

Wetlands you can visit in the Wellington Region

The Wellington Region at the base of the North Island lies on an active fault-zone, comprising an extensive valley nestled between two coastal ranges.

Its wetlands, some formed by earthquake activity uplifting former harbour or blocking stream valleys, include;

- Estuaries and saltmarsh
- Swamps
- Lakes and ponds
- Bogs

Estuaries (including salt marshes) are the most productive of all wetlands, and especially rich in animal life. Many coastal fisheries depend on estuaries as fish spawning grounds.

Most wetlands on private land are **swamps**. They are more fertile than bogs because the water flowing through them brings silt and organic matter. Swamp water levels fluctuate seasonally. Typical swamp plants include raupo, purei and harakeke (flax). The organic matter these plants produce encourages large populations of aquatic invertebrates including insects, water-snails, crustaceans and worms, and vertebrates like frogs and birds.

Lakes are permanent areas of fresh water. Open water areas with shallow margins surrounded by swamp vegetation provide important water fowl habitat. Of the significant

number of lakes in the Wellington region, the largest is Lake Wairarapa.

Bogs are rare in the Wellington region. Fed only by rainfall, they are low in fertility and are acidic. They are home to a variety of specialist plant life, with the wettest dominated by sphagnum moss. Drier bogs support a variety of plants including sedges, rushes, umbrella ferns and manuka.

Aside from the extensive Lake Wairarapa complex, only 3.5% of the natural wetlands in the region remain. Most of the region's and New Zealand's wetlands were drained between 1920 and 1980 for pastoral land use.

Most remaining freshwater wetland are now less than 10 hectares in extent, however they continue to support a range of native species including;

- Brown mudfish, recorded in wetlands of the Wairarapa.
- Other fish such as giant kokopu, short-jawed kokopu, banded kokopu, and koaro, recorded in some rivers of the Region.
- Blue duck found in only one catchment in Wellington.

Today Wellington has an estimated 10,160 ha of wetlands remaining. Over 7,000 ha is the water surface of Lake Wairarapa alone.

Some of the better known wetlands in the Region include:

- The Lake Wairarapa complex comprising shallow Lake Wairarapa, brackish Lake Onoke and their associated extensive wetlands.
- Pauatahanui estuary near Paekakariki
- Carter Scenic Reserve which preserves an ancient kahikatea (white pine) swamp forest



greater WELLINGTON
REGIONAL COUNCIL

The Wellington wetlands directory is sponsored by Greater Wellington (the Wellington Regional Council).

A number of agencies and care groups including are restoring wetlands in the Wellington Region.

Greater Wellington is helping community groups across the region restore wetlands at Makara Estuary, Waikanae Estuary and Waimeha Lagoon in Waikanae, Henley Lakes and Millennium Reserve in Masterton as well as assisting Forest and Bird with the restoration of Pauatahanui Inlet.

Many of the Regional Parks that GW manages also have spectacular examples of natural wetlands such as the Pencarrow Lakes in East Harbour Regional Park and the inter-dune wetlands at Queen Elizabeth Park.

Wellington wetlands that have been substantially restored or created include:

- Waikoko on Mana Island, a predator-free haven for the rare gold-striped gecko, brown teal and fernbird
- Pauatahanui Inlet with visitor facilities and other projects undertaken by Forest and Bird Society with help from the local council and community
- Waikanae Estuary is being restored by a local group

Wellington Wetland Agencies

Wellington Regional Council
www.gw.govt.nz
04 384 5708

Department of Conservation
www.doc.govt.nz











Fish and Game New Zealand
www.fishandgame.org.nz
(04) 477 6118

Please visit our wetlands safely and responsibly

- Please - no dogs, hunting, or fires unless specifically permitted
- Prevent the spread of pests and diseases, wash and dry fishing, wading, and boating equipment between waterways
- Fishing in freshwater bodies requires a permit (contact Fish and Game NZ)
- Do not release any fish, reptiles, or plants in a waterbody.
- Keep to marked tracks
- Be aware of hunting seasons (usually May and June)













Wetlands to visit in the Wellington Region, New Zealand

1Name / type	Description/ special features	Activities ²					Facilities					Access, further information
		 Walks	 Birdlife	 Boating	 Fishing / shooting	 Highly scenic	 Info centre	 Interp. panels	 Lookout/ bird hide	 Picnic area	 Accom.	
Keith Taylor Wetland Water reservoir (0.3 ha) ★★★★★	Karori Sanctuary is a pest-free reserve in central Wellington. It includes a water reservoir with a restored shallow wetland margin used by the rare brown teal, shags, scaup and fish. Entrance fee (not-for-profit Trust).	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓		www.sanctuary.org.nz/ Short drive or bus ride from central Wellington. Access the Visitor Centre at the end of Waiapu Road.
Lake Wairarapa (Wairarapa Moana) Lake, turf, reedland (10,000 ha) ★★★★★	Lake Onoke, Lake Wairarapa and their wetlands form the largest wetland system in the lower North Island. Important habitat > 100 bird species, large numbers of migratory species and resident waterfowl and fish, including several threatened species. Significant turf plant community.	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		www.doc.govt.nz/conservation/land-and-freshwater/wetlands/wetlands-by-region/wellington/lake-wairarapa-wetlands/ Lake Wairarapa wetlands are large, with access points- see website above for options. To get to Lake Domain, turn off State Highway 2 at the start of Featherston onto the Featherston-Martinborough Road (SH53), right onto Murphy's Line and right onto Lake Domain Road.	

¹ ★★★★★ Must see ★★★★ Worth a special visit ★★★ Worth a short detour ★★ Plan to visit if passing ★ Short stop if passing

² Note that game bird shooting and fishing for trout requires a permit from Fish and Game NZ











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Nga Manu Nature Reserve Forest and wetland complex (13 ha) ★ ★ ★ ★	Largest single remaining remnant of original coastal lowland swamp forest on the Kapiti Coast, with plenty of mature kahikatea, swamp maire and pukatea trees. Native bird aviaries, eel feeding. Lookout tower.	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		www.ngamanu.co.nz/ Access off Ngarara Road, Waikanae. Follow the signpost from State Highway 1 at Waikanae. About 50 minutes drive north of Wellington. Entrance fee applies (not-for-profit Trust).
Waikoko Wetland (Mana Island) Lowland freshwater wetland (217-ha island) ★ ★ ★ ★	Scientific Reserve 2.5 km from the mainland. Waikoko wetland was restored to provide habitat for North Island fernbird, brown mudfish and a range of threatened plants.	✓	✓			✓						www.manaisland.org.nz/ Visitors are welcome to Mana Island. Access may be made only in the bay between the old woolshed and the wharf. Boats must remain offshore after visitors have landed. 'Friends of Mana Island' sometimes run day excursions with a guided tour of the island.
Pauatahanui Inlet Restored estuary (>4000 ha) ★ ★ ★ ★	The largest and least modified estuarine area in the southern North Island and the only large area of salt-marsh and seagrass in the Wellington Region. Forest & Bird Society has created a series of shallow ponds, tracks, and hides, planted native species, and established a visitor centre.	✓	✓				✓		✓			www.forestandbird.org.nz/what-we-do/reserves/pauatahanui 30 km north of Wellington. Public access to the Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Reserve is at #5 Paekakariki Hill Road at Pauatahanui village from State Highway 58.





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Pencarrow Lakes, East Harbour Regional Park Freshwater lakes ★ ★ ★ ★	Kohangapiripiri and Kohangatera Lakes are across the harbour from Wellington airport. This is one of the largest and least modified lowland wetland complexes in the lower North Island. Home to bittern, spotless crane and rare plants e.g. <i>Lepilaena bilocularis</i> , <i>Ruppia polycarpa</i> . The margins were fenced in 2004.	✓	✓			✓						www.gw.govt.nz/section400.cfm East Harbour Regional Park. The Pencarrow Lakes can be reached via a two hour walk or 25 minute cycle ride along the flat coastal road from the large Burdens Gate Car park at the end of Muratai Road, Eastbourne. Greater Wellington often takes bus tours to Pencarrow Lakes as part of their Regional Outdoors Programme over summer (check Greater Wellington's website for details). Bike hire is available during weekends and over summer. Ring Burdan's Gate Bike Hire, tel 04 566-2585.
Carter Scenic Reserve Freshwater swamp and semi-swamp forest (30 ha) ★ ★ ★	Situated on two old river terraces this complex of grass, wetland, forest and shrubland was once typical of the Wairarapa. Contains rare brown mud fish. Rare plants including the shrub <i>Coprosma pedicellata</i> are being reintroduced. Short walks (20-30 min)	✓										www.doc.govt.nz/templates/page.aspx?id=33720 From Carterton follow Park Road to the end, turn left into Carters Line and right into Gladstone Road to Carter Scenic Reserve. Reserve approx 3 km along Gladstone Road. The car park is about 500 metres along the driveway.











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Fensham Reserve Swamp forest and sedgeland (3 ha) ★ ★ ★	This 50 ha reserve contains one of the few remaining lowland swamp forests on the Wairarapa Plains. The 1 hour loop track passes through kahikatea and swamp maire forest.	✓							✓		www.forestandbird.org.nz/what-we-do/reserves/fensham-reserve <i>Belvedere & Cobham Roads, 3 kms West of Carterton</i>	
Taupo swamp Flaxland (30 ha) ★ ★ ★	Former inlet of Porirua Harbour, raised by earthquakes. Planted with varieties of flax in the 1880s. Now one of the largest wetlands in the region. Rare plants found in the swamp. Taupo Stream is habitat for native fish, including giant kokopu.	✓ and cycle track	✓			✓					www.openspace.org.nz/Site/Places_to_visit/North_Island_public/Taupo_Swamp.aspx <i>Visible from SH1 North of Plimmerton (about 26km north of Wellington). Parking available.</i>	

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Waikanae Estuary Freshwater lake and saltwater lagoon (27 ha) ★★★	Freshwater lakelets, saltwater lagoons, tidal flats and salt marsh surrounded by dunes at the mouth of the Waikanae River. Significant habitat for waders, seabirds and waterfowl (> 60 species breed here). Banded dotterel, caspian tern, wrybill, dabchick, variable oystercatcher and spoonbill present. A local restoration project is underway.	✓	✓		✓						www.doc.govt.nz/conservation/land-and-freshwater/wetlands/wetlands-by-region/wellington/waikanae-estuary/ www.gw.govt.nz/story6300.cfm? Beware of quick sand in this area! <i>The mouth of the Waikanae River splits the Kapiti Coast townships of Waikanae and Paraparaumu. The main entrance to the Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve is on Manly St North, Paraparaumu Beach.</i>	
Waitangi Park Freshwater reservoir (<1 ha) ★★★	Small constructed urban wetland / stormwater filter. A great example of coastal dryland and coastal wetland ecosystems in an inner city setting and an example of how wetlands can be used in Low Impact Urban Design to mitigate the effects of storm water.	✓									www.wellingtonwaterfront.co.nz/development/waitangi/waitangi_park_introduction/area_one/environmentally_friendly_wetland/index.htm www.rcaforum.org.nz/waitangi-park-wellington/ <i>Wellington Waterfront, near Te Papa Museum and Chafers Marina. Between Cable, Chaffers and Herd Sts and Oriental Parade.</i>	

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Gretel Lagoon Created wetland ★ ★	Privately owned wetland restored over the last 20 years. Open to visitors by appointment on most days of the week. Owners raise pateke (brown teal) for release into the wild, and the rare ducks can be viewed in aviaries. Part of larger Taumata Lagoon, an oxbow lake.	✓	✓					✓			www.ducks.org.nz/wetlands_home.html Open by appointment only. Contact Neil: haltld@actrix.co.nz	
Makara Estuary Estuary ★ ★	The estuary at the mouth of Makara Stream on Wellington's rugged west coast is one of the few remaining salt marsh areas in the region. Habitat for a range of coastal and wetland bird species including occasional white heron. Locals are restoring the estuary and undertake regular beach clean-ups.	✓	✓								www.gw.govt.nz/story20601.cfm 25 km from downtown Wellington. Head past the Botanical Gardens to Karori West, from the end of Karori Rd, turn into Makara Road and head west to Makara Beach. The estuary is visible from Estuary St or Makara Beach.	

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Pateke Lagoons Dune lake and wetland (20 ha) ★ ★	Privately owned wetland in sand dune country being restored by its owners, as a waterfowl refuge. Open to lodge guests only.		✓								✓	www.ngamanu.co.nz/ 152 Te Hapua Rd, Otaki, Kapiti Coast, about 70 km north of Wellington, 1 hour by car on Highway 1. The nearest town is Waikanae (7 km south).
Waimeha Reserve Lowland freshwater wetland (9 ha) ★ ★	Waimeha Reserve is surrounded by houses and is no longer regularly flooded by the Waikanae River. Nonetheless, it is a picturesque and relatively diverse lowland / coastal swamp with large areas of raupo, sedgeland, toetoe and a small lagoon. A local community group maintains the wetland.	✓	✓									www.gw.govt.nz/story6005.cfm Waimeha Reserve is in Waikanae, on the Kapiti Coast (about 50 minutes drive north of Wellington). Best entrance to the reserve is on Queens Road, Waikanae Beach