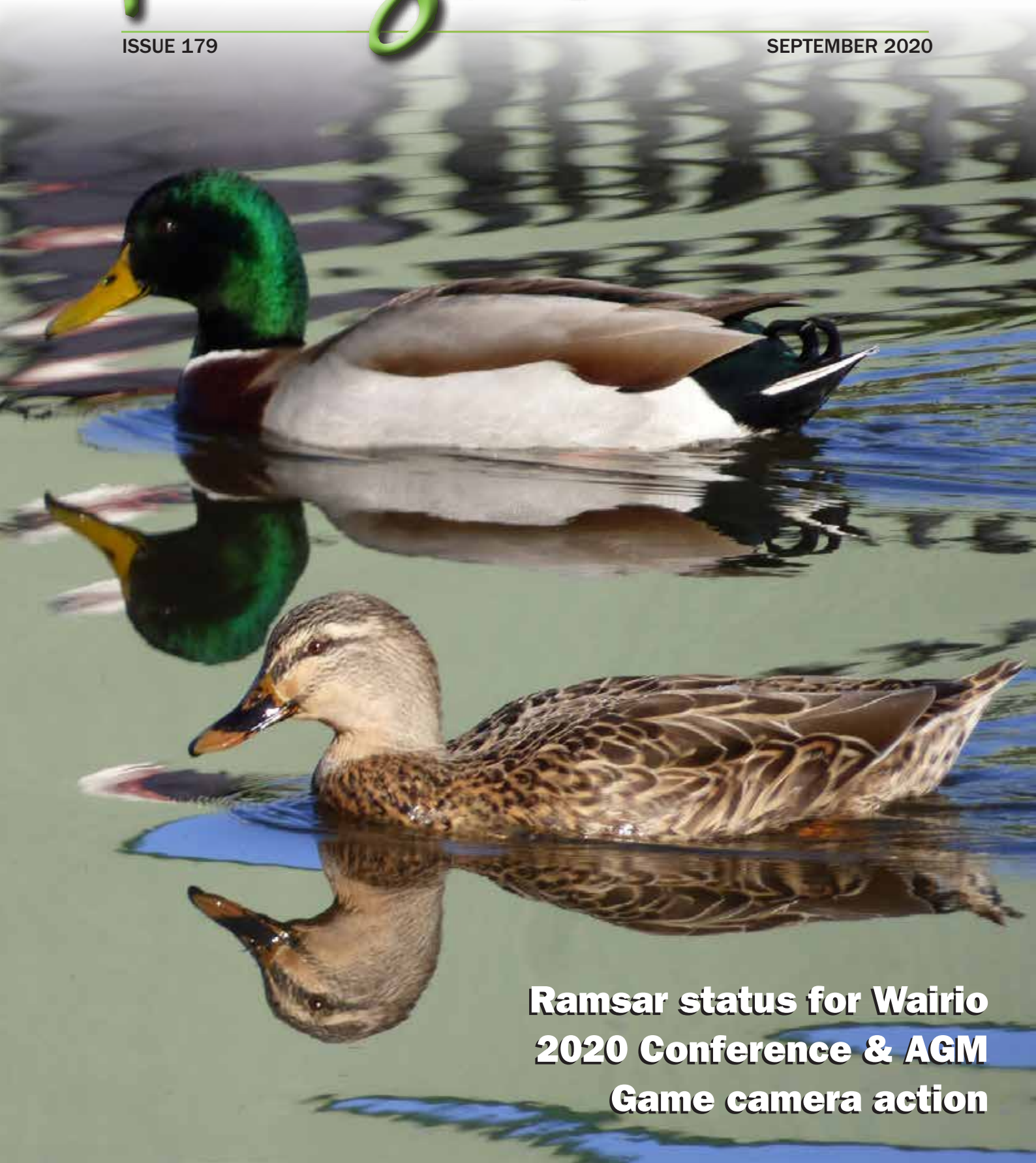
DUCKS UNLIMITED NEW ZEALAND INC. For Wetlands and Waterfowl

flight

ISSUE 179 SEPTEMBER 2020



Ramsar status for Wairio
2020 Conference & AGM
Game camera action

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hi everyone. Last month we got the exciting news that Wairarapa Moana has been granted Ramsar status as a wetland of international importance, joining six other wetlands in New Zealand.

I hope this will mean repair work on the Matthews Lagoon reticulation project at Wairio will be completed sooner rather than later.

Our conference was held in Gisborne this year and it was most enjoyable. Everything ran very smoothly and according to plan. Timing of all the events was spot on.

We were extremely privileged to be able to visit to Nick's Head Station, which we all thoroughly enjoyed.

Next year's conference will be in Wellington, with a trip to Zealandia on the agenda.

Our congratulations to Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust's Anne Richardson, who was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in June.

Ross Cottle

CONTENTS

From left: DU Directors Jim Law and Adrienne Bushell, Wellington Regional Councillor Adrienne Staples, Defence Minister Ron Mark, and Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage.

Ramsar status for Wairio

Wairarapa Moana, which includes the Wairio wetland, has been recognised as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Wetland Convention.

Wairio has been Ducks Unlimited's most significant, and its most rewarding, project over the past 15 years.

Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage, in announcing Ramsar's decision at a ceremony at Lake Onoke on August 21, congratulated all the partners involved, including Ducks Unlimited.

DU Patron Di Stitt's line-up of Labradors, from left, Luka, 7, Dale, 15¾, Dale's son, Rommi, 11, and Luka's daughter, Raven, 11 months.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cover: A pair of mallards enjoy the peace and quiet of Te Mome Stream, Petone, during lockdown in May 2020. Hunting season was delayed from the traditional May 1 start until May 23. **Photo** *Alfred Memelink, Artspace Gallery*
Back: Spot the kererū hiding out at the kōtuku sanctuary near Ōkārito. See story, p14. **Photo** *Ross Cottle*

Flight magazine is published by Ducks Unlimited New Zealand Inc, PO Box 165, Featherston 5740, New Zealand www.ducks.org.nz

ISSN 1173-2776

Editor: Alison Murray
flightdunz@gmail.com
021 124 8095
9/35 Tennyson St, Dunedin

Printer: Lamb-Peters Print, 2477 SH2, Greytown 5794

Editorial:

Contributions, including photographs and letters to the editor, are welcomed. Please send these to the editor before the next deadline, **Wednesday 15 January 2021**.

The editor reserves the right to edit articles for content, length, grammar, style, and readability.

Good timing for get-together

President Ross Cottle welcomed DU members to the 46th Conference and AGM in Gisborne – the first time it has been held there.

He said the turnout was better than expected after the Covid-19 lockdown. The timing of the conference, on the weekend of July 31 and August 1, turned out to be fortuitous, with the country facing further lockdown restrictions from August 11.

Ross thanked Kees and Kay Weytmans for organising everything at the Gisborne end.

Waiting for the AGM to begin are Trish Smart, Patron Di Pritt, David Smith and Fred Bailey.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Ross said it had been another relatively quiet year of activity, not helped by Covid-19.

Wairio continued to be a major focus for DU in the Wairarapa. The attempt to get a permanent water supply from Matthews Lagoon had not been very successful, with the wall of the diversion canal blowing out last winter.

It was yet to be reinstated although DU hoped it would be completed next summer.

DU was still seeking opportunities to advocate for wetland construction, and the promotion of environmental issues where needed.

"Our membership is holding, although there is noticeably more grey hair, and in some cases no hair at all, showing up to events each year," he said.

It was reported at last year's AGM that the Board had decided to offer scholarships to university students studying in the wetland environmental area.

There had been a much slower uptake than expected, but in July, Adrienne Longuet-Bushell, Jim Law and Ross presented Victoria University student Shannon Bentley with $5000 to continue her studies in carbon sequestration in wetlands.

Ross concluded by thanking the Board members for their work over the past 12 months.

Ross Cottle opens the AGM, with Neil Candy on secretarial duties.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Donations have come from the Wetland Trust, the Pharazyn Trust and Treadwells, and a one-off private donation.

Members' subscriptions and donations, along with last year's raffles and auctions contributed to the rest of the income, Treasurer John Bishop said.

DU accumulated $75,000 for the year and, once expenses were deducted, it was left with a surplus of $30,765, though a big portion of this is earmarked for work at Wairio.

John was this year's Bill Barrett Trophy recipient.

WATERFOWL AND WETLAND TRUST

David Smith said that at the end of the trust's financial year, which is on December 31, it recorded its highest net assets at $522,000, but then there was Covid-19.

On March 23, the funds had taken a dive of just over $72,000, though this was also partly because of Donald Trump's trade war with China.

The trust sat tight and, as at July 22, the trust's funds were back to $505,000 as sharemarkets recovered much of their losses.

Dave West, Alice and Ross Hood, Megan Cushnahan and Julie Candy at the AGM.

AGM & CONFERENCE 2020

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Three Board members – Adrienne Longuet-Bushell, Gill Lundie and Emma Williams – had completed their two-year terms. All were re-elected unopposed for a further two years. Liz Brook has retired from the Board.

WETLAND CARE

DU assisted with two projects this year, both in the Masterton area.

Matt Wyeth, of Spring Valley Enterprises, is creating a wetland and pond of about 2 hectares which will complement the already extensive areas created in the past 20 years.

The cost would be more than $10,000, and DU would contribute $5000 towards it. It was due to be completed but had been delayed by Covid-19.

John Murray, of Kainga Mauru Trust, has also created an approximately 2ha wetland and pond. DU has contributed $5000 towards the $10,000 work required to do the excavations.

ROYAL SWAN

Will Abel said that sadly, there was nothing more to add this year, with no swans available.

"The breeding birds we have had over the years have departed the scheme, and we are having no success in replacing them," he said.

"Even our strongest suppliers, Peacock Springs, are now needing breeding stock. We don't really have any ideas how to reverse the trend as importing birds is still not possible."

About 10 pairs had been seen on Henley Lake in Masterton, but there was no easy way to capture them.

MEMBERSHIP

Ducks Unlimited is stable with 275 members, of which 80 are non-paying or life members.

Reminders will be sent to those with outstanding subscriptions.

WEBSITE

The website is now mobile-friendly and the number of people accessing the site through their phones is nearly as high as those using desktop computers.

More copies of *Flight* magazines have been added to the website with 100 issues now online.

Ian Jensen with Sandy Bull and John Cheyne.

WAIRIO

Jim Law said the Wairio project was moving from a development stage to maturity. The site was being visited by more people taking advantage of the grassed walkway around the wetland.

"Just watch your boots" because waterfowl are fond of parking up on it, he said.

Patron Jim Campbell chats to Kay Weytmans.

DU continues to work with iwi who will be more involved with the management of Wairarapa Moana once their Treaty settlement is signed. "Our relationships with them are very good," Jim said.

Greater Wellington Regional Council had taken over responsibility for the Matthews Lagoon and Boggy Pond reticulation project, but it had failed.

"We believe it will be fixed this summer."

There was also debate within GWRC about the need for a fish passage at the site and this needed to be resolved.

The fantastic partnership with Victoria University was continuing, with students regularly working on Stage 3 at Wairio.

In July, the first Wetland Care scholarship was presented to a Victoria University student. The university also has another student who is likely to apply for a scholarship in the next two to three months.

DU has a five-year Wairio strategy which now needs to be updated. Also, its management contract with DOC expires in December 2021 so next year members will be asked about whether to continue that contract.

"There will be less work – we are just waiting for the trees to grow, some repairs and some planting. Our preference is most likely that we would continue," Jim said.

Ross applauded Jim's negotiation skills in dealing with the different Wairio partners.

Di Pritt asked the meeting to record a huge vote of thanks to Jim, Ross and the Wairio committee for their work. She said when they first visited the wetland 15 years ago, their first reaction was: "What are we doing?"

"It was the bleakest place – Siberia had nothing on it", and now it is a significant wetland, she said.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Fred Bailey asked how to access funds for predator control. It was generally thought regional councils should be the first point of contact.

Guest speaker Sam Gibson suggested contacting DOC's local relationship officer to tap into the DOC Community Fund and Jobs for Nature funding.

John Cheyne said Hawke's Bay Regional Council was the greatest source of resources in his region, as well as the DOC Community Fund.

'Smoking' a whole lot of stoats

Guest speaker Sam Gibson, of Goodnature, lets a picture paint a thousand words to demonstrate the effectiveness of self-resetting traps.

His photo, right, of four dead stoats lying beside one trap tells the story. It was taken when he was working for the Department of Conservation in Fiordland about six years ago.

He walked up to the Goodnature A24 trap and found the stoats lying around it. It was a mother who had been teaching three juveniles to hunt.

"This is the key factor as to why we use resetting traps over single-action traps."

Sam had been involved in developing the DOC 200 trap with Darren Peters and Phil Waddington and is still proud of that but when he found multi-kills of stouts under the A24s, "the penny dropped".

He said they had been trapping with single-set DOC 200s, but can only catch just a single stoat, or the trap line fills up with rats first before stoats reach the traps because stoats have such large home ranges.

"We moved to double sets, which can catch a mother and juvenile, but now we can catch the whole family."

He believes the A24 is the most effective trap on the market at the moment. They can "smoke" a whole lot of stoats, Sam says.

They are powered by CO_2 canisters which last for about 24 hits, though Sam often gets about 30 before replacing the canister.

The traps are made in Newtown, Wellington, with plastic injection moulding from Hawke's Bay, and the other componentry from Gallaghers in Hamilton. Goodnature aims to keep the money in the economy.

One of Sam's success stories was on Great Island in Fiordland. There, A24s eradicated all the stoats and DOC is now just managing "the swimmers", using automatic lure pumps, which last about four to six months, depending on conditions, Sam says.

Locally, along the Upper Waioeka, "we have just put in 26 kilometres of A24s, every 100 metres up the river", Sam says.

"When I was a kid, there were whio the whole way through that river."

The previous week Sam and one of his uncles, a dairy farmer from Te Puke, went up the river and his uncle cried because there were no whio to be seen.

It's hoped the new trap line will protect the remnant of the population. Previous examples of successful trapping show that whio populations can bounce back.

Sam has seen this happen in the Kaimanawas, Tongariro and Fiordland – "you put in a single trap line and you go from seven pairs to 27 pairs in five years; from two individuals to 14 in one season."

He says you have to be strategic about trapping. The three keys to success in duck habitats are:

▪ **Seasons:** Ducks are susceptible to stoat predation twice a year, during nesting and moulting. To protect whio, Sam has A24s set up year-round but only changes the gas and lure just before nesting season – "I know I've got four months to get those chicks away" – and again before moulting season in February and March, when the adults can't fly.

▪ **Spacing:** Sam sets traps at 100 metres apart for stoats and 50 metres apart for rats.

▪ **Placement:** It's important to place traps where the predators are. For example, rats are really scared of ruru (morepork) and hawks. They will head for cover so put traps on a tree under a bit of vegetation. Place traps for stoats on their travel routes – for example, the ridges and spurs along rivers.

He says don't get disheartened if numbers of predators don't decline.

"Wetlands are a circle and you are protecting a margin around the outside. You will always get constant reinvasion.

"All you are trying to do is stop the stoats doing circuits around your wetland. We want a stoat to walk into a trap before they walk into a duck's nest.

"Lots of people trap both sides of a river but you don't need to. You only need to set one side of the river because stoats are wired to pick up food and will swim across to get it."

Many DU members are already using the Goodnature traps, and Sam was able to troubleshoot some issues.

He said Goodnature could also service traps, replacing seals, etc, if the traps were no longer working effectively.

Sam also provided tips on trap placement. The usual height is about 12cm up a tree or upright structure though if there are weka, which are really good at jumping, around or the possibility of flooding – the traps don't like water and silt – he places them up to 1.2m high.

"Stoats have no problem running up walls or trees," he says.

Goodnature makes lures for the A24s, but they can also take lure cups. Suggestions from the floor for bait included cat food, kahawai, fresh rabbit and peanut butter.

Sam says choice of bait depends on how often you service your traps. If you do it every week, fresh rabbit, which has a lifespan of about a week, is good but if you only get around the traps once a month, a long-life lure is best.

Sam wrapped up by saying the whio project in the Upper Waioeka would be grateful for any support from outside the region.

Sam Gibson

DU's trip to a 'magic place'

The wetland at Nick's Head Station at Muriwai, south of Gisborne, is a world-leading example of positive human interactions with the land, and of what vision and money can achieve.

General manager Kim Dodgshun has worked at Nick's Head Station since 1994, eight years before the current owners bought the property. "They inherited me and we've worked well as a team ever since," Kim says.

When Kim arrived, the land that is now the main wetland was being grazed with livestock roaming all over, and with cows wandering along the beach. "It was nothing like it is today."

Early on, Kim had the idea of creating a bird reserve on the property and ran it past wildlife ecologist and former Wildlife Service ranger Sandy Bull.

The plan, however, hit a snag when the owners at the time said they did not wish to proceed with something that would not produce financial returns.

Undeterred, in 1995 Kim managed to obtain a $15,000 Natural Heritage Fund grant from the local district council and, with Sandy's help, starting trapping. "We caught a big polecat down on the beach," Kim says.

They also put up "No shooting" signs – it had been a popular duck shooting site, fenced off 15 hectares and planted flax around the outside. The birds flocked in, bringing seeds from other wetlands in the area and the plants began to grow.

The story of the wetland took another turn in 2003 when the farm changed hands after the Overseas Investment Commission approved an application from a US billionaire to buy the land, in what turned out to be a 12-month-long process.

He had first visited the farm in 2002 and embraced Kim's plans to create a wildlife reserve.

The final step for the sale was to gain iwi approval. Kim says communication was the key and once the iwi knew what the owner planned to do with the property, the deal was approved.

In response to Kim's plans, the owner said, "Let's make this bigger and better", and brought out renowned landscape architect Thomas Woltz from the US to design the wetland, with advice from Kim and Sandy.

Kim Dodgshun explains how the wetland was created.

DU members head along the jetty to hear Kim and Sandy's talks.

A previous manager who had farmed there for 35 years had set in place the foundations to drain the saltwater from the low lying areas. He put up a netting fence on the beach which collected all the driftwood and storm debris, building a natural wall with sand.

Next, he added another fence on top of that and planted it out with marran grass and other plants.

Later, in the 1960s, a drain was put in to get rid of the remaining saltwater but a narrow, shallow channel remained, with 700 acres of catchment running into it. In summer it dried up. The surrounding paddocks were all very wet with no drainage.

Kim had already planted some native blocks but as Thomas Woltz learnt more about New Zealand and its trees, "the master plan was to revert the land back to how it was 700 or 800 years ago, with a profitable farming operation, back when there were no predators and the land was covered in native trees", Kim says.

Planting began in earnest in 2003 and now there's almost 700,000 natives on the property – coastal varieties with "the big fellas" – rimu, matai and totara – planted among them.

The wetland project began in 2005 – plans were drawn up, the land was surveyed and work began, initially with six diggers.

Kim had warned the contractors that trucks with wheels and 20-tonne diggers

wouldn't work in the boggy terrain, but they brought them in anyway and all of them got stuck.

Which left the six smaller diggers. Firstly, a wall was put in to stop the saltwater coming in over the original wall at the beach. "We put in some more small ponds up the valley and worked our way west."

Deep channels – "about 2½-cars deep" – were dug out to ensure the wetland had water year-round.

The material excavated from the channels was made up of a layer of Plasticine-like blue tacky soil sandwiched between shells and "rubbishy" soil. The blue material was used to seal the walls or build the islands, while the "rubbishy" soil helped shape them.

Diggers scraped up the topsoil which was carted on to the shaped islands by trucks with tracks to prepare them for planting.

However, when they came to seal the western side of the wetland, they ran out of the blue soil so plastic liner had to be used in some sections.

"We pegged out all the walls and had three diggers in a row, one digging the holes, another with a big roll of the plastic, working at snail pace, unrolling it, with a third quickly filling it in before the walls collapsed," Kim says. Thankfully, it worked.

"Once it was all done, we had to pump all the water out. "We got council permission to pump it out into the sea over sheets of corrugated iron to protect the beach."

In the process, they found some old kahikatea, big, old stumps of trees, leading them to believe that, pre-settlement, it must have been an old kahikatea swamp.

"There are some stumps on the beach visible at low tide that have been dated at more than 8000 years old," Kim says.

As well as dealing with the challenges presented by the terrain, during planting, they encountered another problem.

Holes were dug with an augur, and some crystal rain put in with soil over the top before the tree was planted with a fertiliser capsule.

Later they went back to one of the islands to put in stakes to mark where the native plants were but found that most of them had been pulled out.

"All the rats were just pulling them out and eating the fertiliser caps. They were having a ball."

The answer was to use about 100 bait stations with Pestoff rat bait, from Farmlands, and "there were bucketloads of rats coming in," Kim says. It's slowed down now.

"That was just another little challenge. I can't believe how well the plants have grown."

Now the islands are all finished and planted with native trees – 10,000 trees to the hectare. On the hills, it's 2500 to the hectare.

The wetland has two 1ha islands and several smaller ones. All the islands are in place of valleys, which was Thomas Woltz's plan, imagining erosion coming down and islands forming.

At its peak, 25 people were working on the project. The labour was all local and all the trees were sourced from the Muriwai area. "Now the locals come to get our native trees," Kim says.

The farm is 3300 acres in total with nine kilometres of coastline. It runs Angus cattle, 285 breeding cows and 3300 sheep. This is likely to be reduced to 3200, with the aim of getting more out of fewer stock, by doing things better, "by selling them when they are ready to go and when the market is ready to take them".

"We are looking at the possibility of going down the regenerative farming path, though the steep contours of Nick's Head Station add to the challenge – more investigations in this area are required."

Facial eczema is a problem so the farm focuses on sourcing facial eczema-resistant stock. The farm uses dicalcic phosphate fertiliser, not straight superphosphate, and nitrogen, which was seldom used, has not been used for about eight years.

The station employs a staff of 16, who look after conservation, including a former DOC worker who does trapping and twice-weekly night shoots by bike, general hands, stockmen, groundsmen, a secretary, a citrus manager and assistant, who have 50 hectares of citrus to tend, plus contractors.

Kim pauses, distracted by something that needs fixing. "Everything we do on this place, we got to maintain it.

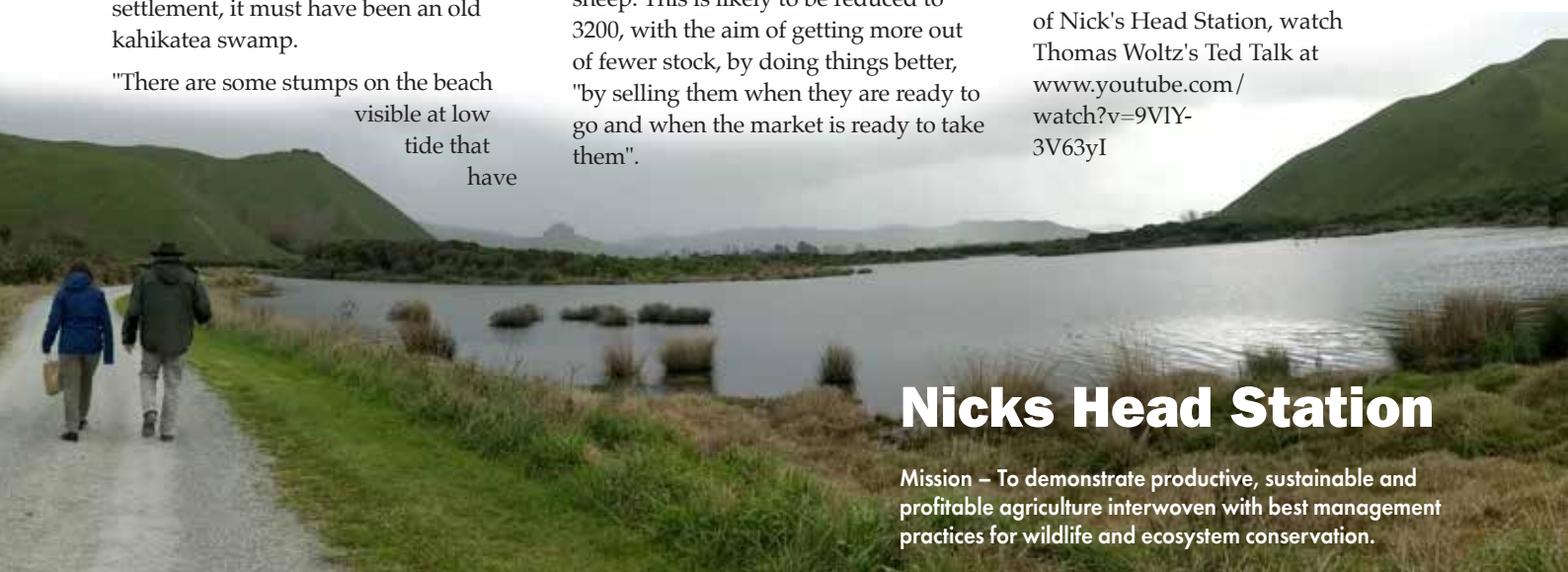
"We've got this magic place that we've all had something to do with and created what it is today. We can't let it go back. We can't let wild pine trees start growing.

"We've got convolvulus – we've got to keep taking it out – we've got kikuyu grass on the farm that we have been spraying, we have got to keep at it. "

"The old place never sleeps."

- The bus trip to Nick's Head Station was organised by Kees and Kay Weytmans, who provided delicious, nutritious packed lunches. Kees' efforts to make sure everyone was comfortable during the talks on the jetty by providing hay bales to sit on were also much appreciated.

- For more on the transformation of Nick's Head Station, watch Thomas Woltz's Ted Talk at www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VlY-3V63yI



Nicks Head Station

Mission – To demonstrate productive, sustainable and profitable agriculture interwoven with best management practices for wildlife and ecosystem conservation.

Mission impossible: 'They said we couldn't do it'

Contractors wildlife expert Sandy Bull and Ecoworks' Steve Sawyer bring birdlife into Nick's Head Station and look after the 2-metres-high predator-proof fence, which protects 35 hectares of native bush and a wide array of wildlife.

About 60 tuatara were translocated from Stephens Island in Marlborough Sounds, and now, safe within the fence, their numbers have grown to more than 100.

There are also about 180 nesting gannets, about 55 to 60 grey-faced petrels, sooty and fluttering shearwaters and even an arctic skua has been seen within the fence.

"Initially, they said we couldn't do it," Sandy says.

To attract the seabirds, Steve smothered the rocks with white paint to look like guano and installed a sound system to replicate the calls of various seabirds. The gannets have been nesting there for several years now.

Sandy says there are plans to translocate saddlebacks and giant weta. He has also been involved in translocating pāteke to the wetland and about 200 have been released.

He says they are now moving around the region and another survey of bird numbers is due but it is clear the pāteke are doing well.

Sandy told DU members that he was well aware of the wealth of knowledge within DU and members' involvement with wetlands around New Zealand.

"There are farm ponds all over Gisborne attracting wildlife but we are very short of big wetlands. This one [at Nick's Head Station] is a joy to behold."

Clockwise from top left: Sandy Bull and Kees Weytmans; Ross Cottle helps with the hay bales; looking for Captain Cook: Neil Candy and John Bishop; Young Nick's Head.

Some of the visiting and resident birds:

- pukeko – numerous (some have been culled)
- paradise shelducks
- shags – black, pied, little, little black and kawau
- white faced herons;
- bittern
- pied stilts
- kōtuku
- royal spoonbills
- godwits – spotted recently
- a nesting colony of black billed gulls, the world's rarest gull
- black-fronted terns – spotted once
- dab chicks
- NZ scaups – in low numbers (the water may be too turbid)
- graylards – interbred mallard and grey teal
- grey teals
- shovelers
- Canada geese
- penguins – a colony on the beach
- oystercatchers
- pāteke
- gannets
- petrels
- Arctic skuas
- fluttering and sooty shearwaters.

Lockdown's silver lining

***Flight* magazine** asked Pukaha/ Mt Bruce's captive breeding ranger Tara Swan how the wildlife centre coped during lockdown.

"Lockdown at Pukaha was lovely actually! Obviously businesswise, like everywhere, it was a bit of a big change, but for the wildlife, it was like a break for them. I think nature enjoyed it." she said.

The stand-out moment during lockdown was the arrival of a kōkako pair, walking the tracks daily and visiting the rangers.

"I think the lack of visitors walking around inspired the birds to come and check out what we do every day.

"We had a stunning orange- fronted kākāriki clutch raised and fledged during the lockdown (actually due for release in September, depending on how this new Covid update plays out)", Tara said.

During the first week of lockdown, four kākā juveniles from the centre's Aviary 3 pair were released into the forest.

This was ideal timing as it meant they could get used to the feed stations and other kākā without the distraction of people too. They still hang around the feed stations so are easy to spot.

"Once lockdown was over, we sent two kiwi chicks to Sanctuary Mountain for release and four red-crowned kākāriki juveniles were released at Cape Sanctuary.

"Nine yellow-crowned kākāriki went to Nelson, where some stayed for some new captive breeding pairs and the rest were released on Puangiangi Island.

"So yes, it was a bit mad! During and after as so many bird transfers were delayed due to the travel restrictions. Thankfully it was during the quiet season," Tara said.

From top left, one of the orange-fronted kākāriki which fledged during lockdown; the curious pair of kōkako; a yellow-crowned kākāriki juvenile before its release into the wild.

Predator control goes on hold

The Department of Conservation had to suspend all non-essential services, including predator control programmes, during Covid-19 Level 4, which began on March 5.

But the timing of the lockdown in many ways couldn't have been better, Brent Beaven, Predator Free 2050 manager for DOC, said.

Most birds weren't breeding, and most of the pests weren't breeding either, so he didn't expect to see a massive rise in pest numbers.

Predator control activities on public land were able to resume from May 13 when New Zealand moved to Level 2.

There was more good news the next day, with Predator Free 2050 receiving an extra $76 million ($19 million a year) in the 2020 Budget, enabling it to co-fund new predator free projects around the country.

Thousands of hunters, however, had to wait until May 23, when the delayed duck hunting season began. It was extended until July 12.

In many places, wildlife appeared to enjoy the break from the madding crowds.

In Dunedin, the Otago Museum's Tropical Forest, home to hundreds of tropical butteries, staff reported some unusual cheeping sounds.

They discovered the forest's zebra finches, apparently for the first time, were raising chicks, partly because of the break from the usual stream of human visitors.

In Australia, scientists took advantage of the lack of maritime activity to learn the language of the Burrunan dolphins, a rare species which live in the Gippsland Lakes in Victoria. The scientists set up acoustic sound monitoring and, for the first time, were able to listen to what the dolphins had to say.

Further afield, there were reports of wildlife occupying abandoned spaces.

These included a herd of wild goats taking over a town in north Wales, pink flamingos flourished in Albania, and wild boars roamed the streets of Haifa, Israel.

Two nights west of the spiral

The winners of a DU auction for a Blue Duck Station experience had a ball. **John Dermer** reports.

Dan Steele tells John and Diny Dermer the story of his new bridge: The old bridge was damaged in a rainstorm and had to be replaced so Dan contacted his insurance company to be told it was not insured under his policy. They next asked him if he would do an advert for the company (Dan was a Nuffield Scholar). He agreed but was surprised when a whole team, about 20 people, turned up with all their cameras and other assorted gear. They asked Dan, on camera, if he was happy with the insurance company. He said, "No, he wasn't", because they had turned him down on replacing the bridge. "Hold on", said the cameraman, "I'll sort this". The boss on site reckoned it was cheaper to replace the bridge than have the camera crew hanging around, so Dan got his bridge.

It's quite a drive! You turn west at Raurimu, famous for its railway spiral, and travel a windy gravel road till you are sure you are lost. When you come to a gate across the road, you've arrived.

The station buildings, including the Blue Duck Cafe, sit on a piece of flat land between the confluence of the Retaruki and Whanganui rivers. Our host, Dan Steele, has bought nearby farms as they had buildings on them for the burgeoning staff that his tourism business needed.

The lovely old homestead that his parents, ("the olds") live in is at the end of the road and has magnificent views up and down the Whanganui. The garden has some very old trees – oak, beech plus many fruit trees.

Kees and Kay Weytmans and Diny and I had arrived for our two-day stay. We had bought this at the DUNZ auction last winter and as we had had such a good time on Brian and Wendy Simmons' boat the previous summer, we thought we would try Dan's Blue Duck Station experience this time.

We stayed in a sunny three-bedroom, three en suite lodge with communal kitchen, large dining table plus masses of outdoor seating. The rooms were fitted with quirky handles, hooks and knobs.

Unfortunately we forgot to bring a gun to shoot the rabbits!

Dan and Sandy farm Blue Duck Station and neighbouring Retaruki Station, which they lease from his parents.

The total area is 7000 acres (2800 hectares) carrying 5000 ewes and replacements. It's mostly steep country – steep to overhanging for much of it, with bush and manuka scrub covering a lot of it.

There is some easier country on it but I have to confess that I have been thoroughly spoilt running a small nearly flat farm for a long time now (actually 46 years). Dan, you can keep your hills!

A pukatea at Blue Duck Station.

The gorges are deeply incised with sheer papa sides, often showing evidence of a catastrophic rainstorm which lashed the area about two years ago. Not much use for stock water but great for whio.

Dan showed us around in a well-used side-by-side. The tracks are pretty good and he is a mine of information about the area, its history and the people who have lived here.

The station is right beside the Whanganui River, rich in Māori history and the major highway for many years.

One of the houseboats, floating hotels of the time, finished its days moored in the Retaruki just below Dan's parents' homestead.

We saw a beautiful stand of kahikatea (white pine), with other species, rimu, miro, matai and pukatea, growing as well. Dan told us about the well-appointed cave that someone had stumbled on in a sheer face nearby.

Mohawk Joe was growing pot on a well tended area nearby and living in the cave. The police just laughed when they saw it. Dan still says hello to Mohawk when he sees him.

The best story was from wife Sandy. She had only visited Blue Duck a couple of times but wrote in a visitor's book that she was coming back soon. To marry Dan!

Dan loves this country. He has just bought a block of 750 acres with about a third of it grazable. The rest is in native bush and scrub.

Not a block that was going to make him much money from farming but Dan had spotted a knob with a view of the mountains, Ruapehu, Ngāuruhoe, Tongariro.

This was reasonably accessible by ATV and he has a very good chef, Jack Cashmore, who happens to be a carpenter as well.

Hence they had the bright idea to build a

high-class restaurant and three chalets up there. The plan is to have top-class fine dining and for people to enjoy a back-country experience.

Typically, Dan has gone half-shares with the chef in the venture. They hope to finish the complex by September. Give Dan a call as it will be fabulous. I hope this venture goes well for them.

Dan's business is now heavily slanted towards tourism. (We hardly heard a New Zealand accent the whole time we were there [pre-lockdown]).

He employs 12 people, many involved in tourism, so he was not a "happy chappy" to get the news about Covid-19.

This shut down the tourism side virtually overnight so he is now dependent on his farming and mānuka honey production, with carbon farming from the mānuka and some plantations which have been planted.

One very rough looking block had been planted in redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) on advice from Horizons. (I wonder how they will perform on this site.) Another block is in radiata so carbon farming should help through this rough patch.

The map in the Blue Duck Cafe showing Dan's trap lines is very impressive. He has predator traps all over the place. More than a thousand of them.

He is great man for doing deals with people who stay there. Free accommodation if you do a few days' rebaiting traps.

Not a great job when you have to remove a very smelly hedgehog. Rats are the main capture at the moment but

After an exhilarating jet boat ride, from left, John, Dan, Diny and Kay.

A map on the wall of the cafe shows all the traps and bait stations.

Dan reckons he will never get rid of them.

We did see a pair of whio, happily sitting on rocks in the river, so all the effort he is putting into his predator control is obviously working.

A jet boat ride down the Whanganui was a highlight. The river is very low so Dan had to keep a sharp eye out for shallow rapids. Also for the many kayakers travelling downstream.

For those of you thinking the gray duck is on the way out, you should see the number on the Whanganui. They are plentiful.

I noticed the same thing many years ago in my own jet boating days, so the numbers seem to be hanging in there.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Where are the swans?

Royal swans are on the wane and DU Director Will Abel wants suggestions about getting hold of some breeding stock. Please contact Will on 06 362 6675.

More Flights scheduled

From next year, *Flight* magazine will be published three times a year in February, June and October. Submissions of stories, photos, story ideas and suggestions should be emailed to Alison Murray at flightdunz@gmail.com.

DU rep appointed

Director Neil Candy has been appointed as a member of the Game Bird Habitat Trust Board, which distributes funding to develop and enhance the wetland habitats of game birds and other wetland inhabitants. He attends his first meeting as a board member this month in Dunedin where 12 applications for funding will be reviewed.

Queen's Birthday Honour

Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust's wildlife manager Anne Richardson, who is based at Peacock Springs, Christchurch, has been made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June, for services to wildlife conservation.

What's on the telly

DU directors Dan Steele and Jim Law both appeared on TV in August. TVNZ's Matty McLean was given a tour of Blue Duck Station by Dan on the *Breakfast* show, and Jim and Marilyn Law's Palliser Ridge Station was featured on *Country Calendar*.

This episode can be watched online at www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/country-calendar/episodes/s2020-e23 though you may need to sign up first (it's free).

Rainy day reading

New Zealand Geographic has an extensive online feature on wetlands. Go to www.nzgeo.com/stories/wetlands.

A grey teal takes a close look at a Ltl Acorn camera; a Moultrie camera set up on a mallard box.

Game cameras reveal secret world

Auckland-Waikato Fish & Game wildlife manager **John Dyer** has discovered a secret world of wildlife.

This article is to share the idea of how useful game cameras (aka trail cameras) are in exploring what is happening at your favourite pond or wetland.

Put a game camera in front of a nest box, a ground nest, a trap you've set, or perhaps at a feeder or roosting log, and see what is using it night and day. There will be a lot more going on than you would credit.

Using such a camera is an invitation into a secret world of wildlife. This increased understanding will also help you in management decisions about your pond and its inhabitants.

Game cameras take coloured pictures during the day when they are set off by movement. You can also set them to take short videos or a combination.

These digital images are stored on a SD card, so you can download, store and share them.

At night, game cameras switch to infra-red and you get black and white photos. The better types have "black flash" which means that not only do critters generally not see the flash, but neither do humans.

That can be handy to get repeat candid photos, but also to let you know who and what is about.

A flash that cannot be seen reduces the risk of theft as does camouflaging the camera and/or buying either a lockable security cable or metal "bear-box" for it.

The bear-box has to be unlocked to get at the attaching screws, though these boxes are often a bit pricey. A lockable braided cable, which I prefer, can be looped around a tree trunk or fence post and back through moulded slots in the camera housing.

The Moultrie M-50i camera, secured with a Python lock.

A camo-finish camera and cable are easier to conceal than shiny, plain-finish ones. In some cases, you will need to import to get what you want.

Game cameras seem to all have the same ¼-inch-20 UNC thread in their base to accept any camera mount, or even a makeshift mount you have made using the same bolt and some wood.

This allows you to position the camera right next to such things as nest boxes, even if a handy tree isn't nearby.

Any movement sets off a photo and it might be the grey teal making sure the inside of the box is empty before risking getting in.

Or it might be an interaction between a pair of ducks and a would-be nest competitor.

It might also be an interloper such as a sneaky myna bird, trying to take over the nest box. The camera records the time and date so you can get a picture (pardon the pun) of what is about and when.

Some duck activities, such as preening on an installed roosting log, seem to only happen at night. And what is that on the log? OMG, it's a water rat!

You'll be surprised to observe feral cats you never see in daylight or the stoat you never caught passing by your trap.

You'll certainly reappraise how many of these vermin are around and what your trapping effort should be to counter this.

I found, for instance, possums reaching in and helping themselves to my rat baits in a home-made poison box. It didn't seem to do them much harm either.

A change of bait might have fixed that, but instead I added a baffle that meant the possum's arm just wasn't long enough any more. You might say they were baffled!

Seeing a stoat go past a trap is pretty annoying, but it starts you thinking; why? Perhaps a better technique is required.

For instance, a little turned-over soil by the trap entrance suggests rabbits have been burrowing and is a good attractant.

Rubbing a little of this soil in your hands will help hide human scent before handling the trap or bait. Stoats and weasels aren't particularly afraid of the sight of humans, but for some reason they are very wary of our scent.

My trapping diary suggests that it takes three days for my unmasked scent to wear off enough for a stoat to visit a rebaited trap.

I was surprised to see pheasants in my trap pictures until I burrowed into the pin oak leaf litter and found acorns.

I'd never known these trees to seed, but it was just that the acorns were either quickly gobbled up or covered up. The camera alerted me to this.

Pictures of a feeder will show you wild ducks that perhaps you didn't know you had and the manner in which they jostle for space might suggest shifting feeders apart will reduce competition.

One hunter I know had some great photos of Canada geese coming to his feeder, but also some bloke's face right up close having a good look at it too.

"Who the heck is that?", he asked me. Luckily old Stan was only curious and not up to anything worse.

One spot on my pond has a mallard nest each year, so I set up a game camera to monitor her success. I was pretty shocked to see a pūkeko and then a hawk standing right alongside the concealed nest.

She must have been well camouflaged and keeping dead still, or perhaps she was quite intimidating. Either way she brought her brood off yet again, (when eggs have hatched, and are not predated, the thin membranes lining the inside shell fragments are semi-detached).

But we have also used game cameras to catch hawks in the act of eating duck eggs – coming back for every single one.

Hawks by law are deemed semi-protected but, in some situations, such as

where native bird recovery is being done on private land, that status is waived.

So, consider adding a game camera to your pond or wetland. Just take it from me, don't point it at a railway line unless you want to know the train schedule.

On a windy day, if there's a few branches in front of it, you'll have 100 shots of them swaying left and another 100 right.

While these cameras are normally quite rainproof, if you have a flood, you might not be so lucky. Place them above any likely tide line.

And if you tire of your game camera, rest assured, they have good second-hand value too. Though my guess is you'll be

From top: A hawk lands on a grey teal box. John says game cameras have caught hawks eating duck eggs; a possum mama and baby wander past a camera; the bait box with the baffle to deter adult possums.

trading up to a better version with more megapixels as your new hobby grows.

Have fun.

WHAT'S ON THE MARKET

Advice re buying a game camera:

Larger shooting shops such as Hunting & Fishing usually have a selection to match your requirements. I prefer camo to avoid potential public land theft and imported a camo Python security strap – and saved a heap by doing so.

In safer areas, the supplied nylon strap will do. A black flash is a feature definitely worth paying more for. If the camera does not have a memory card, then I'd suggest buying an SD card of about 8-16GB. This refers to how much recording space it has, the higher the number, the more space and expense. You'll want a way to connect the SD card into your computer. On older computers, you can do this directly.

For newer laptops, you may need a small card holder with a USB lead attached such as those sold by Stationery Warehouse. You can now download all your pictures.

In the field, the easiest way to see what you have is to put the SD card into a digital camera. In particular, you'll see if the game camera isn't pointing at the object of interest square-on or cutting heads off, etc.

They usually have a digital display in the back of the game camera, but you often have to turn it around to see this, which defeats the whole aiming purpose. Game cameras usually also have an aim feature that you can set and wave your hand around. If it is in the monitored area, the camera will flash red back to you. If not, it won't. So you can tell if all of the subject will be in the picture, for instance, both ends of a roosting log.

Buy good rechargeable batteries and a large charger that takes them all at once, perhaps from a tech store. That will save time and soon pay for itself. There's lots of online advice too.

Kōtuku at the breeding site north of Ōkārito.
Photos: *Ross Cottle*

Close encounters with kōtuku

Ross Cottle reports on his visit to a white heron colony on the West Coast.

On a trip around the top half of the South Island last summer, a friend who lives in Greymouth suggested that I visit New Zealand's only white heron (kōtuku) breeding site, just north of Ōkārito.

The tour operator is White Heron Sanctuary Tours, based in a little town called Whataroa, about an hour south of Hokitika.

The tour starts with a 15-minute minibus ride followed by a 20-minute jet boat ride.

This takes you along a small section of backwater, which is only about 100 metres long, and this is where the birds breed.

There is a viewing hide about 50 metres from the birds so you can get right up close to them.

The breeding season runs from about December to late February and you can see chicks in various stages of growth.

There were also royal spoonbills nesting as well as wood pigeons (kererū) close by.

The area is a Department of Conservation reserve, and White Heron Sanctuary Tours is the only tour company allowed to access the breeding colony.

It was one of the highlights of my trip.

Wetland restoration methods studied

Victoria University student Shannon Bentley is the recipient of DU's first Wetland Care scholarship.

Shannon, who is from Upper Hutt and Carterton, has a bachelor of science degree and is now studying for a master's in ecology.

She is looking at facilitating effective wetland restoration in the Wetlands for People and Place research group.

Shannon Bentley with Dr Stephen Hartley, Director of the Centre of Biodiversity & Restoration Ecology at Victoria.

"This project looks at wetland restoration in the Ruamahanga catchment, and my role in the project (in part) is to find the ecosystem services gained from wetland restoration," she says.

"This project has been an amazing opportunity to contribute to the Wairarapa's environment and clean up the Ruamahanga River.

"In the Wairarapa, farmers have been undergoing wetland restoration on private property. Farmers have used different restoration techniques to re-establish a wetland ecosystem," she says.

"Wetlands produce services such as water purification, flood abatement, carbon storage, and species habitat.

"My master's research asks how restoration, species diversity and ecosystem services interact.

"Specifically, I will ask how does restoration affect the biodiversity of plants and soil microbes? And how do biodiversity and restoration treatments affect the ecosystem services?

"With this information, I hope to be able to advise which wetland restoration techniques are effective at restoring ecosystem services."

Her goal is to quantify the gain in nutrient retention, flood abatement, carbon storage, and plant and microbe diversity in 18 restored wetlands of differing ages in comparison to 18 unrestored wetlands.

"By measuring how wetlands are functioning (via ecosystem services) after they have been restored, and looking at what restoration treatments are effective, this project will be able to determine how effective our current restoration efforts are, and which restoration techniques are working."

DU Director Jim Law says, of Shannon: "She is exactly the kind of person that our scholarships are directed at. She is a bright, passionate young Kiwi."

Shannon's supervisors are Dr Julie Deslippe, assistant director of the Centre of Biodiversity and Restoration Ecology at Victoria, Dr Stephanie Tomscha, head of the Wetlands for People and Place project and a postdoctoral research fellow at Victoria, and Ra Smith.

Ra Smith is an environmental iwi liaison for Shannon's iwi, Ngāti Kahungunu, and a whanaunga (relative). He is involved in the effort to clean up Lake Wairarapa.

wetland care NEWZEALAND

Wetland Care Scholarship

DUCKS UNLIMITED

Interested in studying wetland birds or wetland restoration?
A Wetland Care Scholarship could be for you!

BACKGROUND/PURPOSE

Wetland Care Research Scholarships are Ducks Unlimited-sponsored scholarships applicable to any student currently enrolled or affiliated with a New Zealand university.

Funds are aimed at encouraging and supporting students who wish to push the boundaries of what is known about wetland restoration and conservation.

Up to $20, 000 is available annually to cover up to four separate scholarships of $5000 each.

Funds can be used to support student living costs or cover the costs of equipment purchase, logistics and consumables.

CRITERIA

Applications will be accepted from students/researchers affiliated with universities interested in making a difference through wetland conservation.

Funding is aimed at student projects designed to facilitate better management of New Zealand wetlands or their environment. The student project must be based in New Zealand or be of direct benefit to New Zealand based on current wetland conservation issues.

Preference will be given to applications that demonstrate some of the following criteria:

- projects of direct benefit to New Zealand based on current wetland conservation issues
- innovative thinking that pushes the boundaries of what is known about New Zealand wetland conservation
- research on native threatened wetland bird species
- research with clear objectives and measurable outcomes
- research with a strong wetland management and conservation applications.

VALUE

Wetland Care will award up to four scholarships annually in two funding rounds.

Funds will be paid in one lump sum to successful candidates upon completion of the milestones agreed at the time the scholarship is accepted.

INTERESTED? WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Please email swampbird.research@gmail.com with your questions or to request an application pack.

Terms and conditions are also available on the Ducks Unlimited NZ website, www.ducks.org.nz.

DU MEMBERSHIP FORM

☐ YES, I wish to join Ducks Unlimited as a member OR ☐ I wish to renew my membership

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....

E-mail .....

DUCKS UNLIMITED NEW ZEALAND INC.
For Wetlands and Waterfowl.

All subscriptions include GST.

☐ Junior (under 16) $10
☐ Contributor $60
☐ Family $70
☐ Business $110
☐ Life (one payment) $3000
☐ Bronze Sponsor $90
☐ Silver Sponsor $160
☐ Gold Sponsor $310

Note: Bronze, silver and gold sponsorships include the membership fee of $60 and the balance is received as a donation, which is tax deductible.

Please pay by internet banking, credit card or online at ducks.org.nz under 'Supporter Options'.

Internet banking: Ducks Unlimited NZ, account 02-0312-0038729-00. Use the code DUNZAPP and your initial and surname as the reference.

Credit card: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard Number ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Expiry date ☐☐☐☐

Scan this form and email to info@ducks.org.nz or post to Ducks Unlimited, PO Box 165, Featherston 5740

We deliver and advocate for effective wetland restoration, development, research and education; and support the preservation of threatened waterfowl and the ethical and sustainable use of wetlands.