did over Xmas!). You can become a friend of Mangarakau by contacting Jo-Anne Vaughan, Puonga Road, RD 1, Collingwood (ph 03 524 8072; e-mail: javn@ihug.co.nz).

Nature Heritage Fund Helps Extend Network of Protected Wetland in North Westland.

The DoC West Coast Conservancy has recently secured the protection of new wetlands north of Westport including an extension to Birchfield swamp, an important habitat for bitterns and for a threatened plant species (*myriophyllum robustum*). Nearby the Jones Ck swamp, actually a coastal bog, has also been acquired. Perhaps more significant, a large part of the Orowaiti estuary near Westport has become the latest addition to the network. The site contains important whitebait spawning habitat (as re-confirmed by recent surveys).

Peatland Workshop in Southland

Issues affecting Southland's peatlands were extensively discussed during a week-long series of wetland tours. The week culminated in a field day and workshop held 16 & 17 January 2003 in and around Invercargill. Supported by NHF the workshop was organised by DoC and Environment Southland and attracted participation by a large number of Council staff and Councillors, Iwi, and other community agencies who were joined by wetland experts from Landcare Research (Hamilton) and Waikato University. Two members of the Trust (Bev Clarkson and myself) were able to attend with also a flying visit by our Chairperson (David Lawrie). The conclusions of the workshop centred on the need to educate and inform people about the importance and wide-ranging benefits of wetlands (one of the key objectives of our Trust), as well as addressing some of the threats to these habitats from development, the spread of pest plants and the perceived prohibitive economics associated with their on-going care.

The need for incentives to restore and manage wetlands on private land was regarded by participants as important too.

Tarns, Riverbeds and Palustrine Wetlands Priority Places for Protection in the Canterbury High Country.

In a report recently published by DoC (measuring conservation achievements: concepts and their application over the Twizel Area, by Stephens et al, Science for Conservation 2000, 2002), it is suggested (p100) that the current investment in the conservation of freshwater ecosystems is low relative to the irreplaceability and vulnerability. The tenure review process provides an opportunity to formally protect some of these priority places by allocating some Crown land pastoral lease land units to conservation use. Some analysis suggests that most of the native biota associated with these environments may already have been lost.

Phillipe Gerbeaux.

