DUCKS UNLIMITED NEW ZEALAND INC. For Wetlands and Waterfowl

# flight

ISSUE 167 May 2016


## Grallard – a different bird
## Mallard research
## Spoonbills at Boggy

# *from the* PRESIDENT

Well we have survived another predicted El Nino summer and in Hawke's Bay, where I reside, most wetlands managed to avoid drying out because we did receive some welcome rain in the latter part of summer. This was of significant benefit to a wide diversity of bird and fish species dependant on these wetlands. Wetlands need water to function and this has always been a cornerstone of DU's work.

Our organisation is very dependent on the "back office" staff (Secretary Jan Able, Flight Editor Liz Brook, Web Site Manager Michelle Cooper). It is with some sadness that I farewell Jan Abel who has been our very valuable contribution over recent years. Thank you Jan. At the same time I warmly welcome Mary Mason from Martinborough who has agreed to take up the position and we look forward to working with you.

There are a number of reforms proposed by the current Government for the Resource Management Act (RMA). These will impact on rivers, lakes and wetlands in both a positive and, in my opinion, a negative way. DU has not become involved in these issues in the past but as individuals it as simple as checking on line and making a submission. These issues are big picture ones and certainly justify comment.

Our AGM is in Taupo this year July 29-31, and our team have an interesting programme organised. I look forward to meeting you all again there.

**John Cheyne**

# An important addendum

****Welcome to Mary Mason who has taken over the position of Administration from Jan Abel effective immediately. With that comes a change in the address of Ducks Unlimited also effective immediately.

New mailing address is P O Box 165, Featherston 5740.

If you all could please amend your records accordingly.

# New members

Simon Walker from Pahiatua

Maurice Valenti farmily from Pokeno

Howard Parsons – from Napier.

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Contributions to Flight from members or other readers are welcome.

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**May 2016 Issue 167**



## Board of Directors



**Cover photo:** Excitement as Eru Te Huia and school girl from Orautoha School wait to release this whio into the water. See pages 8 & 9.

**Photo:** Anne Russell.

# Get ready, get excited, be there

An experience for this year's DUNZ AGM.

Taupo is our top spot this year and there is plenty of time to get prepared. Catch up with all those friends you only see once a year. Enjoy the company; enjoy the food; and the scenery.

The Millennium Hotel on the Taupo Lake Terrace, good food, good weather (we hope), walk along the water front, and importantly a three hour cruise on the Lake with a BBQ lunch included.

Conference dates are July 29, 30, 31. As a rule members usually stay Friday and Saturday nights and then head home on Sunday.

Remember it is July, and quite close to the mountains, pack a few warm clothes.

Look forward to seeing you there.

**Cruiser:** Fine looking cruiser for the lake ride.

**Inviting:** Indoor pool just waiting for action.

**Relaxation:** Inviting lounge for guests to meet up.

**Photos:** Millennium Hotel.

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 and for specific reasons from an assortment of trusts and community based charitable organisations that like our work. Membership donations and corporate memberships also help.

Central to Wetland Care New Zealand's mission is forming partnerships with people and organisations with similar aims.

**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.

# 41st Annual General Meeting August 2015

## Ducks Unlimited New Zealand

**8.30am at Distinction Hotel and Conference Centre, Palmerston North.**

**Welcome:**

The President John Cheyne, welcomed members to the 41st Annual General Meeting.

A special welcome was extended to the Piranis.

**Apologies:**

Glenys Hansen and Athol Rowden, Dan and Sandy Steele, Peter and Anne Russell, Chris Bindon, Graham Berry, Sue Perry, Fraser Chetwin.

Motion:

That the apologies tendered are accepted.

Moved: John Bishop.

Seconded: Di Pritt.

Carried .

**Minutes of the last AGM:**

(Circulated in Flight #164, copies available at the AGM.)

Motion:

That the minutes of the last AGM be accepted as a true and complete record.

Moved: David Smith.

Seconded: Neil Candy.

Matters arising from the 2014 minutes: No matters arising.

**President's Report:**

John Cheyne

(Circulated in Flight #164, copies available at the AGM.)

We are facing challenges with maintaining our membership. Our members are aging and younger people just aren't joining.

Main support base is from Wairarapa and Manawatu Chapters. The Wairio wetland project continues to be our major wetland restoration project.

Reiterated his thanks to three key ladies – Liz Brook, Jan Abel and Michelle Cooper

Motion:

The President's report is accepted.

Moved: John Bishop.

Seconded: Adrienne Bushell.

Carried.

Matters arising from the President's 2014 Report: No matters arising.

**Financial Report:**

John Bishop

John ran through the accounts and explained the main differences between receipt of funds.

This particularly relates to the Wairio project where payout has occurred before receipt of funds in.

Accounts show a loss of $41253 for y/e 31 March 2015

Motion:

That the 2015 financial report be accepted.

Moved: John Bishop.

Seconded: Ken Barnes.

Carried.

**Waterfowl and Wetlands Trust Report:**

David Smith.

Funds $463420 as at July so even with the usual fluctuations it has not done too badly, an improvement of our position of just under 8 percent..

Held in a variety of companies predominantly Australasian but some overseas.

Adrienne Bushell questioned re ethical investing.

Moved: Di Pritt.

Seconded: John Bishop.

Carried.

**Election of Officers:**

Board Election:

The President read out the following Statement:

The Constitution states that the Board should consist of not less than six, of which half, but not more than two thirds shall be permanently appointed Directors.

As of right, the permanent appointments are the Chairman, President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Other permanent appointments are Neil Candy and William Abel.

John Dermer and Jim Law are standing again by rotation and also have a nomination of Gill Lundie for the Board.

Call for any further nominations – None - therefore all were declared as duly elected.

Moved: David Smith.

Seconded: Glenys Hansen.

Carried.

**Reports:**

Wetland Care: William Abel (tabled).

Royal Swan Report: William Abel (tabled).

Website Report: Michelle Cooper (webmaster)

Same as last year but with more visitations.

Could someone write on how to build a wetland.

And what to plant maybe publish on our website?

**Quack Club:** Only have five schools involved and 80 younger kids belong. It is continuing successfully but could be doing better.

**Wairio Wetland:**

Jim Law (Full report tabled).

He also showed photos of the project.

Summary: In Wairarapa this project is seen as a significant success story and could be considered a forerunner for organisations such as ours to take on. Perhaps DUNZ could look at one large project every 5 years - need to look to start a new one.

**Pateke:**

Mike Camm (no report).

**Whio:**

Peter Russell (Full report tabled).

**Membership Report:**

Jan Abel.

78 percent memberships renewed slightly up on last year.

**General Business:**

Clarification re Election of officers given. John Dermer and Jim Law were re-elected with Gill Lundie welcomed to the Board.

Thanks to the Board members for their contribution.

**Closure:**

The meeting closed at 9.30am.

# Presidents Annual Report 2016

It gives me great pleasure in presenting my annual report for 2015-16. While a relatively small organisation we certainly punch above our weight in terms of achieving positive outcomes with wetlands and the biodiversity they support.

DU and our wetland conservation arm, Wetland Care NZ, has supported the construction of a number of wetlands in the Wairarapa and Hawke's Bay and are in discussions with a wetland care group near Warkworth to assist them with their project.

Wairio wetland alongside Wairarapa Moana continues to be a major focus for DU because of its large size and the broad community support for this project. With DU's Wairarapa Chapter's excellent stewardship of the project a number of other agencies continue to provide financial support. Without this additional support we would have been unable to achieve what has occurred. Jim Law will provide a more detailed report on this project. A big thank you to our supporters and sponsors Clean Up Wairarapa Moana Fund ( Greater Wellington Regional Council), NZ Game Bird Habitat Trust, Department of Conservation, South Wairarapa Rotary Club, Nikau Trust Pharazyn Trust and DU Chapters.

DU's support of Emma William's bittern research project on developing monitoring techniques has resulted in Emma recently been award her Doctorate. This is an excellent outcome which will make a major contribution to bittern conservation nationally. A significant part of her research was based on Lake Whatuma in Central Hawke's Bay where a Wetland Care Group has been formed. The Group includes landowners, waterfowl hunters, conservationists and Iwi who are now involved in a comprehensive predator control and willow control programme, bird and fish surveys supported financially by the Hawke's Bay Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Forest & Bird, and Birds NZ. The bittern project supported by DU was an important catalyst for other groups to become involved.

Two of our senior members Ian Pirani (DU NZ foundation President 1974) and Jim Campbell (current co Patron) have over the last 12 months received awards for outstanding service to conservation. Ian received the Queen Service medal which was acknowledged at our 2015 AGM, but more recently Jim received the Queen Service medal. Thank you gentlemen and well done!

New Zealand clean green image is still under threat and there is a need for both urban and rural communities to work together to achieve improvements in the water quality in our streams and lakes. Central Government is reviewing how we can best achieve this and a number of our members have made submissions on what is being proposed. Protecting the margins of waterways and recreating more wetlands to filter sediment, nutrients and pathogens is an important option that needs further encouragement and resourcing. Wetlands are the equivalent of the human kidneys. DU's work with wetlands is not just about creating waterfowl habitat but also assist achieve much broader environmental gains.

**Looking back:** John Cheyne and bittern, 2013.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the Board of Directors, Secretary, Flight Editor and Web Site Manager in making our organisation tick along with on-going Chapter and member support. Our sponsor's important support is also gratefully acknowledged.

We do punch above our weight and we only achieve this by working together. However we need more members and young ones at that, and this is a big challenge for us all.

**John Cheyne President**

# Our wonderful wetlands

This page had a big gap, and because I sometimes do not get enough copy from members or from my web searches I needed a filler. Then I remembered this magic photo taken by Will Abel way back in 2013. Can we remember that far back?

For those of you who have not visited Wario wetlands in southern Wairarapa, just look at the amazing scenery in store for you. Take your cameras. **Ed.**

# Habitat te Henga- Musings from the Marsh

**Happy ducks:** Pateke on Golden Pond.

HABITAT
TE HENGA

As the end of the year approached, the Pateke at te Henga were still holding their own and week after week 17 birds were being detected, that is an 85 percent survival. Accordingly, the Pateke Recovery Group indicated that all would be on for a February release and could we please ensure that transmitters and harnesses were arranged and sent to Peacock Springs in readiness?

Again, as last year we would require 20 transmitters and harnesses while this year we would also have additional birds without transmitters and the success of this year would again be judged on the fate of the transmitter carrying birds. Expecting perhaps a total of 40 or 50 birds we were stunned to be told to expect 80!

Last year's release took place on our Forest and Bird Matuku reserve and allowed only a brief glimpse of the Pateke as they rapidly scrambled across a couple of metres of water into dense reed beds rarely to be seen again.

Wanting a better spectacle this year and ensuring that the ducks would be released into the centre of our predator controlled area, the decision was made to renovate an old boardwalk that projected into a large pond so that most of the birds would be released here with a small number at a site offering easy access from a private property nearby.

Many days of activity followed with a couple of us clearing the old boardwalk and constructing a large deck at its far end. Pointed poles 3.6m in length were manhandled, forced through the weed mass then rammed into the muddy substrate below. Bearers, then joists were attached -often a tricky job as being without electricity, a brace and bit at or just below water level was needed. Of course, with the sea only one or two km away, all fittings had to be stainless steel to withstand possible wind driven salt exposure.

With four days to spare the deck was ready along with some under water weeding of the Eleocharis reeds done from kayaks.

Air New Zealand delivered even ahead of their ETA so we had a good start back from Mangere airport to te Henga. A large crowd was waiting and our PR representative had really done her job well with TV and newspapers both national and local all present. Volunteers helped move the boxed ducks across the river on the raft then walked them 500m to the deck where 60 birds were let go, five at a time.

Then it was all back to the more public site where after karakia and speeches, several people, old and young, had the opportunity to release a duck. My speech included a call to pass the hat around, as at this stage we still hadn't obtained funding for the monitoring required of us- the handful of dollars received wasn't going far but fortunately Auckland Council Biodiversity had decided to fund this aspect.

And what has happened since?

Big numbers certainly have made the difference in the number of sightings with groups of 8 or 9 having been seen. Again as last year, one or two birds absconded early on. Pateke Point we call it, is a site where pateke routinely seem to enjoy fluffing around protected by the overhanging willow canopy. What a dilemma, as I have been hell bent on getting rid of all the willows in our reserve. Perhaps we'll leave just these few until replacement planting is mature enough. A transmitter carrying bird has perished cause unknown, while a non-transmitter carrying bird was killed by a car but apart from 3 or 4 adventurous birds, most seem to be sticking close to the release site.

**Deck building:** Deck is now completed with kayak access to pond. **Photos:** John Sumich.

**Releasing Pateke:** Pam Adams aged 92, about to release pateke.

Working back from the deck is a wide elevated boardwalk finished thanks to materials and some labour supplied by Henderson Rotary. A seat and information panel midway will give an opportunity to read about the serial vegetation starting from the cabbage trees, then flax then raupo and other increasingly water requiring sedges, and swamp millet etc.

Hopefully before winter arrives we will have had some nights monitoring where the Pateke forage. With a borrowed radio receiver we'll have two teams attempting to get fixes from two different sites and follow a small number of Pateke at regular intervals for a few hours. An opportunity also to access some night vision glasses may give some insight as to the ducks movement or if nothing else will give the local mosquitoes a picnic. Then there is the planned pest monitoring using chew cards attached to stakes placed through parts of the swamp. Seems like an interesting project in theory but as always there's plenty to do at te Henga.

**John Sumich**

# My favourite New Zealand duck

**Jamie Steer University of Auckland**

I was talking with a guy the other day about ducks and somehow got on to discussing favourites. His was the blue duck because it's on the $10 note.

He said, 'That's a bird that knows how to sell itself'.

'Maybe that's true,' I said, 'but I haven't seen many around recently so I wouldn't know'.

We agreed that they had a pretty great strategy 800 years ago. Good for them.

I told him my favourite was the New Zealand grallard, the bastard love child of the introduced mallard and the native grey duck, and now New Zealand's most common duck. This at first seemed to both perplex and bewilder him but, once he'd settled down, I ran him through my reasons and in the end he accepted that I'd made the more compelling choice.

This is basically what I said.

Grallards are one of the world's newest birds. They came into existence not long after mallards were introduced to New Zealand in the mid-19th Century. Mallards took a shining (wink wink) to the grey duck and the rest is history. From what I hear the grey is partial to a bit of mallard action too so it's a veritable love in. People talk a lot about birds that haven't changed in ages but I like the versatile new chick on the block.

Grallards are all over the place. I drive around a bit and there aren't many water bodies I don't see grallards on. Clearly they're loving it here. People shoot a tonne of them every year and they just keep coming back. They're the duck version of The Terminator. I respect a bird that can take all the crap people have thrown at them over the years and still keep on kicking. I take my son down to feed the ducks and they're always there ready and obliging.

Grallards are unique to New Zealand. I searched around and haven't found grallards anywhere but here. There's something similar in Australia but they're derived from mallards mixed with the Australian sub-species of grey duck. I reckon they look different over there too. It's neat to have another locally unique duck, especially one that's got such an interesting history. Millions of years of evolution in those genes and it didn't end with their parent species. They're the biological version of fusion cuisine.

**Grallard:** Enjoying the world. **Photo:** Peter Rees Photography.

Grallards could teach people a thing or two. Some people are so distraught about losing biodiversity that they can't see the gains happening right in front of them. Grallards have accepted people and the changed environments that they live in. They don't distinguish between native and introduced species, or between pristine and modified environments. They get on with living their lives and the world is a more diverse, interesting and vibrant place for it. While some other species have 'evolutionary potential' grallards are busy realising theirs.

It's like they're sitting there quaking, 'Here I am loving life and the world isn't going to end'.

Maybe there's a lesson in there, I don't know.

**Jamie Steer**

# Letter to Ed.

Thank you Liz, for another excellent Flight magazine. Full of interest. It's always been a strong point of DUNZ.

I particularly enjoyed the Whio News 2015 (page 14) and the "Ghost flow" photo of the whio of very pale colouring that had set up on the Whakapapanui. Peter Russell will have been well aware, but I think it's worth mentioning that the bird is of the leucistic colour phase. Leucism is an abnormal plumage condition, caused by a genetic mutation that prevents pigment, particularly melanin (which produces black), from being deposited in a bird's feathers. It occurs also in Black swan (personal comment Ken Meirs). It occurs too in animals. I treasure a photo I took many years ago of this leucistic chamois (right) which had been netted in the Waiau river country.

**Howard Egan.**

**Chamois:** Makes a change from ducks!

# Whio freedom –

**Duck check:** Dean Flavell and Pani Church.

A great day out at Ruatiti Domain on the Manganui a te Ao River where we released 12 captive reared Whio, 7 females and 5 males. We had a good turn out with school children, Iwi, Horizon councillors, land owners, two Orana Park staff who released one of the Whio they had raised, a film crew and Doc staff, interested visitors and Anne and me. The Whio were reared by staff at Peacock Springs, Orana Park and Mt Bruce.

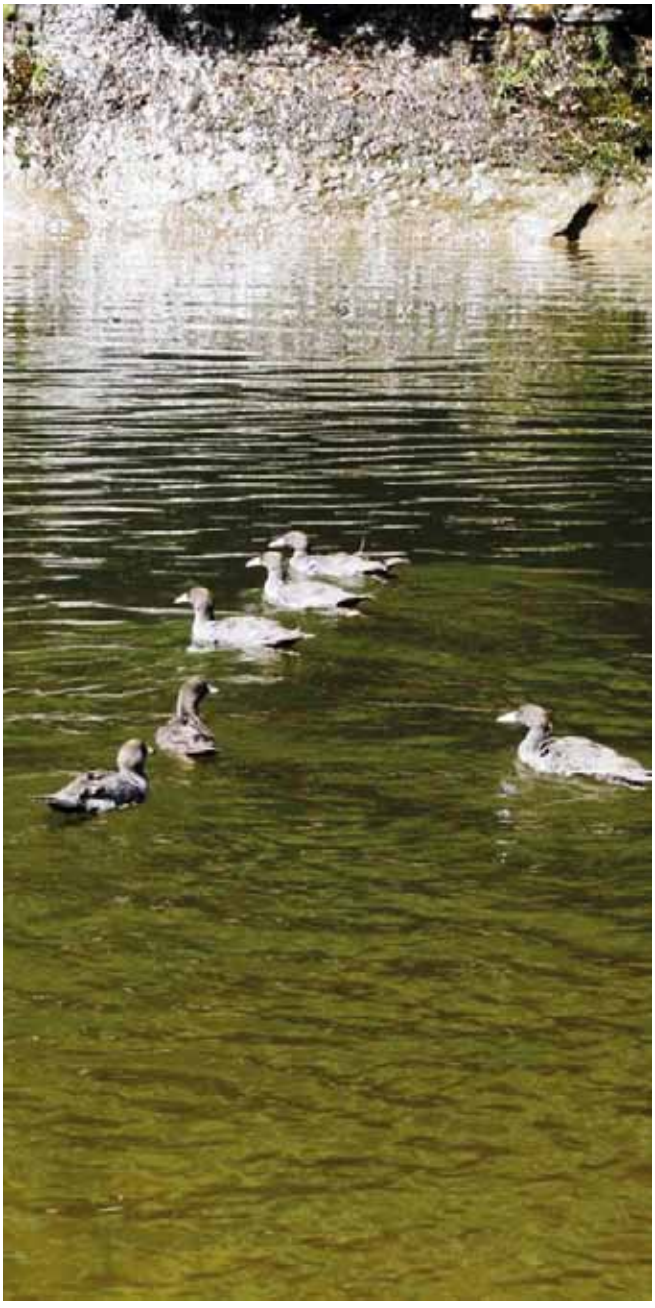
**Peter Russell.**

**Eds note:** The Manganui a te Ao River starts on the western flank of Mt Ruapehu and flows westward through forest and steep hill country north-west of Raetihi, Waimarino County, Taihape and then joins the Wanganui River. The name means - stream; great; of; the; world.

**Photos:** Anne Russell.


**Unloading:** Peter Russell.

**In the frame:** Careful hands, precious cargo.



**Water at last:** Six Whio finally free.

# reward for careful nurturing

**Right:**

**Release:** Peter Russell.

**Middle:**

**Ready to go:** Alyssa Salton and Leigh Percasky from Orana Wildlife Park

**Bottom:**

**The moment when:** Alyssa Salton, Bill Martyn, Bruce Rollinson, Paora Haitana.

# Wairio restoration planning and farewell

The presentation of DUNZ's certificate "in recognition and appreciation of support to NZ's waterfowl and wetland habitat" to Ian Gunn from Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) – Manager of GWRC's Wairarapa Moana Project and a great supporter of the Wairio Wetland Restoration Project. Ian was critical in securing a "step change" in funding for the project.

The presentation was made at the end of the meeting along with the small gift of a bottle of wine. DUNZ members may recall Ian joining us at our 2014 AGM in Martinborough.

The recent meeting was held at Fish & Game's Kilmore Lodge, adjacent to the Wetland where the group planning the 2016 work programme was underway.

Funding currently tots up to around $30,000. Of this, about $20,000 is already funded by contributions from our supporters.

**Presentation:** Ian Gunn's contribution to Wairio was acknowledged when he received a certificate of appreciation from DUNZ on his retirement from GWRC (and the Wairio Wetland Restoration Committee). From left: Jim Law (DUNZ), Ian Gunn (GWRC), Ross Cottle (DUNZ), Geoff Doring (F&G) and Kolja Schaller (GWRC).

**Below: Group planning:** 2016 work programme in progress.

# Duck broods under constant threat from predators

**By Erin Garrick**

Southland has long been recognised for its duck population and the associated buzz around the district during the first weekend in May!

However, the combination of several poor mallard breeding seasons in a row and in response to hunters concerns about the struggling North Island population, the Southland Fish and Game Council funded a national mallard research project. I was fortunate to have my Master's research funded as part of this wider project.

The Southland Council had expressed concern about continual dairy conversions and the associated changes in pasture management that might affect duckling survival. Consequently, for my research I focused on female habitat selection and factors that may impact duckling survival.

In terms of pasture management, I found that duckling survival is comparable between dairy and sheep/deer pastoral grazing systems. This is good news for mallards in Southland, as we readily see our landscape convert to dairying systems. However, first and foremost, brood-rearing females in Southland are selecting for 'unmanaged habitat' i.e., everything that is not pasture (hedgerows, shelterbelts, rank grass). This may not seem like an unexpected result, but alarmingly, these types of habitat are associated with lower duckling survival.

In our landscape, these habitats are typically thin and linear in configuration, creating ideal travelling corridors for predators. While broods may feel safe and protected tucked up in a hedgerow, predators that rely on their olfactory sensory system to track prey can easily run along the downwind side of these strips and pick up the scent of a sitting duck.

Additionally, I found that duckling survival is reduced for broods that spend their time closer to houses and roads, with both being structures that tend to be associated with a higher predator presence. Over the two year study period, 15-25 percent of our breeding females were killed on the nest by predators. To put this figure in context, this is similar to the proportion that we, as hunters, shoot each year. Further, an additional 30 percent of nests last season were abandoned or destroyed due to predators. At necropsy (post mortem examination), many of these females had evidence suggesting both mustelids and cats were the main perpetrators. While more research is needed, these results suggest that predators are having a much bigger impact on our mallard population than we originally suspected. Luckily, predator abundance is a factor that we can all influence. Further, in reducing the predator guild, you may be surprised in what other wildlife you attract!

**Operation duck pond**

After chasing ducks through the 2014 breeding season, staff noticed definite differences in ponds that were used by ducks and broods. Consequently, over the 2015 breeding season, we deployed 21 game cameras on ponds throughout the region that captured images every five minutes during daylight hours. If you do the math, that means I have roughly 250,000+ photos to wade through! As a result, I have not quite made it through all these photos to run the analysis. However, I can make a few comments on factors that seem to have an impact on the ponds I have made it through thus far.

**Monitor:** Erin Garrick sets up monitor camera.

**Photo:** Fish & Game

Typically, the shallower ponds with plenty of feeding bottom (at least 43cm deep) have had hundreds of headless, 'bums-up' photos. Another example is a pond that only has water in it during the breeding season. These seasonal bodies of water tend to be the most productive in terms of invertebrate presence, and this may flow through into brood use. In last year's study, I found that the presence of ephemeral water (short-lived bodies of water) during the first 10 days of a ducklings life, had a huge impact on survival. For Southland, cumulative duckling survival to 30 days of age without ephemeral (lasting only a short time), water present was only 11 percent for broods raised by yearling females compared to 26 percent for broods raised by adult females. However, with the presence of ephemeral water, duckling survival dramatically increased to 28 percent for broods raised by yearling females and 46 percent for broods raised by adult females. Initially, ducklings require a high protein food source, which is readily available in ephemeral water, particularly in the form of earthworms that are forced to the surface. Hence, this may be why Southland is recognised as a duck factory, and as duck enthusiasts, we shouldn't be complaining about the weather! Consequently, management of pond water levels to mimic a seasonal body of water might be one way to encourage duck use of ponds.

Another observation that might be important to brood use is the degree of exposure of the pond to the elements. The more barren-like ponds lacking any edge, bank, or overhead cover tend to have very limited use by any mallards, and none by broods. It will be interesting to see what factors come out of the data, but my gut feeling is pond use by broods is a combination of factors that create a sheltered, food-laden haven…. Watch this space!

**Safer in space:** Mallards grazing in the open:

**Photo:** Erin Garrick.

# Spoonbills at Boggy Pond and surrounds

The photo is of spoonbill chicks in a nest early this year. The nest itself is a pretty loose affair of sticks placed in the base of a dead willow tree and surrounded by open water on all sides. As the chicks age the nest becomes a lot whiter, the result of droppings from both the chicks and their parents.

This was the first record of spoonbills nesting at Boggy Pond and only the second for Wairarapa.

They have been seen more often in the wider area over the past few years with the increased area of shallow wetland created by DU's Wairio restoration project likely to be providing a good reliable food source.

I think, also, that the predator control in the area has been a big part of supporting these nests once they start and giving the youngsters a decent chance of fledging.

We hope that this is the first of many!

Earlier in the year a team took the canoe to chase and spray purple loosestrife.

On the way out we noted a big flock of spoonbills at the northern end of the lagoon and on the way back we came across some nests in the bases of sprayed willows.

We didn't approach too closely, but through the telephoto it looked like two chicks at least in each.

**Bundles of fluff:** Royal Spoonbill chicks in nest at Boggy Pond, southern Wairarapa.

**Photo:** Tony Silbery.

It was quite a shock to come across these, a pleasant one too, as you'd imagine. This is the second confirmed nesting site at Wairarapa Moana.

We plan to follow up the loosestrife work and will check on these chicks and have a look over a wider area to see if there are more.

I think this is a result of the combination of willow spraying opening up the lagoon and creating the right conditions for nest building and the pest control keeping the nests alive instead of providing food for hungry mammals.

**Tony Silbery**

Kaiarahi- Koiora Rerekētanga (Ranger, biodiversity) DoC.

# Tussock provides shelter and pleasing vista

Widespread in swamps, *(Carex secta)*, is a tussock-forming sedge. Its drooping leaves are rough and can cut the skin. It used to be called niggerhead, a term now considered unacceptably derogatory, because it resembles the feathered head wear of African tribes people, or to describe the plant's blackened appearance after the fires that swept through swamplands during early European settlement.

There are about 60 known species of Carex in New Zealand's wetlands – some are hard to distinguish unless they are flowering or in seed.

**Ian Jensen**

**Top photo:**

**Early days:** Excavated within an exotic rushed wetland margin, provides some of the lost diversity due to local drainage surrounding the area.

**Same pond:** This excavated pond, 25 years on is well matured, Harakeke and large flowering rush *(Gahnia Xanthocapa)*, along with the re-generated Carex Secta provide good cover for Mallards and other waterfowl to hide up from the stiff breeze.

**Photos:** Ian Jensen.

# Urban bittern chicks get into strife

**Bittern lesson:** Emma Williams and Gill Lundie visited Kahutara School in the Wairarapa where Emma talked with the children who were keen to hear about bitterns, and also to learn more about why there was a dog involved.

**Photo:** Gill Lundie.

Now, if I was to ask how many of you have seen a juvenile bittern or a bittern nest, I think it'd be safe to assume that most of you haven't. And that's saying a lot given that you are all wetland enthusiasts who regularly work and play in these kind of habitats.

So when we got a report that a female bittern chick had been found wandering along a road in Christchurch you can imagine our surprise. What was one of the most cryptic and secretive wetland birds doing on a road in the city? And the surprises didn't end there – a few weeks later a second female bittern chick walked into a residential garage, only 500m from the location where the first bittern was found.

There had to be a nest nearby – but where?

Both bitterns were very skinny and clearly dehydrated. They were taken to bird rehabilitator Jackie Stevenson, who set about trying to fatten them up and get them feeding for themselves. In the meantime, local ornithologist Peter Langlands set about trying to find their nest.

Now this is no easy task. Bittern nests are tricky to find. A broody female bittern will build her nest by bending blades of raupō to form a floating platform that is perfectly hidden in the thick vegetation. And she's not necessarily alone. Male bitterns can have multiple females, which all appear to nest within close proximity to each other.

Once a mother-to-be is happy with her nest she'll lay between 3 and 5 eggs before starting to incubate. She hatches the eggs and rears the chicks alone, apparently chasing the male away if he tries to get too close. While incubating, she's almost impossible to see as her streaked plumage blends perfectly in with the surrounding vegetation. Occasionally she'll slip silently off the nest to feed, but only momentarily as this leaves her eggs vulnerable to predators.

After about 25 days, her eggs will hatch to produce little fluffy chicks with Albert Einstein inspired hairdo's. These fuzz balls, emerge as masters of disguise straight from the eggs, and will adopt a perfect 'freeze pose' that looks similar to that of the adults if they are disturbed. Chicks fledge at about seven weeks old. However, there is some suggestion that they may start wandering from the nest as early as two weeks old - which is perhaps how one chick ended up on a city road and the other in a household garage.

Midway between the locations where these two birds were found lies Travis wetland, a 120 hectare swamp complex that has been restored over the last 15 years by the Travis wetland trust and the Christchurch council. It is the most likely place where these two birds came from. As it happens Travis is a noteworthy place, with an interesting history. In the 1960's, this beautiful wetland was under threat from developers, who wanted to convert it to a residential area. Luckily, the locals had other ideas. They realised the importance of the site's natural biodiversity, and argued long and hard for its protection. After a long battle that involved a petition signed by almost 7000 people, biodiversity won out, and in 1997 the site became a natural heritage park.

And lucky for bitterns that it did!

Since then, these two bitterns have done well in captivity and we were able to release them over the festive season - one along the Waimakariri river and the other at Harts Creeks. We attached radio transmitters to both bitterns, one of which was kindly funded by Ducks Unlimited. Both of these birds will be tracked regularly by local enthusiasts and, as female survival and breeding success is the secret to saving a species in decline, and these birds are the only females to carry transmitters at the moment - the information we gain will be essential for saving the species.

**Emma Williams**

*And thanks to Gill Lundie for organising the school visit.*

# Keep alert – invaders are everywhere

**No 1: Velvertleaf.**

As of Wednesday April 20, Velvetleaf had been confirmed on 196 properties in 11 regions of New Zealand. This number is expected to increase as the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) continue to visit properties in Otago and Southland known to have planted the Kyros or Bangor fodder beet varieties.

More and more unwanted problems and pests are invading out lovely country. We need to be alert and make sure caring people like Ducks Unlimited members keep a look out for problems.

Velvetleaf is one of the world's worst cropping weeds and it is just about everywhere fodder beet has been planted this season.

Velvertleaf is an annual board leafed herb that grows up to 2.5m tall. It has large heart shaped leaves, velverty to the touch. It flowers from spring through to autumn with yellow flowers about 3cm across.

It crows in crops, if you think it might be on your place contact Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) 0800 08 99 66. Advice it not to pull up the plants but contact MPI.

**No 2: Honeybees.**

Our little helpers are in danger of memory deficits and learning. Even low levels of pesticide can harm the bees. It means they lose the ability to recall odours and worse they lose their odour-learning abilities.

Bees rely on memory to target flowers, but exposure to various sprays appears to be stunting their effectiveness as nectar foragers and pollinators.

Researchers at Otago University tested bees from 51 hives at 17 sites in Otago and tested their pesticide chlorphyrifos levels. Low levels of the pesticide were found in bees at three of the sites.

In 2013 the team from Otago's Department of Chemistry showed chlorpyrifos was detectable in air, water and plant samples, and even in non-sprayed areas as it had a high ability to volatilise and travel great distances.

Most uses of the chemical have been banned in Britain since April 1 this year.

**No 3: Blackgrass.**

Now there is Blackgrass. It was detected during routine sampling of rye grass seed in Canterbury in February.

It seems to be an isolated incident, but farmers should stay alert and are urged that a thorough investigation should be undertaken to trace all potentially contaminated material.

Blackgrass is an invasive plant that is difficult to contain once it spreads. It competes with winter crops for light, nutrients, space and water, resulting in yield loss and increased cultivation costs that could be potentially devastating to the New Zealand Arable Industry.

**Velvertleaf:** Look out for these.

**Above:** In crop.

**Bottom Left:** Flower

**Bottom Right:** Capsule

Photos: Courtesy Ministry of Primary Industries.

# Seabird Award winners set examples

Winners of the 2015 Seabird Smart Awards have changed the behaviour of their entire fishing fleet to ensure the wellbeing of seabirds.

Bill Mansfield, chair of the Southern Solutions Seabird Trust, pointed out that New Zealand had an international responsibility to ensure the long term survival of seabirds.

Tom Searle, operations manager of Leigh Fisheries and Mike Black of Talley's were the main winners. Both have instigated significant change on vessels in the way engagement with seabirds is managed and in raising awareness of the impact of fishing on the birds.

Special awards were given to fisher Wayne Dreadon for championing collaboration with environmental groups and fisheries observer Jamie Willimason for giving fishers a new appreciation of the seabirds they see every day.

The Southern Seabird Solutions Trust is a collaboration between seafood industry representatives, the Government, WWF-New Zealand, Te Ohu Kaimoana and recreational anglers to ensure a sustainable future for fishing.

# Notes from Overseas

**Floodplain revegetation can alleviate flood severity (UK)**

A study by an international team of scientists, led by the Universities of Birmingham and Southampton in the UK has shown that strategic planting of trees on floodplains could reduce the height of flooding in towns downstream by up to 20 percent, according to research published in the journal Earth Surface Processes and Landforms.

**6th National NRM Knowledge Conference (National)**

The 6th National NRM Knowledge Conference is being held in Coffs Harbour on June 6-8 2016. The theme this year is People, Planet and Profits. Field Trips will explore projects ranging from innovative riverine management in the Upper Orara River, to agricultural and horticultural production in the Coffs hinterland, the complexity of the Bellinger River & Coffs Creek estuary, a look at the precious World Heritage Rainforest at Dorrigo and culturally significant headlands including the unique Muttonbird Island. The full conference programme is available on the conference website.

ballina@werlandcare.com.au

or search on the web

# Breeding success continues at Mt Bruce Pukaha

**Shore Plover:** 26 chicks were raised with some released at Waikawa and some at Motutapu. Four remain at Pukaha to continue with the breeding programme.

**Pateke:** 18 ducklings from the two breeding pairs at Pukaha. These were sent to the pre-release site, Peacock Springs near Christchurch, before they are released into the wild.

**Whio:** 2 male and 1 female ducklings hatched and reared by a pair at Pukaha have been sent to the pre-release site at Turangi. 13 ducklings were hatched from eggs collected from wild sites and of these 9 are male and 4 are females. They will remain at Mt Bruce Pukaha.

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