

# Flight



ISSUE 171

May 2017



**Competition photos**

**Fears for who**

**Check out DUNZ AGM**

# from the PRESIDENT

Well the Hawke's Bay drought that I mentioned in the last issue has disappeared and we now have the wettest late summer-early autumn recorded for many years. Great for topping up the wetlands but also promoting grass growth. This is so important for the farming community heading into winter. Interestingly the change in weather conditions has also encouraged some mallard pairs to start prospecting for breeding territories as we have seen on our property over the last two weeks.



Last week we were at Mahia in northern Hawke's Bay surveying the coastal Maungawhio-Pukenui wetland complex to assist with the preparation of a restoration plan. This involved recording bird and fish species and assessing habitat condition. We set a number of small fish traps and the results were amazing. A good number of juvenile short fin eels, common bully and inanga were recorded. This reminded me that while most wetland birds are readily observed many of our small native fish are secretive, cryptic and nocturnal. For this reason we often overlook the important fisheries values associated with wetlands and riparian margins.

The good work that DU and its member's carry out with wetlands achieves much more than just improving habitat for waterfowl. There are these broader biodiversity values and the added ecosystem services (sediment and nutrient removal, flood mitigation) that wetlands provide. Our wetland restoration and enhancement programme will always have an important role to play and we must continue to be focused on this.

I am looking forward to this year's DUNZ AGM to be held on 5-6 August at Brackenridge, Martinborough in the Wairarapa. We used this venue three years ago and it was excellent. If you didn't attend last time I am sure you will thoroughly enjoy yourselves. Be great to see you again and rekindle many long term friendships.

**John Cheyne**

## Stepping back

It will be interesting to see how those protected little trees have done at Wairio since 2014.

New trees planted and protected in 2014. Now at this AGM we have the chance to see how they have grown – or not. Bring your gumboots.



Photo: Liz Brook.

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Contact the Editor to book space or check discounts.

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Ring me if you have a problem. New publication dates are February, May, August, November.

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**Cover photo:** Into the blue for these two spoonbills. Check out other photos on pages 8, 9 and 14.

**Photo:** Diane Chetwin.

# Crack the whip and get along to DUNZ 2017 AGM

Brackenridge Country Retreat is our place for this year's Ducks Unlimited Annual General Meeting, (5&6 Aug, also Friday evening if you arrive on the 4th) annual dinner and the much anticipated auction.

DU was there in August 2014 and members found Brackenridge enjoyable and comfortable.

The weekend event includes a catch-up on Friday evening, the annual AGM the next morning, plus morning tea then a bus trip to visit Wairio Wetlands, which has come on leaps and bounds since our last tour there. Put in a pair of gumboots for Wairio.

Lunch follows at the Village café in Martinborough.

Brackenridge has the atmosphere of early New Zealand station dwellings and with a view of the Haurangi ranges.

Brackenridge Conference Manager Leeann O'Neill said they are looking forward to hosting our group.

All members should receive the brochure about events at the AGM, and the information.

Brackenridge can accommodate 64 guests, so make sure you do not miss out.

## Accommodation -

- Studios, two-bedroom cottages with two bathrooms and four-bedroom cottages with three bathrooms (includes self-catering continental breakfast provisions with free-range eggs).
- Indoor heated 20m lap pool, and gym complimentary for guests (16 years and over).
- On site day spa offering therapeutic and beauty treatments (bookings essential).
- Some unites are available at The Claremount in Martinborough for overflow.

## Register now for another fun DUNZ AGM.

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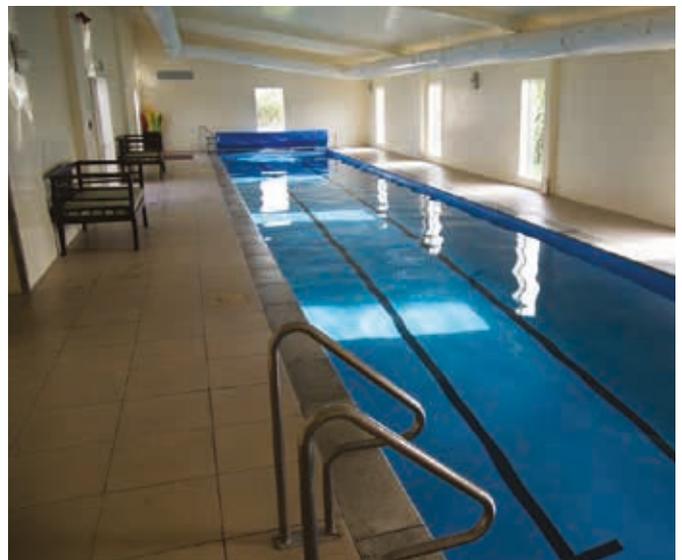
Cottages: A touch of romance.



Studio: Luxurious comfort.



Exercise: Work out time.



Pool: A lap before dinner.

# Wairio in action



**Essentials:** Putting in the pipes.



**Heading home:** Trusty digger – job done.

## A busy day at Wairio:

There was a digger on site to raise the walking track.

The success of retaining water in the wetland has required this work. Also the need to clear a few culverts to allow the water to flow more easily from Stage 4 (in the slightly higher ground in the north of the wetland) to the Stage 3 area. Though there is still plenty of work in progress and the need to equalise the water level.

There is new walking track signage made by DOC. That will be a big help for those interested in exploring the area.

And lastly, Stephen Hartley from Victoria University (with helpers Maxine, Veronica and our own Ross Cottle) starting a drone flight to record vegetation and water levels, principally in the Stage 3 research area.



**Checking the plan:** Sorting out drone instructions.



**Instructions:** Finally, an actual notice-board.



**A Round world:** From the air. Photos taken in April.

# Fears for who after weather bomb

February (2017) brought a highlight on the conservation calendar at Blue Duck Station – the release of 14 rare juvenile blue ducks (whio) into the Kaiwhakauka Stream.

After months of preparation in which the young whio were raised in captivity and prepared for life in the wild on an artificial stream, teams from Blue Duck Station, the Department of Conservation (DoC), Horizons, and Whio Forever saw the ducks off into their new home as part of a community event at Blue Duck Falls. A representative from the local iwi blessed the ducks before volunteers released them into the Kaiwhakauka, watching as they swam upstream into their new habitat. The long term aim is for the ducks to form breeding pairs along the length of the Kaiwhakauka stream, further strengthening the local whio population.

Unfortunately, the joy was short lived. In March a weather bomb wreaked havoc along the Kaiwhakauka. Over 100ml of rain fell in one day, causing flash floods and land slips that battered the Station. The environment around the Kaiwhakauka changed drastically – fallen trees and boulders littered the river, while flooding risked washing away the newly released whio. High water levels also threatened the whio's ability to feed in the stream and with the stream bed turned upside down, it is unclear how much feed is left for the ducks.

While the damage is severe, the team at Blue Duck Station remain optimistic. In the coming months they will be assessing the impact and planning how best to help the ecosystem recover. Sightings of juveniles have continued in the surrounding areas since the floods, so hopes are high that habitats can be restored for further releases in the future and that Blue Duck Station will continue to be a haven for whio.

**Maxine Ross, David Atkinson.**



**Bob Jordan and whio:** – Bob Jordan, chief eco-warrior, with a blue duck.



**Community release:** – Members of the local community get involved with the release.



**Waterfall damage:** Track damage at Blue Duck Falls, site of the release.



**Whio:** – Getting used to their new home.

**Photos:** David Atkinson.

# The Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust

The Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust, established in 1977 continues the land rehabilitation and conservation work of Sir Neil and Lady Diana Isaac.

The Trust is self-funding and does not solicit for monies. It is the assets, bequeathed to the Trust from Sir Neil and Lady Isaac that provide the income to continue their philanthropic contribution to conservation.

The main focuses are the conservation of endangered native flora and fauna, the conservation of heritage buildings and the study of conservation through education and research. This study of conservation and the environment is embodied by funding two post graduate scholarships annually, at both Canterbury and Lincoln Universities.

Specialised captive breeding of New Zealand native birds, reptiles and fish, with the aim of reintroduction into the wild, is carried out to stabilise and reverse declines in at-risk species. The Trust currently holds New Zealand shore plover, orange-fronted parakeet, red-crowned parakeet, black stilt, blue duck, brown teal, Cook Strait tuatara, grand skink, Otago skink and Canterbury mudfish.

The Trust also breeds Cape Barren geese and mute swan, which are donated to Ducks Unlimited New Zealand.

The Trust has decades of animal husbandry and captive breeding experience, specialising in New Zealand species on the brink of a high threat status. This area of the Isaac Conservation Park is off limits to the public due to the fragility of its inhabitants.

Lady Isaac was not just a wildlife conservationist, but also a conservationist of historic buildings. The development of the Isaac Heritage Village is comprised of 14 relocated historic Canterbury buildings. Many of these unique and irreplaceable buildings (c.1860 to 1940), were threatened with demolition. The Heritage Village will eventually be open to the public.

Revegetation of plants on the Isaac Conservation Park land includes a focus on the restoration of the Otukaikino River, feeding into the Waimakariri River. To date the Trust has fenced off waterways from stock, extensively cleared weeds, and planted over 45,000 eco-sourced natives. Along the corridor of native plants that now line the river, land has been set aside to provide a public walkway.

The Trust has been set up to exist in perpetuity to provide a benchmark in conservation, continuing the legacy of Sir Neil and Lady Isaac.

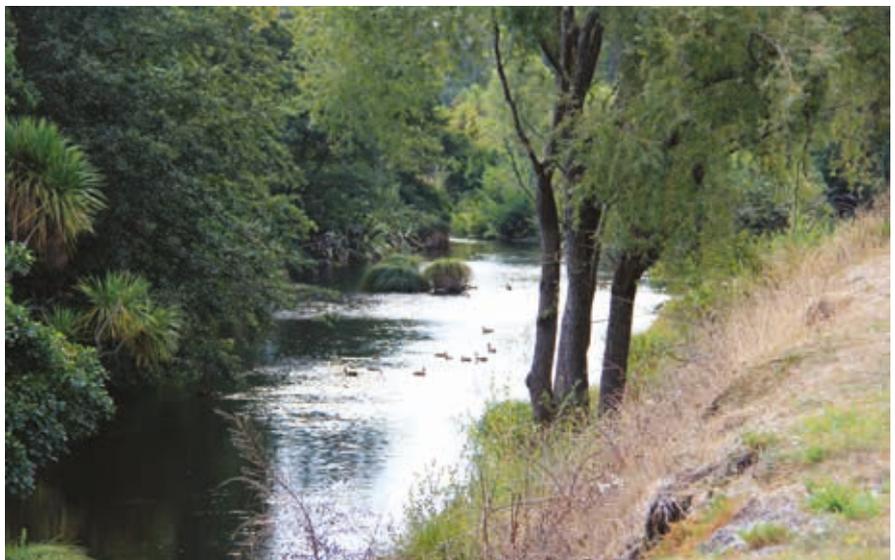
**Catherine Ott**



**Church:** St Ita's built 1911, came from Hinds in five pieces then fully restored on site.



**Protected lake:** Water adds tranquility.



**More inviting water:** Yet another restful setting.

# Who in decline...

The who (blue duck) is one of New Zealand's ancient endemic waterfowl species and is classified as Threatened (Nationally Vulnerable) in the New Zealand Threat Classification System 2012, and listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. North Island and South Island who populations are genetically distinct (though they are not described as sub-species) and are treated as separate management units.

The who has experienced rapid declines (particularly in the South Island) in abundance and distribution, nowhere common. It lives at low densities in severely fragmented populations. The most recent estimate of total population numbered 1200 pairs at most.

The most notable decline driver comes from introduced mammalian predators, with predation of eggs, young and incubating females. Stoats are the most significant threat and stoat control is a main focus of management activities.

The blue duck's widespread decline throughout South Island beech forests areas has highlighted the insidious effects of mast-seeding beech trees, which result in great predation pressure, as rodent populations explode, causing a lagged increase in stoat populations which seek alternative prey when rodent numbers crash. A male-biased sex-ratio throughout the range, indicates that predation during incubation is significant.

One of the major conservation management tools for who is captive breeding for release into the wild. The blue duck has been held in captivity for many years, and its husbandry requirements are understood. The aim is to maximise productivity of the captive breeding programme, and ensure that captive-bred ducklings are released at the highest priority sites. Captive breeding has proven highly effective, and is vital in aiding the recovery programme with the re-establishment and rebuilding of viable populations throughout the former range.

The Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust provides the largest output of blue duck juveniles annually, with its waterfowl aviaries being the most successful captive breeding enclosures in New Zealand for North Island blue duck. The Trust currently holds two North Island blue duck breeding pairs. These breeding pairs can lay up to three clutches per season, with an average of six eggs per clutch. All eggs are collected for incubation and hand rearing.

The Trust is a significant participant in the WHIONE programme, which consists of retrieving wild eggs each breeding season from South Island pairs for artificial incubation and rearing in captivity, with a subsequent release of juveniles once fledglings have been hardened in our fast water facilities and are at a lower risk of predation. Releases take place in natal territories or at new sites around the South Island to increase numbers and genetic diversity across sites or re-establish lost populations.

Since 2016 the Trust has been retaining cohorts of South Island blue duck juveniles for flock mating, to initiate a captive breeding population across several South Island facilities. The Trust will move out of North Island birds and hold three pairs of the South Island blue duck.

Each season for the last 12 years, the Trust has also received North Island blue duck juveniles bred by other captive institutions nationwide, which are transferred for pre-conditioning in fast flowing raceways prior to release into the wild.

## Sabrina Luecht

Wildlife Project Administrator

The Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust



Old enough: Adult who.



Very cute: Did they survive?



Sharing: Hope they made it through.

# 2017 DUNZ Photo Competition top shots



**1. Other water birds:**

Birds on shed.

**Stephen McGaughran.**

**2. Wetland:**

Spoonbills.

**Stephen McGaughran.**

**3. Other water birds:**

Dab chicks and egg.

**Stephen McGaughran.**

**4. Ducks:**

Boulder duck.

**Diane Chetwin.**

**5. Ducks.**

Mallard mother and ducklings.

**Diane Pritt.**



**1. Wetland:**  
Morning mist.  
**Diane Chetwin.**



**2. Under 16:**  
Royal Spoonbills at  
Big Lagoon.  
**Ben Gillett (6 years).**



**3. Wetland:**  
Wet work.  
**Jane Donald.**

**4. Wetland:**  
Thumping in.  
**Jane Donald.**



# Keep a weather eye on the birds

Back in March 2017, near Pokeno on the F&G McKenzie Wetland Block near Pokeno, one hour south of Auckland off SH1 we were banding grey teal there. If DU members could keep an eye out for these I would be pleased to hear about them.

Now for BOW – this is a pond specially reserved for people who pass our course of how to shoot clay targets, dress (pluck) game, tie trout flies, cast a trout rod and there's a nice salmon meal in a tent to finish with.

The Dean Block is a F&G wetland near Pokeno and BOW pond is part of that. There's about 50 grey teal nest boxes there and more on the adjoining McKenzie Block.

BOW means Becoming an Outdoor Woman. The lady who did this, Shonagh Lindsay, has since moved on, which means the programme

is currently suspended. We took women of all ages and shooting coaches Brian Thompson or Bill McLeod taught them how to shoot a shotgun at clay targets. I taught them how to dress a duck and then cooked it for them, (Schnitzel-style). The Auckland Anglers club taught them how to fly-cast with a trout rod. Sally Spiers and her daughter showed them how to tie a trout fly in the tent, (they fished the one they tied themselves – a Woolly Buggar – that's actually what it is called, (it was Sally Spiers who chose it). We then gave them a chance to catch a fish near Waikino, (near Waihi).

It was a popular two-day programme, and we did feed them salmon in a F&G tent, Paul Matos was the professional chef who donated his time for many of these. But eventually everyone who wanted to give it a go did so

and bookings in Auckland dried up. Northland Fish & Game also did some for several years with equal success. We were strongly hoping other F&G regions would pick up the proven programme.

I think the main idea is that many woman would like to give these things a go with their men-folk but perhaps lack confidence. We thought if we taught them the basics, they'd join in. After all, if their father, husband, boyfriend or brother already had the gear, the know-how and the places to go. We thought the inspired, initiated and more confident women could now go with them. The feedback was very positive and it seemed everyone, trainers and trainees, had a lot of fun doing it.

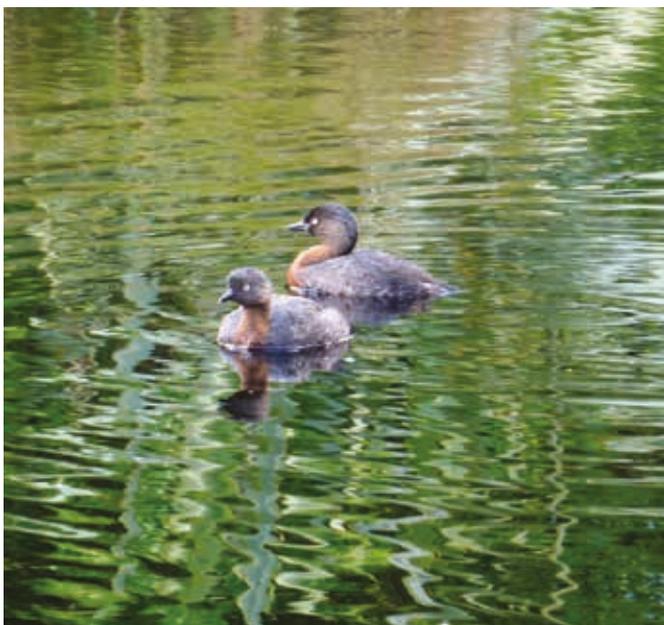
**John Dyer.**



**Grey Teal 1:** Good spot – Fish and Game.



**Grey Teal 2:** Another nesting box in use.



**Dabchicks:** Dabchicks at BOW pond.



**Nesting boxes:** Fifty nesting boxes keep ducks happy.

**Photos:** John Dyer.

*Horizons Regional Councillors joined DOC representatives and iwi at Blue Duck Station in February 2017 for a who release, during a tour of the northern parts of the Manawatu-Whanganui Region. Blue Duck Station set within the Kia Wharite project, has seen Horizons, DOC, Whanganui iwi and private landowners working in the private lands and remote forests around Whanganui National Park to improve land, water and biodiversity, while enhancing community and economic wellbeing. Kia Wharite is one of the largest projects of its kind in New Zealand in scale and scope.*



**Who set free:** Horizons Cr Pat Kelly (left) and Cr David Cotton (right) at whoie release in February. We all hope those little ducks survived the wild weather.

## Kia Wharite restoring the balance for whoie

Back in February, way before the weather bomb hit Blue Duck Station, (see page 7) Horizons Regional Councillors joined the Department of Conservation (DOC) deputy director general operations, Mike Slater, and iwi representatives for the release of 14 whoie at Blue Duck Station.

The whoie release was a hands-on opportunity to show how Kia Wharite, a collaborative biodiversity project in the Whanganui/Ruapehu districts, is directly contributing to the survival of native species.

Since 2008, Horizons, DOC, Whanganui iwi and private landowners have been working in the private lands and remote forests around Whanganui National Park to improve land, water and biodiversity health, while enhancing community and economic wellbeing. Kia Wharite is one of the largest projects of its kind in New Zealand in terms of scale and scope.

The Kia Wharite project spans over 180,000 hectares and includes a mixture of private land and parts of the Whanganui National Park, the second largest lowland forest in the North Island. This remote area is home to the largest population of Western North Island brown kiwi and plays host to many native bird and plant species.

Possums, goats, stoats and other predators have threatened the health of the forest and put the long-term future of its inhabitants in jeopardy.

Horizons Councillor Bruce Rollinson said as part of the project extensive possum control operations have been undertaken by Horizons and OSPRI on rated land, and DOC on

crown land. OSPRI have signalled a phased withdrawal from areas inside the project sites, as these areas are declared TB free. Currently approximately 150,000 hectares of land has regular possum control undertaken in the project area.

This work, alongside pest and weed control, protecting bush and wetlands and monitoring threatened native species, is also why it was possible to release 14 whoie into the Kaiwhakauka Stream. Here, whoie are protected on the river through a network of traps managed by Blue Duck Station volunteers to target stoats, said Cr Rollinson.

Predator control is carried out in the wider whoie security site by Horizons and DOC; over 85 km of trap lines are in place along the Retaruke and Manganui o te Ao rivers, providing necessary protection for whoie.

Department of Conservation deputy director general operations Mike Slater said with a population of fewer than 3000, this national whoie security site is one of eight locations identified across the country as being essential for whoie recovery.

With the support of Genesis Energy, DOC has been able to double the number of fully secure whoie breeding sites, boost pest control efforts and enhance productivity and survival of these rare native ducks. The ultimate goal of this security site is to achieve protection to 50 breeding pairs, said Mr Slater.

Whoie are adapted to live on fast-flowing rivers so finding them means you have also found clean, fast-flowing water with a good supply of insects. This makes whoie important indicators of ecosystem health, they only exist

where there is high quality, clean and healthy waterways.

It is not just whoie and the environment that benefit from the project. Horizons and DOC believe there are positive economic returns to be had from the project. Blue Duck Station is the most obvious example.

The sheep and beef cattle farm, located 55km south-west of Taumarunui, is set on 2915 hectares of medium to steep hill country. Blue Duck Station owner and manager Dan Steele said grazing areas have been deliberately offset by native bush and manuka.

“Through the Kia Wharite project, we have worked closely with Horizons and DOC to develop a sustainable land plan, and fence off selected farm areas to protect native fauna and flora,” said Dan Steele.

“The Station has approximately 450 traps for stoats, mustelids, feral cats, rats, mice and hedgehogs; all enemies of the blue duck as well as other native species. In partnership with Kia Wharite, we maintain and reset the traps approximately every two weeks; this is undertaken mainly by our volunteers or eco-warriors as we call them.

“Embracing the environment in this way provided the perfect place to set up a lodge and tourism operation. In a relatively short time we have grown to approximately 8000 visitors a year, many of whom become eco-warriors during their stay,” said Dan Steele.

Cr Rollinson said Kia Wharite is proving to be a successful approach, with the project already exceeding some of its goals. “It shows what can be accomplished when organisations join forces and work collaboratively.”

# New science links to China will benefit NZ

AgResearch intends to form a joint international research centre with China's largest state-owned food company and largest university research department specialising in food science and nutrition.

A Collaboration Arrangement was signed earlier this year in Beijing with the Nutrition and Health Research Institute (NHRI) within the China Oils and Foodstuffs Corporation (COFCO), and with the College of Food Science and Nutritional Engineering (CFSNE) of China Agriculture University (CAU).

The parties will explore opportunities to work together formally in the name of a "Joint International Research Centre for Food Science" to promote international exchange, research and productivity, with a particular focus on further enhancing a China/New Zealand relationship".

The arrangement states: "The overall goal of the collaboration is to initiate activities that are of mutual benefit to the parties in terms of knowledge development, scientific and technological innovation and economic benefit".

AgResearch chief executive Tom Richardson says the relationship with such influential institutions – from the world's most populous country with a rapidly expanding middle class – opens up a host of opportunities for



**Science arrangement:** A joint handshake to mark the signing. People involved being Dr John Dyer of AgResearch (right), Vice Dean of CAU College of Food Science and Nutrition Engineering, Professor Shuntang Guo (middle) and the Chief Scientist of COFCO's Nutrition and Health Research Institute Dr Xinghe Niu (left).

**Photo:** COFCO.

AgResearch, and agriculture and agribusiness in New Zealand.

"We are fortunate to have world-class scientists in New Zealand. Being able to reach out and work with some of the best scientists elsewhere in the world bolsters what we are doing, and what we can offer to enhance industry here."

"Some of the key research areas where AgResearch expects to work closely

with COFCO and CAU are food science, processing, food assurance and safety, and human nutrition."

For those seeking further information, email [media@agresearch.co.nz](mailto:media@agresearch.co.nz) or contact:

Jarrod Booker, External Communications Manager, AgResearch Ltd.

03 321 8612  
021 832 351

## MB100 – a milestone for Pukaha

Pukaha was delighted to announce the 100th kiwi chick to be hatched in the nursery since it started hatching kiwi chicks under human care in September 2005 MB100 made its way into the world on March 18, 2017. Lead kiwi ranger, Jess Flamy, was on hand to assist. Jess has supervised the hatch of nine kiwi at Pukaha this year so MB100 was in very safe hands!

To celebrate the 100 milestone hatch, Pukaha held a Kids Go Free day in March when MB100 was having one of its first feeds at 12 noon.

### Pateke – clutch No. 3

More conservation breeding success with the hatch of five more pateke ducklings in the Free Flight Aviary. This is the third clutch for the same pateke pair this year so they must be pretty happy in their new home. Mum is fairly happy showing off her new brood and at 4pm daily there is a ranger talk in the Free Flight Aviary and the pateke are usually happy to eat the mealworm treats they get at that time on their pond.



**100 and counting:** The 100th kiwi chick with Jess Flamy at Pukaha.

**Photo:** Pukaha

### DOC does its bit

#### Kea set free after successful leg surgery

A young kea has been released back into the wild in Fiordland after his severely injured leg was successfully remodelled by vets. Thanks to Real Journeys, Air New Zealand and Meridian Energy for being involved in this happy ending.

#### Rare native buttercup found on Stewart Island

The mount Allen buttercup was found by DOC botanists on a remote mountain range on Stewart Island/Rakiura. The island is a hotspot for endemic plants with at least 28 native plants, many of them alpine species, found there.

#### Motley Crew arrive in Hawke's Bay

Kōrure (mottled petrels) have been translocated from Whenua Hou (Codfish Island) to their new home at Maungaharuru. These translocations gave 67 birds a new home and are part of an effort to restore seabird populations.

# Makeover at Matuku Link.

## It links the Ark in the Park

Habitat te Henga; and the Forest & Bird reserve, Matuku so we called our newly purchased property, Matuku Link. Some of you may have helped our GiveALittle appeal to purchase it and we took possession on November 1st late last year.

There are 37 hectares with three or four of those being alluvial flats including several scattered dock and buttercup ridden paddocks, irregularly divided by old riverbed meanders. In the meanders is a mix of tree lined open water with emergent baumea, extended raupo and swamp millet beds and carex, cyperus and juncus sedge patches. Peppered on the flats are remnant pukatea, kahikatea, kaikomako and totara.

Wasting no time, we held several working bees. Several truckloads of junk were taken away, scrap iron to the metal merchant, and the house made liveable for our new resident caretaker. A boundary line of poplar was felled and about a hectare of blackberry sprayed.

All internal fences were removed with the help of an obliging neighbour and the posts set aside for some future use – which manifested a mere month later. A group of 30 students from the Culver Academy, Indiana, touring through New Zealand wanted to be part of a conservation project. With a labour force that big, and four magnificent local carpenters, we constructed in two days 40 metres of boardwalk over a stream outlet on the Matuku Reserve.

Carrying tools, timber and a large generator almost a kilometre along the riverbank to



**Wetland education:** First wetland talk in the old barn.

the site, these energetic teens and their tutors helped finish a project that had been on the to-do list for four years. Some of them also helped plant kahikatea, the first of many trees, shrubs and sedges that will convert the paddocks to an alluvial forest resembling that which once existed.

Other intrepid travellers had arrived the week before and, unfortunately, their arrival coincided with Auckland's mid March weather bomb. With the river some 3-4m higher than usual, turbulent and silt laden, the never-say-die elvers (young eels) all the way from Tonga were seen flick flacking over the flooded bridge.

The desire to enable this property, which has

easy access, to become a site for a wetland education centre has also rocketed ahead. The Trusts Community Fund Million Dollar Mission was opened on March 1 with several selected community groups competing to get votes from supporters for their projects. By the time the million ran out, Matuku Link had gained over 17,000 votes with each vote worth \$5. The money will go toward material needed for the conversion of the barn while design and build will be a real-life project for Unitec students from the schools of survey, architecture landscape, and construction.

**John Sumich**

Matuku Link trustee



**On the job:** Boardwalk working late.



**Whew:** Time to rest, work over.

**Photos:** John Sumich.

# Endangered native beetle threatened by rabbits and redbacks

An “unholy alliance” between rabbits and Australian redback spiders is threatening the existence of an endangered New Zealand species, a study by AgResearch has shown.

Carried out with the Department of Conservation (DOC) and University of Otago, the study has illustrated the struggle for the ongoing survival of the Cromwell chafer beetle – a nationally endangered native species that can now only be found in the 81 hectare Cromwell Chafer Beetle Nature Reserve between Cromwell and Bannockburn, in Central Otago.

The study found numerous rabbit holes that shelter the rabbits were also proving ideal spaces for the redback spiders to establish their webs. Investigation of those webs in the rabbit holes found the Cromwell chafer beetle was the second-most commonly found prey of the spiders.

“Of course the rabbits and spiders aren’t actually plotting to bring about the demise of the chafer beetle, but these findings do give a fascinating insight into the almost accidental relationships that can develop between species in the natural world, and how that can impact on other species,” said AgResearch Principal Scientist Dr Barbara Barratt.

“Otago University students doing research in the area found that 99 percent of the spiders had built their webs in the rabbit holes. We don’t know exactly how many of the chafer beetles there are left because they are not easy to find, but research into larval densities tells us the numbers are low. It does appear the redback spider, which has established populations in two locations in New Zealand since the 1980s, has been increasing in number over time, and this increases the risks for the beetle population.

“What we were able to show in our research was that filling in those rabbit holes was an effective way of eliminating the presence of the redback spiders at the treated sites, and therefore reducing the rate of the chafer beetle being preyed upon.”



**Redback:** Not nice spider.

As a result of the research, DOC has carried out a programme to break down old rabbit holes and hummocks in the reserve to destroy spider nests, and also does regular rabbit control. An annual survey for beetle larvae with AgResearch will show whether these actions are having an effect.

“We will survey for beetle larvae next summer to see what effect reducing redback spider nests is having on the Cromwell chafer beetle,” said DOC Ecology Technical Advisor Bruce McKinlay.

“Hopefully we’ll find the beetle population has increased with fewer falling prey to this introduced venomous spider.”

The Cromwell chafer beetle (*Prodontria lewisi*) is a large flightless beetle that lives underground in the sandy soils of the Cromwell river terrace. In spring and summer adult beetles emerge from the ground at night to feed on plants and to breed.

**Jarrod Booker**

AgResearch External Communications Manager

## Spare photos – fun



**Fascinating fungi:** A rare sight.

**Photo:** Diane Pritt.



**Reflections:** Spoonbills at Pohangina wetlands.

**Photo:** Rex Bushell.

# wetland care NEW ZEALAND



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**  
**Steining Trust, Hawke's Bay**  
**Travis Wetland Trust, Christchurch**  
**Wairoa 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.

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For Wetlands and Waterfowl.

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WETLAND CARE'S

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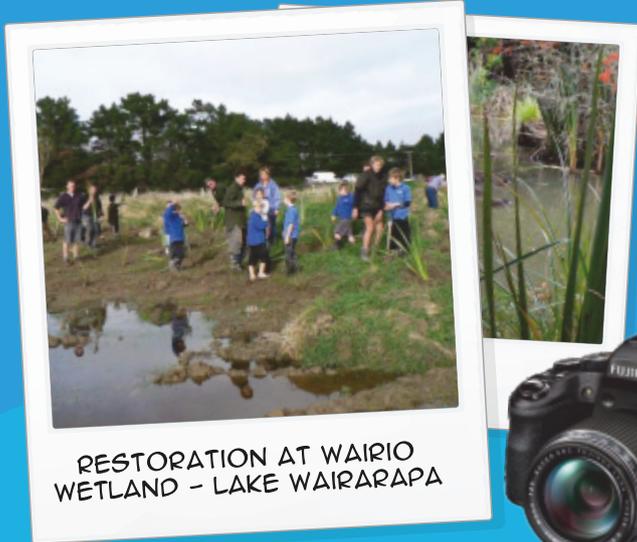
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