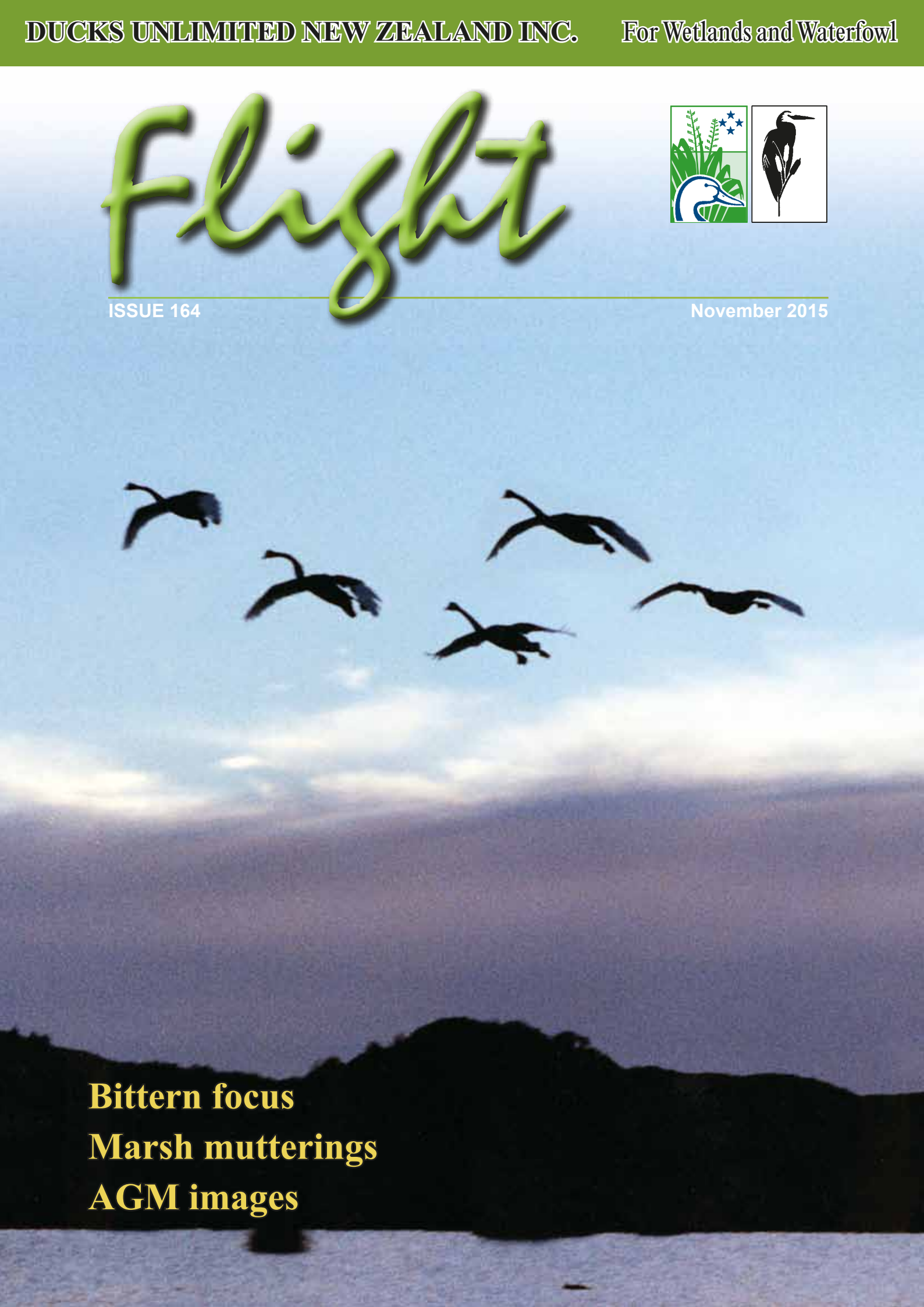
DUCKS UNLIMITED NEW ZEALAND INC. For Wetlands and Waterfowl

flight

ISSUE 164 November 2015



Bittern focus
Marsh mutterings
AGM images

from the PRESIDENT

Firstly a big thank you to the organisers of a most successful AGM in Palmerston North. It is always great to catch up with friends again from the wetland and waterfowl fraternity and without your ongoing support Ducks Unlimited would not survive.

The bus trip to Michael Burke's property to view his magnificent man made wetland complex was appreciated by all. Emma Williams Sunday morning talk on her bittern (matuku) study at Lake Whatuma, Central Hawke's Bay and her excellent rendition of a male bittern booming was appreciated by those present. Ducks Unlimited and Wetland Care NZ are major sponsors of the bittern project and once again show that we are leaders in threatened bird species conservation in New Zealand having previously initiated action with pateke and whio.

It has been a relatively dry winter in most regions which delayed the onset of breeding for many species of waterfowl, but heavy rain in late September-early October spurred things along. The shallow ephemeral wetlands topped up at this time of the year are so important for waterfowl and other species like eels. Only one morning recently, with assistance from two young grandsons, I emptied 181 small live eels from two fyke nets set overnight in water 0.3 metres deep on the edge of Lake Whatuma which highlights just how productive ecologically these shallow wetlands are.

Just as well we have organisations like DU championing the importance of these areas.

John Cheyne

New members

A very warm welcome to our organisation to:

James Mackie from Waipukurau.

Judy Carmichael from Matakana.

From the Editor

I have asked before and now here I am asking again. No matter in what part of these islands you reside, if you have an interesting photo or a good story (short or long), please send to me.

Email if you are can and attaché a jpg of your favourite dog, or water fowl, or simply write an old fashioned letter and enclose a photo. Names are always useful for captions, and you can find both my email and my snail mail address at the bottom of this page. Ed.

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Board of Directors

Cover photo: Swans fly before the storm

Photo: Ron Wilkens

Decoys

A trick of the eye at the Bourke wetlands.

See pages 8 & 9.

The Swans

Early morning, Ngawhakangutu (Te Hapua) Wetlands

The story of the cover photo taken by Ron Wilkins.

The wetlands by default are called "Te Hapua Wetlands" as they are adjacent to Te Hapua road, part of a small farm close to SH1 that was so named and due to the road being on part of it.

However the early maps by Carkeek show the Wetland area as Ngawhakangutu, this name has recently been put to a reserve at Raukawa Road

Dead ferret

See more on page 14.

And pick up a trick or two.

Risk taker

An Australasian bittern away from cover.

See pages 4, 10 & 11.

Peka Peka, the map also shows the "Te Hapua" area.

Ron, the photographer, who captured this shot quite some time ago is a hunting friend of Ian Jensen's and his late father. He has a house at Parapara, on the peninsular between the Parapara inlet and Golden Bay. He has it on the market, he is now 80 and did shoot with Ian and Ron again on opening weekend this year in between his 'busy international schedule'. He has only missed three openings since 1979. His mother who lived in Levin passed away very recently in her 106th year.

Ron's father may well be shooting with them again next year.

wetland care
NEWZEALAND

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.

Australasian bittern/matuku

The endangered Australasian bittern (Botaurus poiciloptilus), is elusive and little known. Like many of New Zealand's birds, bitterns were once abundant. Today less than 900 individuals remain and it is uncommon to see more than one at a time.

Bitterns are found throughout New Zealand - in the North Island they predominantly inhabit Northland, Waikato and East Coast wetlands; while in the South Island they mostly inhabit West Coast, Canterbury and Southland wetlands. The most important bittern site nationally is Whangamarino Wetland, a large and diverse wetland complex in the Waikato.

Bitterns are large, stocky birds, with streaky dark brown and beige plumage on their throat, breast, abdomen and thighs; and dark brown on the neck and back. The head is dark except for pale beige around the cheek, forming a pale eyebrow. Plumage can vary significantly and may be age related.

Bitterns are rarely sighted due to their exceptionally cryptic behaviour, inconspicuous plumage resulting in excellent camouflage and the inaccessibility of many wetlands. They are mostly active at dawn, dusk and throughout the night.

Bitterns are occasionally spotted in the open along wetland edges, drains, flooded farmland and roadsides. They are very sensitive to disturbance and will silently creep away to avoid detection, or adopt the infamous 'freeze' stance (with the bill pointing skyward) if approached. This allows bitterns to blend into many environments, whilst maintaining a close watch of surroundings. If an observer continues to advance on a bittern, then it will eventually take flight in a laborious manner.

Often the only sign of bittern presence in a wetland is the male's distinctive booming call

Australasian bittern.

Photo: Steve Playle.

at the beginning of the breeding season. Each call sequence may consist of 1-10 individual booms, with an average of 3 booms. Boom sequences are repeated at regular intervals, and normally preceded with inhalations or gasps. Females are mostly silent, apart from producing an occasional 'bubbling' sound upon return to the nest, or a nasal 'kau' when alarmed. Bitterns in flight may produce a resonant 'kau' or 'kau kau'.

The breeding season is extremely long, spread over a 10-month period. Females construct a reed platform nest amongst dense vegetation deep within wetlands. A clutch of 3-6 eggs is produced between August and December (peaking in November), and then incubated solely by the female for 25 days. Chicks remain in the nest for 7 weeks and fledge from November to May.

Bitterns are considered an indicator of wetland health, as they are dependent on the presence of high quality and ecologically diverse habitats, which are rich in food supplies (such as eels, fish, freshwater crayfish, aquatic insects, molluscs, worms, spiders, frogs and lizards).

Bittern numbers have declined drastically since the arrival of European settlers, with over 90 percent of freshwater wetlands now drained and cleared. Ongoing wetland degradation continues to be the chief threat, resulting in habitat modification and loss, reduced food availability and poor water quality. Other threats contributing to bittern declines include predation by introduced mammals (particularly cats, rats, dogs and mustelids), human disturbance of nesting bitterns, as well as power-line and vehicle collisions.

You can help bitterns by becoming involved in wetland conservation and reporting all sightings (or calls) to your local Department of Conservation office. Most importantly you can protect wetlands on your property by planting native vegitation to create riparian buffers and fencing waterways from livestock.

Sabrina Luecht

Wildlife Project Administrator

(supplied by The Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust)

Blue Rock shoot at Martinborough

In association with DUNZ the Blue Rock Gun Club shoot took place in early October with 59 shooters taking part. Paul Hallett won top prize.

Top shot: Paul Hallett with his trophy.(right)

Sorting ammo: Ashton Tannant. "Does a power of work for the club." (left|)

Ready steady: Lined up and ready to shoot. (bottom right)

Trigger ready: Waiting for the signal. (bottom left)

Photos: Donna Campbell.

Habitat te Henga

Mutterings from the Marsh

Nearly nine months since the release date on January 22, and things are looking good for the first trial cohort of 20 pateke at Habitat te Henga.

Although rarely seen, their radio transmitters give the show away and let us know they have tended to take up residence in separate parts of the wetland. Many are clustered within a few hundred metres of the release site, while others have shunned their companions and are contentedly at the extremes of the wetland, west or east.

Required by the Pateke Recovery group to monitor the birds intensively for the fist six months, but only at monthly intervals beyond, we have been able to have volunteers maintain a weekly survey. With spring upon us and with certain pairs sticking close to each other we hope the more frequent monitoring will give us an indication if nesting is occurring.

Another more sombre reason though is that if a mortality signal is generated, we might be aware sooner and be able to recover a body to possibly determine cause of death. Three times we have had the mortality tone, and two carcasses were found while in the third case the transmitter was accurately tracked to almost 2-metre deep water. Was this a death or a case of harness failure? With that possibility and with an analysis of one carcass that showed no signs of predation but rather a tarsus fracture indicating a probable duck vs. vehicle incident, we have been fairly pleased with our predator control measures.

With no mortality tones in almost five months the population of 16 remaining birds seems nicely stable. But hang on you say, 16 plus three is 19 –what about the 20th? Well you might ask, as pateke channel 54 disappeared after five days and its signal could not be detected near or far at any of three local water reservoirs or along the extensive west coast beaches. Until it returned after 154 days! The prodigal's return was welcomed but she obviously had other ideas and went again after a couple of weeks.

No signal: Transmitter detected, let it lie!

Todd in kayak: Monitoring on the wild west coast.

Maintaining predator control has been a large group of volunteers who check traps- some on their own properties, others checking traps on private or public land. Almost half of the traps though, are tended by our contractor who walks two 12 -14 km trap lines on a regular two weekly schedule. This large number of traps has allowed us to conduct an experiment which is ongoing.Alternate traps are baited with salted rabbit meat or a commercial dried rabbit product. The Statistics Department of Auckland University is analysing the results and by next year will be able to tell us if one is more efficient a lure than the other.

A contentious topic recently, but one I've been promoting is the use of UAV not for the casual model aircraft enthusiast, but as a genuine conservation tool. Chancing upon a local UAV manufacturer I was able to get him to look into using a UAV [drone] as an aerial radio receiver. Drones with cameras used for conservation purposes are commonplace but the use of a drone to be able to track multiple radio frequencies could be a first and for a secretive species such as pateke [or kiwi] might greatly enhance monitoring. Test flights have taken place and for an idea of what the UAV looks like, a short video is on the facebook.com/habitattehenga site.

Other activities include a recent extensive survey of fernbird at three sites comparing the Forest & Bird reserve where predator control has been maintained for 15 years to two new sites only trapped over the past 18 months. This will give baseline date to use when we are able to add rodent control to some of the new sites. Spotless crake were to come in for a similar survey using sound playback in early October. Meanwhile bittern are being seen more and more frequently. Nice to think it is due to our pest management, but it's as likely to be due to more observations by interested persons. As with most conservation though, the hardest task is fundraising and a second translocation next year is dependant on successful applications. I'll tell you how that went in a future update.

John Summich.

Obituary

Ambrose Aquila (Andy) Gurney had a great send off

Died July 28 2015, aged 85. DUNZ Life member.

It was a memorable occasion and Andy got the send off he deserved. Close to 40 attended.

The Celebrant was outstanding. I followed and with a long list of people who had sent their condolences and commented about his tireless contribution to everything he took part in.

I also paid tribute to the incredible support Andy had received from - Joan, Duncan and Barry Silvester.

Allan Wilde read a delightful poem on Andy's duck shooting exploits.

There were some impressive photos of Andy in the foyer and his coffin was draped in a camo net, with a pair of his boots and a pair of mallard decoys.

John Blatchford informed us of this:

Ambrose - A male name: from a Greek word meaning "Immortal". **Aquila** - Latin, meaning "Eagle"

Andy Gurney

So, Andy was – **Immortal Eagle** – We think he would have been proud of that.

Neil Hayes

Andy lived in Featherston and was a life member of DUNZ.

Through his friends, Joan and Duncan Smith, Andy arranged for five duck prints he had accumulated over the years to be donated to DU to be auctioned at this year's conference, with the proceeds going to wetland restoration. Jim Campbell collected the prints and they were duly auctioned.

PS. Duncan mentioned that Andy has an Argo 8*8 that his executors will want to sell. Again, Duncan would be the person to contact. I also have a few details.

Jim Law.

An OkPinion
The best way

If we really must pinion birds, and there are often very good reasons for doing so, let's consider doing this by a less invasive and somewhat pleasanter method – namely by the use of nitrogen.

Nitrogen (N) a colourless, odourless, tasteless gaseous element – melting point – 209.90C boiling point – 195.8C can be bought from outlets such as BOC (British Oxygen) and Air Liquid throughout NZ. (See contacts below).

The liquid boils off rapidly as a gas, into the atmosphere – therefore it must be kept as cold as possible at all times. A quality thermos flask is essential to obtain the nitrogen with, from the supplier. Keep it out of sunlight, away from any heating sources preferably low down in a fridge – or better still in a freezer. When travelling with it, you simply can't have enough insulation around.

Nitrogen is frequently used by medical practitioners to control or eliminate various undesirable skin developments such as warts.

It's extremely low temperature when liquefied has a burning effect and thus kills off such growths very efficiently.

Pain levels from this treatment are stinging but easily bearable. An improvement on surgery (sometimes butchery?).

Application should be by means of a long shafted cotton bud capable of reaching deep into the flask. GPs nowadays normally use a sophisticated and expensive application gun.

Nice if you can afford it!

Step one: Remove almost all the length of the shafts of a few of the outer primary feathers – one wing only, of course. (Yes – it has happened!) Cut the shaft down to just above the blood line.

Step Two: Kill off the "roots" of the feather by applying the liquid nitrogen liberally. You may have to repeat the procedure once of twice, taking it lower each time.

Younger birds tend to give easier and better results, so if possible pinion them sooner rather than later – but with this method it is never totally too late.

Killing off the base of a few feathers to prevent any re-growth is in my book much better done by this method rather than by invasive (minor as it may be) surgical methods affecting the carpels and risking infection and possibly attracting predation.

Alan Fielding

BOC New Zealand
988 Great South Road,
Penrose, Auckland, New Zealand.
Ph:0800 111 333.
Fax:0800 229 923.

Air Liquide New Zealand Limited
19 Maurice Road, Penrose, Auckland 1061.
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Fax: +64-9-622 3882
Website: http://www.airliquide.com

Clean and green the aim

For members who receive the NZ Farmer rural newspaper each week, you might remember the issue of October 12.

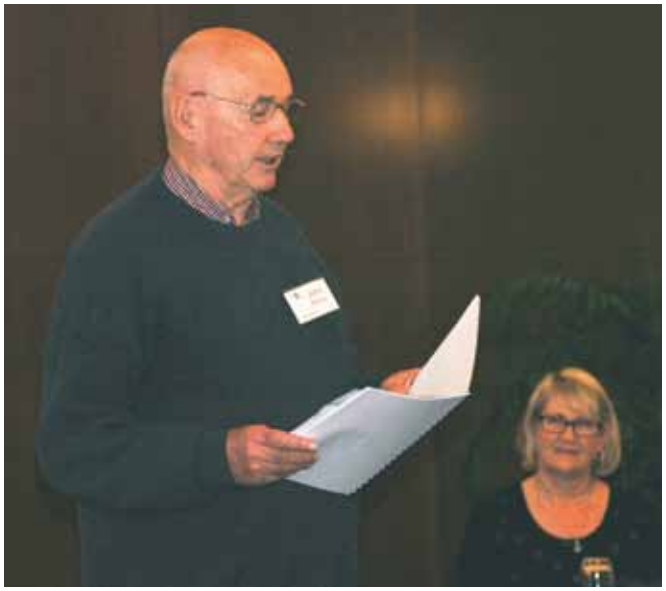
The centre spread has an article about working to clean up streams, and one of our members – Ossie Latham – is a driving force behind that initiative. Landcare Trust regional co-ordinator in the Manawatu, Alastair Cole regards Ossie as a community champion for the effort he has put in over the past few years to encourage other landowners to help clean up the streams and the rivers.

Trees have been planted, and streams fenced off, locals (not only farmers, also lifestylers) have embraced the clean streams idea, and a local school has taken on the idea as a continuing project.

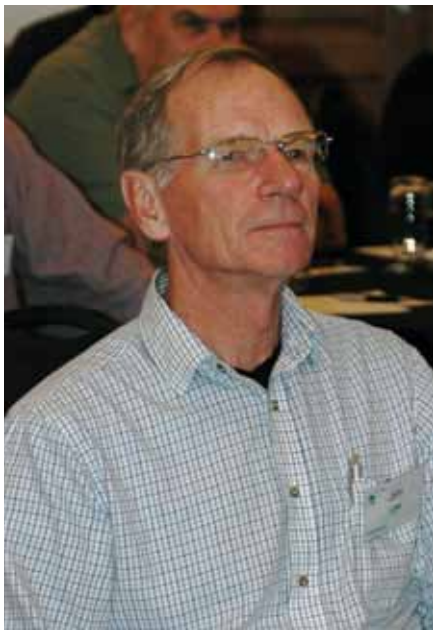
Most farmers are enthusiastic about the project and one said he hopes it won't be long before fish are seen again and the birdlife flourishes.

DU members with a squirrel nature may have older Flight magazines tucked in a cupboard. In Flight 195, April 2014, page 5, you will find a story about Ossie, and the beginning of this initiative.

Getting the lowdown on DUNZ



Treasurer: John Bishop keeper of the accounts gives members an update on finances.



Wairio guardian: Jim Law gives an account of happenings in and around Wairio Wetland – Southern Wairarapa.

Nancy Payne: DUNZ oldest member, she well deserves the flowers. From an early age Nancy has been interested in wetlands and water birds.

Emma explains: Emma Williams provided an interesting insight into the problems and the excitement of keeping track of our endangered bitterns. (Read more on page 10-11).

Drama on Bourke wetland walk

Hot pursuit: A mute swan provided an exciting pursuit at great speed, as it chased a black swan from a nesting site. Blackie turns to go back, but Whitie will have none of that, and increases the pace. Finally the black swan gives up and goes away.

This way: Mike Bourke tells the visitors a bit about his wetlands, and then points the way.

On track: Robyn and Robin Borthwick set our around the first lake. John Dermer in the background.

Good exercise: Diny Dermer and Jim Campbell follow the path around the first lake.

Camera talk: Brian Simmons and Ian Jensen discuss the various photographs so far.

Ancient log: History in an old log that looked as if it may be a totara, seemingly run aground!! But not so - the old rimu log came from a neighbour's place where Mike was doing a job. Mike placed it there as a rest for the birds, and he told Ian Jensen the ducks like to sit on it.

Hot soup hits the spot

Apiti Tavern lunch: Hot soup, fresh scones, hot and cold drinks, and convivial company on the way back to Palmerston North after the interesting look around Mike Bourke's wetlands.

Spring surprise: (above) Diane Pritt, Co-patron of DU, presents Clare Worth with a container of miniature spring bulbs at the DUNZ Conference dinner. Clare, wife of Jack Worth the original director and driving force behind the conception of DUNZ. Their son Craig was also a DU President.

What is that?: A strange object held aloft by William Abel while first time auctioneer Alex Stewart cajoles members for higher bids..

Auction win: William Abel hands a very smart hunting knife to Treena Rice after she did some determined biding.

Among the first: from left - Di Pritt, Jim Campbell, Ian Pirani, Dawn Pirani, and Paul Pirani. I hesitate to call them "old timers".

It's not all boom and gloom: autumn dispersal of bitterns revealed

Trackers: Emma and Kimi look for bittern where they should be.

Photo: Colin O'Donnell.

The fallen leaves crunch below our feet as Kimi, my canine sidekick and I approach the top of yet another hill.

It's autumn and we're hunting for Australasian bitterns – but not in the thick raupō or out in the shallow waters along wetland edges as you would expect.

No, we're on farmland - the last place you would think to look for an endangered bird that is rarer than the kokako.

Yet this is where my telemetry gear tells me we need to go. A loud beep pulses out from the little box that hangs from my neck, and I know from the frequency that Prince Tui Teka is close.

It is hard to imagine Prince in this environment. His streaky dark-brown and beige plumage contrasts markedly against this sea of emerald green - so that instead of blending perfectly into the raupō, as he does in his breeding territory at Lake Whatumā, he stands out like a gangly teenager with stage fright - or worse, a possum in the headlights.

We have long suspected that bitterns forage in farmland drains and small spring fed creeks. After all, this is where members of the public report seeing them. Yet bitterns are also easier to spot in these environments, and the habitat is far removed from what the species is reported to like. This is why these sightings have always seemed like fortuitous interactions rather than something of the norm.

The same can be said for bitterns leaving Lake Whatumā. We always thought it was possible, but somewhat unlikely. In the 1980s, a few bitterns carrying transmitters at Whangamarino wetland in the Waikato left their breeding site and were never re-found. Yet other bitterns marked in the same study were known to remain within the area. There are multiple reasons why we might lose the signal of a transmitter carried by a bittern and not all reasons relate to the bird leaving the area. For one, the thick raupō they live in has a high water content, and therefore dampens the radio-signals emitted by our transmitters. So if one has no idea where a bird has gone, and there's a chance it is in thick raupō, thorough searches of the area are needed to be sure it has left.

So when the signals of all six of my marked bitterns suddenly disappeared in late December, and thorough searches at Lake Whatumā revealed nothing, I have to admit that I was a little surprised. One or two birds leaving the lake was expected, all of them leaving was not. At the same time it was also logical.

The departure of these birds coincided with a dramatic drop in water levels at Lake Whatumā. For most wetland birds this was a god-send – fish and other small prey items become concentrated in the centre of the lake where several wading birds, like pied stilts, congregate to feed in large numbers. But this is not good for bitterns. Of all the species in the heron family, bitterns are known to be the least behaviourally adaptable. They like what they like and that's it. They're not one of those gregarious flighty species that can opportunistically flit between people's gardens, like the silver-eye. And they are not interested in probing around with yappy pied stilts. They'd much rather stalk and stab their food in peace - preferably somewhere that there's cover and low water levels. If they can't do that, they leave.

So they left.

Initially it took us a little while to track them down. Kimi and I spent a lot of time out on the top of hills where it's easier to get a signal. This is because the angle means there's less vegetation between us and the bird. I met a lot of farmers and landowners during these quests. Some landowners already knew what a bittern was because they'd flushed them from time to time, and others had no idea - but everyone was equally excited to learn that they have the rarest bittern in the world living on their land. I was overwhelmed by the response of these locals and the appreciation they have of their land and their environment.

Yet finding my birds in these areas also troubled me. Sometimes I would find my bitterns foraging happily on gambusia soup or an army

Continued Page 11

High Tech: Trelise Durham-Hunt helps look for bitterns at Lake Purimu.

Photo: Emma Williams.

of frogs with lots of cover around them. But more often than not I'd find them wandering along a deep drain looking lost and dispirited. There will have been a time when this happened with brown kiwi. When they were still on peoples doorsteps, being seen by locals who loved and adored them. Yet their habitat was still in decline. They were visible not because they were plentiful, but because they couldn't find what they needed, and were out and about looking for it…and then one day they were gone.

I believe we're at this unique position with bitterns. The birds are still around but don't have everything they need for the population to increase. This is a concern because there will be multiple factors driving the decline of bitterns and many of these factors are still poorly understood. The longer a species remains endangered the harder it is to reverse the decline. If you need any more evidence to convince you of this, you only have to look at how intensive (and expensive) the kakapo recovery program is – a species that is currently only one threat classification rarer than bitterns.

The signal emitted from the transmitter carried by Prince Tui Teka gets stronger and suddenly he flies up out of a tiny raupō patch at the edge of a stream. I know that he saw us long before we saw him. As soon as we came over the brow of the hill he will have been tracking us – just as we were tracking him. He will have been standing in the raupō with his beak pointing towards the sky and only his eyes moving as he watched us across the paddock. He will have seen us pause several times to visually scan the raupō patch. The same patch he was hiding in. Who knows he may have seen us look right at him. Yet until this moment we had not spotted him, and even if we had his plumage makes him look exactly like all of the other raupō stems in the same patch.

He has only flushed now because he knows the game is up. Thanks to the transmitter he carries his camouflage no longer prevents us from re-finding him. I watch him land further down the stream before placing my boot in the water where he was previously standing – the stream is shallow and several small fish and amphibians dart away from me and disappear into the aquatic vegetation. This is one of the better places I've found him. There is some cover for him so that he can hide while he forages and the water is clear and shallow enough for him to see his prey. I leave him in peace and head off to find the landowner and congratulate them on this discovery. It's not all boom and gloom – this landowner likes bitterns and has already said he will not remove any of the habitat Prince uses. I still suspect Prince doesn't have everything he needs but at least this site is better than the empty drain he was wandering along last week.

Upon returning to my van on the top of the hill I have a quick listen for the bittern Tama Tomoana with my tracking gear. Members of the local hapu named this bittern after one of the grandsons of Henare Tomoana, a prominent Māori leader in the Hawke's Bay region in the late 1800s. Tama's father, Paraire Tomoana, composed a number of well known waiata including 'Pō Karekare Ana'. Tama himself was renowned for his rich baritone booming voice – just like our Tama. (And the leadership and musical genes were passed on to Tama's son, Ngahiwi,

Exposed: Prince in a less than optimal habitat.

Photo: John Cheyne.

Dramatic decrease: Water level drops at Lake Whatuma.

Photo: Emma Williams.

who currently chairs Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Inc.). Yet it's been a while since we've heard anything from Tama the bird.

Tama has been missing for seven months now. During the breeding season he was one of our most site-loyal birds and he was regularly found booming within a small area of less than 2 hectares in size - basically one small raupō patch. This was in contrast to some of the other bitterns, like Barry White, who boomed from lots of locations within a 15 hectare area.

This previous site-loyalty left us extra surprised when Tama disappeared and then could not be found. By now all of the other bitterns were accounted for – even Bing Crosby, who had originally flummoxed us last year by disappearing mid-way through the bittern breeding season. In late January we happily rediscovered Bing at Wanstead swamp, a site that's about 15 kms from his breeding site. Of all of our wandering bittern, Bing was found the farthest from home. We looked for Tama in all of these areas too and nothing was heard.

Colleagues in Australia had recently attached a satellite transmitter to a juvenile male bittern and found that this bird moved farther than 550 kms after breeding had finished, crossing two state borders. Clearly our bitterns could physically move long distances if they want to - this got us thinking that perhaps Tama has done something similar? Five months after he went missing we decided we needed to broaden our search, so we put out a national plea asking anyone with access to telemetry gear to check their wetlands and listen for his signal. People looked for him at wetlands across the country - from Northland down to Waituna lagoon in Southland. His signal was still not found.

In June, all five of our autumn wanderers came back to Lake Whatumā. We waited with baited breath to see if Tama would also return - but his signal remained silent. By July 28, local landowner Max Lyver reported hearing the first bittern boom on the lake. The breeding season had begun, but still Tama was missing. We'd given up hope. Then on August 12, eight months after he'd left the lake, and over one month later than all the other marked male bitterns, Tama's signal was once again heard beeping from his usual breeding territory. He was back and booming again. Where he went we will never know. He clearly still has a story to tell. This year we hope to recapture him so that we can replace his radio transmitter with a satellite transmitter - kindly donated by Ducks Unlimited, NZ. This will allow us to track him regardless of where he goes, meaning we will be able to get a complete story of his autumn adventures next year.

To me, Tama's return to Lake Whatumā highlights just how much we've learned about the habits and behaviours of these birds over the 12 months they have been carrying transmitters – and yet how many mysteries still remain.

Without Ducks Unlimited, NZ's continued financial support of this project we would not have been able to unlock these bittern secrets. Knowledge gained by this project is being used to help inform bittern conservation projects nationally.

Emma Williams

Volunteers by the score

A great number of volunteers were involved in native plantings at Tawharanui Open Sanctuary this last winter season.

Working on quite a steep slope, there were around 92 volunteers with 4000 plants to go in. It took just under three and a half hours to complete.

Afterwards the traditional bbq lunch that follows is really worth waiting for!

In the photos the wider view shows earlier plantings on the right, from the past two years.

The plantings in the brown (hopefully dead) Kikuyu grass on the left have all been done in the four planting days this last season.

All up it adds up to 20,000 plants for the year.

At Tawharanui the policy is to plant out the steep sidings so there are plenty more still to be done!

All seed is sourced from the local bush there and propagated in the Tawharanui Nursery where each week volunteers attend to the seedlings.

They do a grand job and really enjoy their potting days - especially the morning teas!

Patte Williams.

Infill planting

Our planting photos often do not have much green in them because we are planting where there has been Kikuyu and it has to be sprayed out first. Infill planting in a wetland that has more colour.

Alison Stanes.

Pitching in: Auckland Council Ranger Maurice Puckett plants with volunteers

Planting detail: Volunteers enhancing a hill side at Tawharanui.

The long view: Planting in progress.

Photos: Patte Williams & Alison Stains.

Happy volunteers: Mel Wilson and Maggie Cornish putting rabbit protection around plants.

Pateke flourish, Cape Sanctuary

In February, Havelock North scouts, volunteers and staff spread far and wide, both inside and outside the sanctuary to count patake for the Annual Flock count. Thirtythree dams were visited within the sanctuary and 134 pateke counted (although there were a number of dams and areas such as Rangaiika and Porpoise Gully not visited on the day). Many of the dams we checked are also known to have pateke but birds weren't seen. If these 'known' pateke are optimistically added to the count it makes approximately 180. Also, Chris, the cat contractor has seen pateke a few weeks ago at Rangaiika and I recently counted six in the Porpoise gully stream at night. The lads from Rural Pest Service out shooting rabbits see plenty wandering around at Rangaiika.

Outside the sanctuary, John Winters and I visited around 22 dams not far from the Cape Sanctuary boundary. Pateke were counted on the large Haupouri shooting dam – 12 of them and Andy Lowe saw 18 on both Clifton and Taurapa stations. Three pateke were also spotted on a dam at Elephant Hill by some avid birders who reported them to Sue McLennan while she was taking them on a Kiwi Walk. I was surprised that there were no pateke on the Nilsson's dams and even Blackie on Te Awanga lagoon didn't show (he is around seven years old now so maybe has done his dash). Overall though, a good count. It is a snapshot of what's out there and at the very least around 10 percent of the national population. The exciting developments with the Cape to City project (see http://capetocity.co.nz/about/ and https://www.facebook.com/capetocity) will help provide safer habitat for pateke taking up residence outside Cape Sanctuary.

How many golf courses can boast that they have a critically endangered duck nesting only 10 metres from the Club House entrance? Can you spot the pateke nest behind the log in the centre of the picture? Cape Kidnappers landscaping team recently disturbed a nesting pateke sitting on six eggs, in the golf course drop off/turning area. The area was being replanted. The female had returned by the following morning and appeared oblivious to vehicles coming and going. The eggs all hatched and mum has moved the family off to somewhere a little quieter.

Tamsin Ward Smith

Spot the pateke: Somewhere in there is a nest.

Joining the dots on Watermouse

WetlandCare Australia has obtained funding through various local government grants to try and locate the vulnerable water mouse, *Xeromys myoides*. Working with consultant and Sunshine Coast based water mouse researcher, Janina Kaluza UQ, WetlandCare Australia will be out in the mangroves and saltmarsh from Jacobs Well to Beachmere on the hunt for signs of the water mouse.

With support of several organisations, Janina Kaluza has been surveying, monitoring and researching the water mouse in a number of locations throughout the Wide Bay and South East Queensland region since February 2012. This work has expanded and built on previous research in the past 15 to 20 years by scientists within State Government and the broader community. However, gaps remain on information that Janina aims to fill.

The water mouse inhabits coastal areas of central and south east Queensland, Northern Territory and New Guinea, and is typically found in coastal saltmarsh and mangrove areas. A key sign of their presence is their nesting mounds that range from free-standing mounds in saltwater couch grasslands to sheltered mounds in sites such as the base of old grey mangrove trees (Avicennia marina) located within the intertidal zone. The water mouse forages in the mangroves at night, feasting on invertebrates such as crabs, shellfish and snails. Loss, fragmentation and degradation of their habitats are key threats to their survival.

Water mouse house.

Photo: WetlandCare Australia.

Working with local councils, WetlandCare Australia has been awarded funding to undertake a number of small local projects to survey potential water mice habitat areas. The combined information from these projects will contribute towards completing the jigsaw puzzle on water mice in south east Queensland.

Not much is known about this Australian native rodent, with the data collected being an important step in assisting the implementation of the 'National Recovery Plan for the water mouse (false water rat) Xeromys myoides' and the delivery of a coordinated approach to its conservation.

Another project focuses on surveying key habitat areas on Russell Island, one of the Southern Moreton Bay Islands, with funding support from a Redland City Council's Conservation Grant. The water mouse was recorded on the island in the 1990s. The project aims to determine if the water mouse is still present and identify current threats to its habitat and survival. Surveys undertaken over three days in May this year and the data and survey results are currently being collated.

Funding through the City of Gold Coast's Community Grants Program, WetlandCare Australia will be focussing water mouse survey effort in the Jacobs Well area in early 2016. Survey work will build on knowledge obtained in the 1990s that recorded the presence of the water mouse in this area. Logan City Council, through their Enviro Grants allows for surveying potential habitat areas on the Logan River in search of the water mouse. Approximately 40ha of mangrove areas will be surveyed in early 2016 to record the presence or absence of nests.

Water mice surveys will also be undertaken in early 2016 over 80ha of mangrove vegetation near the mouth of the Caboolture River with funding through the Moreton Bay Regional Council's Community Grants Program. This project aims to identify the presence or absence of the water mouse in this area. The water mouse has been recorded previously at nearby Donnybrook.

Did you know?

Wild animal releases are illegal

It is illegal to release wild animals to 'farm' them for hunting at a later date.

The main potential consequences are breeding disruption and the spread of bovine tuberculosis to farmed animals and reduced local biodiversity.

Section 11 of the Wild Animal Control Act 1977 states:

Restrictions on liberation of wild animals

No person shall without the written authority of the Minister—

(a) capture or attempt to capture any wild animal, or convey or have in his possession any wild animal, for the purpose of liberating it or turning it at large; or

(b) liberate any wild animal or turn it at large or allow it to go at large.

Every person commits an offence against this Act who fails to comply with or acts in contravention of any of the provisions of this section, or of any regulations that relate to this section."

The maximum penalty for an offense is two years imprisonment and a fine of up to $100,000

Apart from the legal risks, there are also potential unintended consequences.

- Both pigs and deer can act as carriers of bovine Tb.
- Illegal release of animals to establish feral herds attracts poachers after wild animals in more 'convenient' locations.
- Illegal release of wild deer may corrupt local farmed deer genetics.
- Most keen hunters will not condone the release of deer to areas that are not in the designated feral range as specified in the deer farming notice. Trophy hunters don't want hybrid animals (sika/red, wapiti/red, farm selected breeding animal/wild red.) when they are looking for genuine wild, species-specific trophy heads.

A hand at Hexam Swamp

WetlandCare Australia's (WCA) merger with Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) had immediate benefits for a 20 Million Trees project at Hexham Swamp.

Two of CVA's Better Earth teams started work in August to plant 8000 trees at Hexham Swamp. The trees will reinstate Coastal Foothills Spotted Gum – Ironbark Forest in open paddocks at Hunter Water's Shortland Waste Water Treatment Works. The outcome will be a more biodiverse habitat for wildlife, improved carbon storage to mitigate global warming, and a buffer to reduce urban nutrients entering the Swamp.

The Swamp adjoins Hunter Wetlands Centre and flows into the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar Site. It is listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia, and is part of the Hunter Estuary Important Bird Area.

WCA Hunter's Senior Project Officer Tim Mouton said, "Thanks to Paul Davidson and his trusty tractor, the preparation on the site proceeded well and we were ready to start. The site had been slashed, sprayed and deep ripped, so planting was forward."

Wild cattle were found on site, so a temporary electric fence was installed to make sure the precious plants are not trampled or disturbed. WetlandCare Australia working with Local Land Service's will have the cattle removed.

The Anti-lead shot mythology

(Also known as pseudo science, mythical science and subversion of science.)

Only over the past few years has it become widely appreciated that the anti-lead shot/anti-lead projectile brigade's 'scientific evidence' does either not exist or the evidence is a figment of someone's imagination – MYTHOLGY; i.e. scientific 'opinion' not based on any honest scientific research!

Way back in the 1950s research commenced to prove that wild waterfowl die from ingesting lead shot, but when this research failed to determine this hypothesis another pseudo research programme was created - one that saw huge numbers of captive waterfowl dosed with massive quantities of lead shot; this resulted in a number of birds dying! Hardly surprising as the amount of dosage was hundred times greater than any bird would intake in the wild.

Google – search for: Dosing ducks with lead shot.

In the late 1950s the United Nations latched on to the opportunity to establish a world-wide anti-lead programme, solely aimed at curtailing the growth of shooting sports and at the same time take firearms out of private hands!

In 2012 the UK's high profile Countryside Alliance financed extensive research on lead in the environment; this determined that 30 commonly eaten foods all contained element of lead – none of which had come from lead shot!

Lead in the environment is a naturally occurring element and no-one appears to have died from eating any of the 30 foods listed in the CA research publication. Australian scientist John Reid said this about 'modern scientific research:

"There are issues concerning the way science and scientists are perceived by the public and by themselves.

"Why is it assumed that science always gets it right, that only industry is capable of wrecking the environment?

"There are issues about the unholy alliance between environmental scientists on the government payroll and environmental activists and lobby groups acting politically.

"There are issues about the way in which scientists continue to produce those environmental "threats" which have proven so useful in maintaining project funding."

John Reid has also said:

"It works like this: activists, NZ - Forest & Bird, the Green Party, Dept of Conservation, etc., and overseas, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, US Fish & Game, etc use science to push for international action on a science-related issue in an area such as health or environment. Then, an international agreement is established, and the science on which it is has been based becomes institutionalised and funded by government. Time and again, when this happens, "the science" stops being science.

"This is because the scientists working on the relevant topic start being advocates and stop being researchers. After all, they are now being paid by the bureaucracy to support a particular doctrine, not to discover new stuff."

http://blackjay.net/?p=237 (The Subversion of Science).

Recently – from the USA's Hunt for Truth:

The crux of anti-hunting activists' argument against traditional ammunition rests on the misplaced assertion that the use of lead ammunition for hunting leads to elevated lead exposure and poisoning in scavenging animals, such as the California condor, that allegedly ingest fragments of spent ammunition in gut-piles or carcasses left by hunters. The scientific studies relied on by the anti-lead proponents are in fact not scientifically sound. The proponents use "faulty science" to support their anti-lead ammunition agenda. HuntForTruth.org has procured and analysed over one hundred thousand documents from governmental agencies, universities and researchers and have found systemic flaws, which include faulty methodology and sampling protocols and the selective use of data (i.e. "cherry picking" data for publication).

The anti-lead ammunition proponents have employed psuedo science as a tool to support their distorted agenda. Indeed, the scientific studies used to impose lead ammunition bans are flawed. Researchers who have published these papers have used questionable sampling sizes and have ignored data believed to be contrary to their pre-conceived conclusions regarding lead ammunition. They have also routinely ignored evidence of alternative sources of lead in the environment as a potential cause of lead poisoning or mortality in wildlife. Key studies that profess to link lead ammunition to lead poisoning or mortality in wildlife have been criticised by scientists, and have even been embroiled in lawsuits for withholding original data that show results contrary to their published conclusions.

www.huntfortruth.org/myths/

In March 2015 I detailed the background to this anti-lead shot scenario pointing out that this has played the major role in the demise of the mallard – and possibly the demise of duck shooting in this country.

This was distributed widely – here and overseas – and here it has resulted in NZ Fish & Game admitting that there is a major problem with mallard numbers!

Neil Hayes

Ferret lured by sardine juice

This trapped ferret (pic on left) is located in a fenced area adjacent to part of the wetland, note the sprayed access to the trap.

The ferret must have liked the smell of the juice from the 'Sardines in Springwater'. Note the colour of the ferret, mostly white.

Another hedgehog trap used, DO 200 (pic right). Blackbirds use the top of the trap to crack the snail shells on. It is awash of snail 'juice', for the want of a better word, and the trap is surrounded by empty snail shells, sometimes this activity sets the trap off.

Ian Jensen

Keeping count at Boggy

Boggy trapping progress June, 2015.

Steve Playle completed two years of trapping at Boggy wetlands at the end of June this year. He sent the following report:

Interestingly predator numbers have not reduced since the first year off trapping was completed. There is currently 94 trapping sites established around the project area now so trapping hours have increased substantially meaning that more traps have been available for predators to encounter than was the case in the first year.

Total predators trapped for 2014/15 was:

Cats 20, ferrets 60, stoats 2, weasels 18, rats 87, hedgehogs 169, mice 70, magpies 10, hawks 11, rabbits 4.

Total predators trapped for 2013/14 was:

Cats 20, ferrets 43, stoats 1, weasels 13, rats 52, hedgehogs 159, mice 29, magpies 10, hawks 2, rabbits 1.

Total predators trapped over two years:

Cats 40, ferrets 103, stoats 3, weasels 31, rats 139, hedgehogs 328, mice 99, magpies 20, hawks 13, rabbits 5.

Steve Playle

Biosecurity Officer

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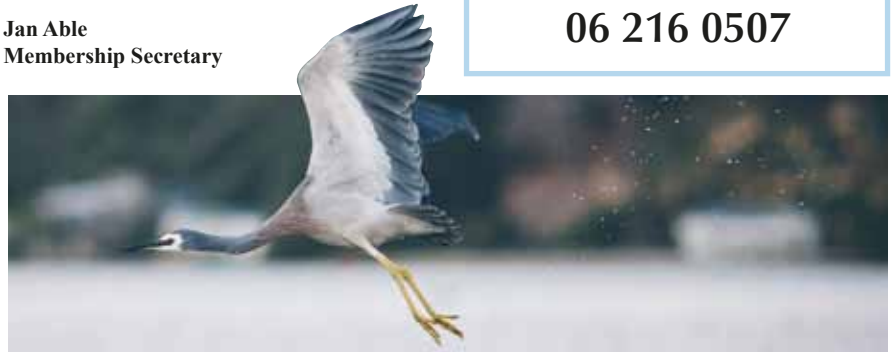
Those who pay by credit card please ensure you provide the card expiry date as the banks have become extremely picky about this (as they should).

For those who have authorised DU to have their subscription paid automatically by credit card I need the card expiry date. The majority have long since expired and as stated above the bank will no longer accept either an old date or the blank spaces. Members can either email this information now, wait and provide it on the subscription renewal notice that will come out in April, or send a note now to me at the above address.

Jan Able
Membership Secretary



Airborne: A heron takes off from the Paramata estuary. A trail of spray in its wake.

Photo: Billie Win.

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New File to come next Wednesday