

Wet & Wild!



NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL WETLAND TRUST

No. 4, Summer 2002

Welcome all readers to this edition of the National Wetland Trust Newsletter.

The trustees have had a very busy time over the last few months progressing activities in our business plan. Perhaps the most exciting achievement during this time has been the recent purchase of a piece of land for the National Wetland Education Centre. Further details about the site and the proposed centre are contained in this newsletter.

It's also that time of year again where we get to celebrate the special values of wetlands in New Zealand on World Wetlands Day, February 2nd. This year the theme of World Wetlands Day is "Wetlands: Water, Life and Culture". This theme recognises what an amazing pataka (storehouse) wetlands are of cultural heritage. As well as being widely used by people for food and raw materials they have also provided inspiration in art, music, literature and folklore. Some of these elements are explored in a range of events that are happening around the country – check these out in our regular 'wetland snippets' column.

Happy World Wetlands Day 2002!

WETLAND EDUCATION CENTRE

At last, after months of intense debate, a site has been purchased for the development of a national wetland education centre. The establishment of an education centre has been the priority task for the National Wetland Trust since it formed in October 1999. The vision is for the centre to be a world-class facility with state-of-the art educational and interpretative services that are instructive, accessible, enjoyable and creative.

Site location

A site of approximately 4800m² has been purchased at Rangiriri, which is halfway between Auckland and Hamilton and close to three wetlands of international significance. Rangiriri will be a main access/exit for the proposed SH1 extension and is already developing into a historic tourist destination. One of the exciting features of the site is that it leads into the wetlands surrounding Lake Kopuera which we hope to connect to the centre using boardwalks.

Functions of the Centre

We hope that the education centre will be all of the following:

- Firstly and most importantly it will be enticing to the *casual* visitor.
- An educational facility for schools, wetland managers, farmers and others who are seeking a deeper understanding of wetlands.
- A depository of wetland information and knowledge.
- A facility for furthering wetland research.
- The start of a walking trail around Lake Kopuera and of vehicle-based wetland trails around the Waikato and the rest of NZ.
- A meeting place for wetland organisations.

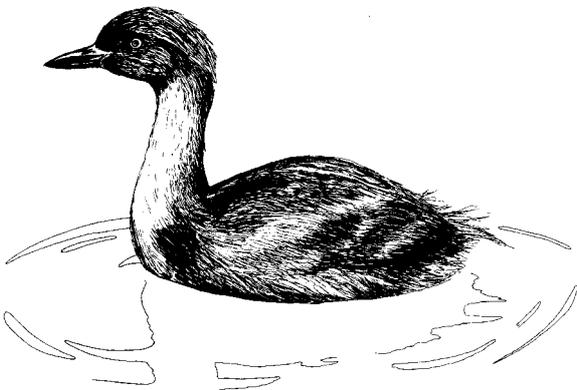
A design brief for the building and the landscape are currently being compiled. To date the trustees have agreed that the building should be distinctly NZ in character, eco-friendly and be integrated with landscaped gardens demonstrating as many indigenous wetland vegetation types as possible. We'll keep you posted as this exciting project progresses.

Dabchick recovery at South Kaipara Head dune lakes

David Pye

The Kaipara, New Zealand's largest harbour, lies on the west coast of the North Island, a little to the north of Auckland city. Tens of thousands of wading and shorebirds can be found there. Two dune peninsulas form the western edge of the harbour, one coming down from the north and one up from the south. These peninsulas are both over 30km long and contain a chain of dune seepage lakes. Good numbers of waterfowl, grebes, rails, crakes and shags can be found there, just to name a few.

Extending along the length of the South Kaipara peninsula there are approximately 33 lakes and large ponds. Most of these are typical seepage lakes formed behind the massive sand dunes of the Tasman Sea coastline. Few have any stream inlet or outlet. Whilst some of the lakes are quite large, deep and permanent, most are highly variable bodies of water. They have come and gone over the years, changing with the fluctuating water table, rainfall, forestry plantations and land use.



During the late 1970's and early to mid 1980's the majority of the lakes dried and many completely disappeared. Only about half of the 33 were left, with many of those remaining being mere shadows of their former selves. A lot of the "ex-lakes" were quickly converted to farm paddocks or pine woodlots. However over the last few years the lakes have returned with surprising rapidity, turning the clock back some 30 years. These re-emerging lakes have dramatically changed the size, extent and type of freshwater habitat available to the local birdlife. They are generally shallow bodies of water, full of exotic weeds and dead trees, and with large areas of submerged vegetation. This is of course wonderful habitat for many wetland bird species.

Bird censusing

Since the late 1970's, the Auckland branch of Ornithological Society of NZ (OSNZ) have kept an eye on these lakes, monitoring the wetland bird populations. A census of the lakes birdlife is taken most years. NZ Dabchicks are the main focus of attention since they are a threatened endemic species with a national population estimated at around 1700-1800. South Kaipara peninsula is one of the very few areas in the Auckland region where there is a significant breeding population.

The 2001 lakes census was conducted in conjunction with the South Kaipara Landcare Group and recorded a grand total of 129 grebes, 83 NZ Dabchick, 41 Australasian Little Grebe (ALG) and 5 birds not distinguished between the two species. NZ Dabchick were found on 13 different lakes, and ALG were found on 9, of which only 4 were shared with NZ Dabchick. Other counts of interest included 143 shags (mostly Pied Shag), 375 Paradise Shelduck, 134 Black Swan, 364 Grey Teal and 182 Australasian Shoveler.

During the early 1970's when the lake chain was of similar size, censuses routinely produced totals of 70 – 90 NZ Dabchick. During the "dried out" period of the mid 70's to mid 90's the NZ Dabchick numbers fluctuated around 40 - 60 birds. In 2001, with the lakes returned to their former extent, it appears that the NZ Dabchick population has also returned to its former size.

The ALG began appearing on the South Kaipara peninsula lake system in the mid/late 1980's. Their numbers remained very low through to the late 1990's, with censuses often failing to record any. However by 2001 some 26 adult and 15 juveniles were present. This high proportion of juveniles maybe representative of their apparent recent population explosion.

The future

Most people who have a long-term association with the area have been surprised at just how fast the lakes have re-appeared. The census work over the decades shows how variable the populations of NZ Dabchick, ALG and other water birds are in this dynamic habitat. Very little is known about the interaction between NZ Dabchick and ALG. At the moment both seem to be flourishing but will one soon oust the other?

Wetland snippets

World Wetlands Day Events

Auckland

Forest and Bird, Auckland Regional Council and the South Kaipara Landcare Group are celebrating World Wetlands Day with a fieldtrip to Wainui Estuary at South Kaipara Head. Contact Sarah Gibbs ph 09 303 3079.

Waikato

The National Wetland Trust, Fish and Game Council and the Lower Waikato River Enhancement Society are having a joint celebration beginning at the recently purchased site of the National Wetland Education Centre. A blessing of the site, adjacent to the Heritage Café, Talbot Street, Rangiriri will commence at 9.30am on February 2. This will be followed by brief talks by members of the National Wetland Trust and the Lower Waikato River Enhancement Society. Following this a BBQ at 12.30pm will be hosted by Auckland Waikato Fish and Game Council at the Dean Block (within the Mangatawhiri Wetland). RSVP by 29 January ph 07 849 1666.

Also in the Waikato, Environment Waikato, Waipa District Council, Fish and Game Council and DoC are celebrating World Wetlands Day with the signing of the Waipa Peat Lakes and Wetlands Accord. This will take place at the Lake Ngaroto Boat Club (near Te Awamutu) at 10am on February 1st. Contact Environment Waikato ph 0800 800 401.

Bay of Plenty

Fish and Game, Environment BOP, DoC and the NZ Landcare Trust have

a full day of action planned at Matua Saltmarsh. Activities include a guided walk, childrens hat making competition and several talks on wetland issues. The day begins at 10am at the Matua Estuary on 2 February. Contact Marie Long 07 357 5501.

Taranaki

Taranaki Regional Council, Fish and Game, DoC and the Ornithological Society are inviting people to come explore a wetland with them on February 2nd. The location is Lloyds Ponds (Omata Tank Farm) signposted on Beach Road, Omata. Contact Rusty Ritchie ph 06 765 7127.

Nelson/Marlborough

Tasman District Council and DoC have organised a guided fieldtrip to Mangarakau Swamp (West Coast, Golden Bay) on February 9th. Bus departs Tasman District Council, Richmond 8am, Motueka 8.40am and Takaka 10.15am. Returning to Richmond by 6.30pm. Registration essential. Contact Martin Workman (TDC) ph 03 544 3432.

Canterbury

Ngai Tahu, DoC and the Fish and Game Council have organised a bus trip to a peat wetland at Coalgate, Christchurch. Contact Rochelle Hardy ph 03 366 9191.

West Coast

Field trip to the mouth of the Mahitahi River. Local Kaumatua speaking of the cultural value of wetlands to iwi. Contact: Phillippe Gerbeaux, DOC ph 03 755 8301.

Wetland for sale

A beautiful and valuable wetland is up for sale in the Motueka catchment, Nelson region. The property is 20ha with 8-10ha of meadow and up to 8ha of wetland/stream which contains Giant Kokupu. A three bedroom cottage is also located on the site. Tasman District Council staff have viewed the site and consider it to be of considerable conservation value. Assistance with fencing and willow control is potentially available. Contact Fritz Horlemann of Haven Realty Ltd ph 03 548 0200.

Rob Smith, Tasman District Council

Wetland purchases

The NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust has just completed the purchase of the Pehitawa Reserve in the Waikato. It is a kahikatea wetland remnant and is the first of three wetlands they are involved in buying. The other two are open rush and raupo wetlands today, although one and maybe both, were once mature kahikatea forest. The 68 hectare property at Opoutama near Mahia is regionally significant and probably the best remaining on the East Coast. In the South Island at Mangarakau, south of Farewell Spit, is a 350 hectare wetland of national significance of which the Trust is buying half, with DoC already owning the balance. They have to raise \$300,000.00. Next month the full story of these purchases. Meantime you can send donations to:

NZ NFRT
PO Box 80 007
Green Bay
Auckland 1007

Geoff Davidson, NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE TRUST

To submit a contribution for the next newsletter please contact:

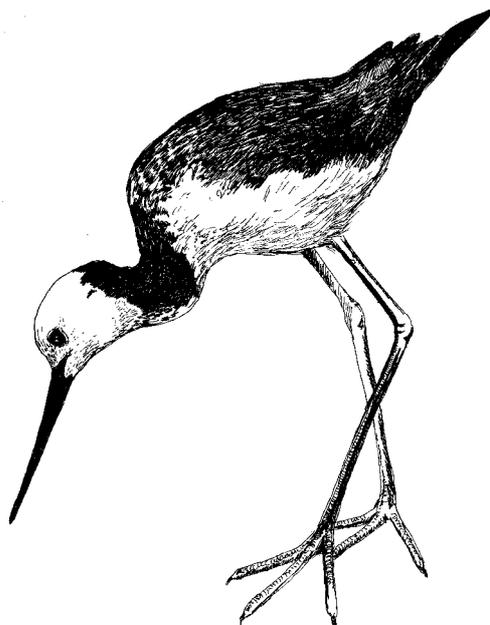
Paula Reeves

ph: 07 8561738

Email: p.reeves@niwa.cri.nz

Address: NIWA, PO Box 11-115, Hillcrest, HAMILTON.

All the wonderful images contained in the newsletter are by Sonia Frimmel. We thank Environment Waikato for making these images available to us.



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MEMBERSHIP FORM

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