

# Flight

ISSUE 190



JUNE/JULY 2024

**49th AGM & Conference  
Wairio plantings revisited  
A dive into the archives**

It was a conundrum. Were these hunters preserving wetlands purely to increase the number of ducks that they could blast out of the sky come duck shooting season?

That was the accusation thrown at me by friends when they heard I was heading off to make a *Country Calendar* programme on Ducks Unlimited NZ.

I headed first to Dunedin to meet an apparently grumpy old bachelor, “just a broken-down old rabbit”, as he described himself with a grin.

Horrie Sinclair had been chief ranger of the Otago Acclimatisation Society where, in 6½ years, he brought 198 individual charges before a magistrate or judge and obtained 171 convictions.

He reckoned he was asked to leave because he caught too many chiefs and not enough Indians. He then spent 20 years as a field officer with pest destruction boards.

He’d obtained an option to purchase 315 hectares of swampy farmland because as he explained, “I was a duck shooter but didn’t have a place to shoot. I’d always dreamt of owning my own place.”

As I suspected, I thought to myself, a little bitterly. Then I saw what Horrie had achieved in the previous 20-plus years, turning that swamp into one of the finest wetlands in New Zealand.

It was a magical place with tranquil waters reflecting a thousand flax bushes which are home to around 67 species of wildlife and waterfowl.

Horrie had wanted a place for wildlife to live and breed and an area to provide sport during the hunting season.

To the outsider, these two aims can seem mutually exclusive but as I learnt it is often the hunter with his detailed knowledge of his quarry and its habitat who, outside the hunting season, does more for conservation than some of the ‘do-gooders’ with their rather vague ideals.

Horrie had steadfastly refused to drain his land at the requests, then demands, of his neighbours. Eventually he was threatened with court action under the 1908 drainage Act. It went all the way to the High Court before the law came down on the side of Horrie’s precious swamp.

He reckons he was the most hated man in the Taieri for a while.

That was the penalty for being ahead of his time but now conservation is no longer a dirty word, Horrie is considered something of a hero.

While I was there, I saw that the 50 nest boxes he’d erected for grey teal, and clusters of shoveler and scaup.

Understanding DU’s aims and history, Horrie subsequently made the decision to give his magnificent wetland into the care of DU so it could be protected after he had gone.

Ducks Unlimited NZ was founded in 1974 by a small group of conservationists concerned that not only were New Zealand’s native waterfowl not receiving the attention they deserved but were declining.

I learnt that DU’s aims are to preserve, restore and maintain wetland habitats. I learnt that many of their members propagate and preserve New Zealand’s rare waterfowl.

One of DU’s members (Chris Thomas) made a film about the last pristine river to flow down Ruapehu which supported a significant population of endangered whio or blue duck. The river was threatened by a hydroelectric scheme but after the film was shown in Parliament, the scheme was cancelled and the whio were saved.

Roll on a few decades and I have now had a few years as a director of DU. In the intervening decades I’ve learnt that some members travel the country to collect mute swans to give to other members to raise in order to prevent their decline in numbers.

I’ve learnt that our directors act as consultants to people who hope to build a wetland. I’ve learnt that wetlands purify water and act as carbon sequestration.

Only this morning, I hear on the news that a farmer from Katikati has moved his polluted stream from a score of 2 out of 10 to 9 out of 10 by judicious use of wetlands to filter his water.

I’m just a greenhorn but my fellow directors and members have accomplished extraordinary goals in conservation and many of them have garnered awards.

I salute them. For me, the conundrum has been solved.

**Adrienne Bushell**  
DUNZ Director



- P3-6** 49th AGM and Conference reports
- P7** Measuring tree carbon at Wairio
- P8** Lake Braemore, an exercise in perseverance
- P9-12** David Smith dives into the archives
- P13** Greeting from Henry Lickers
- P14** Waituna gets clean bill of health

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**Cover:** A pāteke, or brown teal, the focus of one of Ducks Unlimited NZ’s first projects, in 1975. See p11. **Photo Stefan Marks**

**Back:** A family of swans at Plimmerton, Wellington. **Photo Will Abel**

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### Editorial:

Contributions, including photographs and letters to the editor, are welcomed. Please send these to the editor before the next deadline, 12 September 2024, in time for the October/November issue.

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



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# 49th AGM and Conference



All present: The DUNZ Board and patrons: from left, Jim Campbell, Jim Law, Ross Cottle, Di Pritt, John Bishop, Neil Candy, John Dermer, Will Abel, Adrienne Bushell, Dan Steele and John Cheyne outside Homewood Storeroom.

## Time to take a bow, 50 years on

A wealth of experience in waterfowl and wetland conservation was to be found under one roof on Saturday, May 11, as Ducks Unlimited New Zealand met for its 49th AGM and Conference at the Copthorne Solway in Masterton.

DUNZ was founded 50 years ago and, for the first time in many years, the full Board and both co-patrons were all in attendance.

Several past board members and other early members also came to share memories and reflect on half a century of achievements.

### PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Ross Cottle welcomed everyone to 49th AGM and 50th anniversary of the establishment of DUNZ, with a special welcome to Co-Patrons Di Pritt and Jim Campbell.

He said: "DU was established at a time when waterfowl numbers in New Zealand were dropping alarmingly and I congratulate those far-sighted people who saw the need and acted accordingly.

"To name a few: the Piranis (Ian and Paul), Jack Worth, Neil Hayes, Bill Pritt, our own Jim Campbell and others – they showed the way and we thank them."

Ross also acknowledged the presence of past board members Glenys Hansen,



Dudley Bell and Ian Jensen, two of DU's first members back in 1974.



Andy Tannock and Neil Candy, trustees of the Game Board Habitat Trust.

Continued next page

# 49th AGM and Conference

from previous page

David Smith, Fred Bailey, and a founding director, Dudley Bell.

“These people were involved early. Dudley wrote the first *Flight* magazine back in 1974,” Ross said.

“DU has continued to support the development of wetlands but, as I said last year, the Department of Conservation and the regional councils do not make it easy, but hopefully the new Government can make some changes to help.

“There have been major changes in the Wairarapa with the local iwi being given back Lake Wairarapa along with the Wairio Wetland. We will have to wait and see how this affects us.”

Ross concluded by thanking William Abel, and his wife Jan, for helping to organise the AGM and conference, and also the Board for their input over the past 12 months.

## FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer John Bishop tabled his report, saying that although the information was basically the same, the Charities Commission now required it to be presented in a different way.

DU currently has 52 life members, 24 sponsor and 12 business members, 42 family and 52 contributor members.

Volunteer hours by board members were unchanged, at 1100, and volunteer hours spent on work at Wairio Wetland had risen from the previous year, from 620 to 700 hours.

*Flight* magazine is published three times a year and each costs about \$6000 to produce. The website was not attracting new members but it was being used as an information source, with almost 36,000 hits in the past year.

Total revenue for the year was \$63,015, down slightly from \$65,967. Expenses were also down to \$56,430 from \$75,081, ending the year with a \$6,585 surplus compared with a deficit of \$9,114 the previous year. It was noted that \$8000 raised at the AGM for Blue Duck Station was not included in the report.

Total assets at March 31, 2024 were \$32,247 compared with \$25,661 the previous year.

Life Member Fred Bailey suggested the life members who had helped launch DUNZ might be interested in making a voluntary donation and could be approached each year when subs were due.



David Smith acknowledges Glenys Hansen's 26-year-plus contribution as treasurer for the Waterfowl and Wetlands Trust.



Tallying up the auction results are Will and Jan Abel, under the careful eye of Ross Cottle, left, and John Bishop.



Duncan Sutherland, John Cheyne and Fred Bailey.



Auctioneer Dan Steele with his assistant and spotters, Will Abel, Neil Candy and John Bishop.

## **WATERFOWL AND WETLANDS TRUST**

David Smith said the trust had been dissatisfied with its previous fund manager and its funds had been transferred to a new adviser, Palmerston North-based Tailorednz Ltd, on September 16.

As at December 31, 2023, the trust assets were \$444,527, just under \$25,000 more than the year before.

The trust usually makes yearly payments to DU but last year's payment of \$38,000 only occurred this year in January, so it's likely "we will get a double hit" this year, he said.

Currently, there is just over \$422,000 in the trust, an increase of \$15,815 in the past five months, "a vast improvement" from the previous manager, which justified the move to Tailorednz, David said.

Olwyn Griffin was now a trustee and had taken up the reins as Treasurer.

David Smith acknowledged Glenys Hansen's enormous contribution as treasurer for over 26 years and presented her with some flowers.

## **SCHOLARSHIPS**

Jim Law said DUNZ was continuing with its scholarship programme to distribute up to \$20,000 a year to mainly master's students to continue their studies into wetlands and waterfowl.

Applications are called for twice a year, at the end of March and September.

Last year, of the four applications in September, two were successful: Jessica Wagner and Pearl Ruston, both from Victoria University.

Jessica is looking at rat responses to sounds and aromatic lures and Pearl is studying carbon and nitrogen sequestration in different types of wetlands – natural, restored and manmade.

In the March 2023 round, a student at Otago University had received a grant but has been unable to continue her research and DUNZ is now awaiting a refund from the university.

More recently, only one application was received for the March 31 round and this was declined because the primary focus was an engineering subject looking at the construction of waterborne drones, which could be used in a wetland, but also could be used in the current war between Russia and Ukraine.

The lack of applications continued to be puzzling but the programme will continue and, after discussions with Victoria University, Jim is optimistic that at least one application will be received in the next round.

## **ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Will Abel, John Dermer and Adrienne Bushell, whose two-year terms on the Board were up, were willing to continue and were re-elected unopposed.

## **WETLAND CARE**

DUNZ had not received many applications for wetland grants recently but two were pending.

## **ROYAL SWAN**

Pairs in captivity were not breeding so there no cygnets available. It was likely they were too close genetically and had stopped breeding. Ross said his pair sat on eggs for weeks but with no results.

## **WAIRIO WETLAND**

Jim Law said Wairio remains a premier project for DUNZ and the wetland was well recognised, particularly in the Wellington and Wairarapa region.

Last year's planting day was successful, with 900 trees, mostly kahikatea, planted in the southwest part of Wairio.

There was a good turnout, with both primary and college kids, and the South Wairarapa District Mayor Martin Connelly also came along. After a guided tour with Ross Cottle, the mayor said he was shocked that he didn't know such a wonderful wetland existed. "We could do more to promote the wetland," Jim said.

"Our predator control continues, by Steve Playle – he's a DUNZ member and works for Greater Wellington Regional Council. His very good work is going to be supplemented by toxic lures for mustelids and cats in the wetland," Jim said.

The Aorangi Restoration Trust, of which

Continued next page

# 49th AGM and Conference

## from previous page

Jim is a director, has been given \$700,000 by DOC for a three-year programme to increase trapping to protect the long-tailed bat and bittern. Part of that money is going to be used around Wairio, Boggy Pond and Matthews Lagoon to help protect bitterns.

GWRC has made no progress in constructing a fish passage at the northern end of Wairio where a diversion channel, to take the water flowing out of Matthews Lagoon and Boggy Pond and bring it back into Wairio Wetland, constructed by GWRC had failed badly and “water is now flowing back out of our wetland through that channel”.

“We have really struggled to try to get that repaired,” Jim said.

“We are now post-Treaty settlement and there is going to be a co-governance relationship with regard to Wairarapa Moana and we sit under that.”

Everything has to be signed off by local iwi and the communication between the council and the two iwi has not yet been clearly established. “We are experiencing huge delays. It’s very frustrating,” Jim said.

Another complication is DU’s management agreement with DOC which was established 17 years ago. It was initially for five years, then renewed every five years. When the Treaty negotiations for Wairarapa Moana began, DOC changed it to yearly extensions.

It has now given DU “a periodic tenancy” with a notice period of 20 days for either party.

After working on the Wairio project since 2005, Jim says, “We find this current arrangement ‘less than optimal’, which is being diplomatic.”

Because of the uncertainty, plans have not been finalised for this year but GWRC has agreed to give DU about \$5000 for trees, mainly kahikatea. DU had budgeted \$15,000 for work at Wairio in the past year and spent \$16,600.

It raised \$22,000 – \$10,000 from GWRC, \$7000 from the Pharazyn Trust, \$2000 from the Muter Trust and \$3000 from Rotary.



**Diana Chetwin with the hand-carved wooden loon that she won in the auction.**

Ross thanked Jim for his diplomacy in navigating difficulties with Wairio stakeholders.

## BITTERN REPORT

John Cheyne said the construction of Wairio Wetland by DU had produced quality bittern habitat.

He said it was the largest wetland project involving water-level management of its kind for over 30 years. The previous one was at Whangamarino in the Waikato.

A booming male has been recorded last spring for the first time at Wairio. Previously, John and his wife Gail had regularly detected bitterns on the

lakeside but not in the DU wetland project area.

But now that the vegetation in the DU project area was maturing and with a good food supply of young eels and bullies, bitterns were finding the habitat highly desirable.

The work that DU had done at Wairio was nationally significant, he said.

Four or five years ago DU funded bittern research by Emma Williams at Lake Whatuma which produced some significant information, which is going to “hold us in good stead for decades”, John said.

For example, 10 male bitterns were fitted with transmitters and eight of those birds were back on the same territories in the raupo around the edge of the lake the following year.

“Their site fidelity is very strong.”

## GENERAL BUSINESS

Ian Jensen questioned how DU might progress and said it needed people like the young shooters who were so concerned about the loss of habitat that they formed the organisation in 1974.



**From left, Wendy and Brian Simmons with Will and Jan Abel and, below, Deb and Paddy Chambers with Graeme Berry and Bangorn Phoooued at Homewood Storeroom, which served up a delicious and generous lunch after the field trip to Lake Braemore.**



# Research trees live to tell the story

Although cutting down and burning trees might be the most accurate way to work out how efficient they are at storing carbon, Cameron Johnson said he didn't think it would be wise to do that at Wairio Wetland, DU's long-term restoration project.

Cameron, a 2021 recipient of a \$5000 DU Wetland Care scholarship, was this year's AGM guest speaker.

Cameron's research at Stage 3 of Wairio for his master's of science degree involved estimating and comparing the amount of carbon sequestered in 10-year-old plantings at Stage 3 of Wairio.

The most efficient way of estimating how much carbon was stored in a tree was to cut it down and burn it, he said.

This was not an option so Cameron used allometric equations instead to estimate the carbon quantities of the trees.

Allometric equations meant taking measurable components of Wairio's trees (diameter at breast height, diameter at root collar, height, etc) and comparing them with trees elsewhere that had been burnt to calculate the amount of carbon stored.

The trees had been planted in 2010 by master's student Bridget Johnson who carried out a cost-benefit analysis of how different treatments affected tree species in a riparian zone. The treatments included varying spacing between trees, weed spraying v weed mats, and scraping off the topsoil around the trees.

The species, planted at spacings of either 0.75m or 1.5m, were kōhūhū, mānuka, Coprosma robusta, Coprosma propinqua, Olearia virgata, totara, kahikatea and cabbage trees.

Picking up from where Bridget had left off, Cameron set out to assess the carbon sequestration quantities in individual trees and patches of trees one decade



DU Director Jim Law, Cameron Johnson and founding director Dudley Bell at the AGM.

later, taking into account the treatments they had received.

He said some of the trees were now more than 5m tall.

Cameron's studies concluded that:

- The species that sequestered the most on average were kōhūhū (*Pittosporum tenuifolium*), mānuka and *Olearia virgata*.
- Cabbage trees were unaffected by most treatments.
- Totara and *Olearia virgata* grew better in the presence of kōhūhū and mānuka.
- Weed control via spraying may have been better, but the trend is inconclusive.
- Scraping topsoil resulted in poor plant growth, therefore less sequestration.
- *C. propinqua*, *O. virgata* and mānuka responded poorly to topsoil scraping, maybe due to water pooling in the depressions.
- Low-effort options were benign or

had a positive effect, eg, wider spacing, spraying, retaining topsoil.

- Planted kōhūhū has sequestration rates that are competitive with mānuka in a riparian environment.
- Topsoil scraping could be viewed as an analogue for poor soil quality.
- Patches where there was a lot of coprosmas among the plantings did not sequester as much carbon as patches of faster growing species. "The level of it was quite dramatic, more than I expected."

Cameron also contributed to the updating of the Wairio Wetland strategy document.

He now works as a carbon analyst for Carbon Forest Services, a consultancy that helps forest owners and landowners with the Emissions Trading Scheme to get land registered, collect carbon credits, forecast carbon issuance and ensure registered areas are legally compliant.

## IN BRIEF

### Message from Canada

Ducks Unlimited Canada has published a special message for DUNZ on its social media pages and in its *Conservator* magazine.

It said: "Ducks Unlimited Canada would like to extend our congratulations to Ducks Unlimited New Zealand (DUNZ), which was established in 1974 and is celebrating 50 years of wetland and waterfowl conservation this year!

"New Zealand is home to two of the rarest waterfowl species in the world: the

whio (blue duck) and the pāteke (brown teal).

"In addition to facilitating the creation, restoration and enhancement of many wetlands across New Zealand, the organisation sponsors Wetland Care scholarships for postgraduate students undertaking wetland research and delivers education resources to schools.

"Keep up the great work!"

### Giveaway winner

The winner of the book giveaway in the last issue of *Flight* magazine was Lyn

Watson, Palmerston North. Lyn has won a copy of the beautifully illustrated and highly informative *Blue Duck Station: The land, the rivers and the people*. Thanks to all those who entered the draw.

### Kahikatea in trouble

Kahikatea dieback is a new disease that has been affecting trees in the North Island. It is a relatively unknown disease and researchers are looking into the cause. People are being asked to contact their regional councils if they see any dead or unhealthy looking kahikatea (white pine).

# The dam that Len built



The site in January 2022



The DUNZ field trip at Lake Braemore, where Len French, centre right in bright blue, described his battle with bureaucracy.

After a couple of dry years about eight years ago, Len French, a farmer at Whareama, east of Masterton, realised he needed better irrigation to stay one step ahead of the climate.

On the DUNZ annual field trip, members had the privilege of seeing the results of Len's vision to create a park, with a dam for irrigation as its centrepiece.

They also learnt about the battle he had to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles that stood in his way.

The first step was to buy some land and, fortunately for Len, he met a neighbour, who was selling up, on his way to the real estate agent.

After a tender process, Len bought the retiring farmer's 600-hectare property.

"We kept 180ha, which added to the 200ha we already had and sold the rest.

"We have 140ha of very good fertile flats in the Whareama Valley, which is good quality soil and we wanted to make the maximum use of it," Len said.

The plan was to build a 13ha, 10m-deep dam, big enough to irrigate the 140ha plus some. A series of wetlands, including a wildlife reserve, would feed into the dam.

Three weeks into the project, in 2017, he was told he couldn't do it because it would not gain consent because of a small "wetland" within the dam area.

Len said it had probably been a wetland 100 years ago but had been drained by a previous owner. That drain had become blocked and water had built up again.

An ecologist confirmed Len's impression that it was not a significant wetland – a few eels and grasses, which would be more than compensated for by the proposed dam and wetland network.

However, Greater Wellington Regional Council told him that because Wellington did not have many wetlands, all wetlands in the region were "significant".

Being stubborn and with the belief that common sense would prevail, Len decided to fight his way through the council's maze of regulations.

"Along the way I came across a lot of 'experts' who have no vision, common sense and are completely out of touch with reality of the real world," Len said.

Finally the council allowed him to offset the "wetland" by creating additional wetlands elsewhere, which he had planned to do anyway, and meet other resource requirements, which included fencing three kilometres of stream and planting 7000 natives.



Len French

The resource consent process and extra work it required cost Len almost \$400,000.

When the plan went out for public consultation, the locals welcomed it, as did iwi and the district council, but Forest & Bird objected.

Len invited local Wairarapa Forest & Bird representatives to visit the site and they supported the project but their head office continued to oppose it.

Eventually after several approaches, Forest & Bird withdrew its objection with no explanation, but had delayed the project by six to eight months, and contractors who had been ready earlier were no longer available.

He found a good contractor, however, and work began in February 2022.

They worked 80-hour weeks from February to July, with three diggers and two dump trucks doing most of the work.

Though the average depth of the dam is about 10m, it can be taken down to 4m, leaving 150,000 cubic metres for wildlife.

Once built, the dam was expected to take two years to fill, but six months and a couple of cyclones later – Hale and Gabrielle – it was full. The dam rose 1.5m overnight during both of those events.

Len's vision to create a park includes a walkway around the whole complex with 1km already completed, and over summer, it will be open for water sports and camping.



# A dive into the DU archives

David Smith has been reading past *Flight* magazines and compiled a history which he presented at the AGM. This is an abridged version.

Ross Cottle rang me and asked if I would do a presentation on the history of DUNZ. He said you would all be sick of hearing from him.

No parameters were given. I have relied on the past copies of *Flight* which are posted on our website –there are 189 of them. After several days of reading, I would have happily listened to Ross speaking.

I also received notes from John Cheyne made after a discussion of several Board members which have been very helpful, and parts have been adopted into this address.

I am genuinely stunned as to how much we have achieved.

Ducks Unlimited NZ Incorporated was registered as an incorporated society on May 31, 1974. Norman Kirk was Prime Minister. He died three months later.

DUNZ's first publication was a newsletter in August that year. The name *Flight* was adopted for the second and subsequent magazines. Ian Pirani was our first president, his brother Paul, vice-president.

The other directors were: Dudley Bell, Neil Hayes, Trevor Voss and Henry Lickers. Apart from Dudley, who was 25 years old, they were all in their 30s.

Ian, an area manager for a large national company, was based in the Waikato. Paul was a development manager for a major property development group, Neil was a company director in Wellington and Trevor was a Taranaki farmer.

There was a history of involvement with acclimatisation societies for all four. Ian, Paul and Neil were past Wellington society councillors and were involved with clay target clubs and Neil, in particular, was a successful bird breeder.

Dudley was a wildlife officer in the Waikato. He spent six months with DU Canada observing their operation and reported back to the Board. Some of his reports were published in *Flight*.

Henry was 30, was an indigenous Canadian and his studies at Waikato University were sponsored by the Canadian Government and Indian Affairs Department.

His research on black swan was based at Lake Whangape. When asked why he took up wildlife research, he responded: "What else would an Indian do?"

He is quoted as saying: "I was a trapper and hunter on the reserve. Indians are said to have a better rapport with nature, and I believe that's true.

"It would be impossible for someone raised in the art of hunting and trapping not to care about the animals he depends on."

He aligned with Māori whom he saw as instinctively guiding and protecting the environment. See p13 for more on Henry.

The Board grew and its composition changed as is the nature of societies.

In September 1975, Glen Butts and Kelvin Mackie were directors and in December 1976, Jack Worth's resignation as a director is noted but his original appointment was not recorded in *Flight* magazine.

In 1977, Murray Dench and Sig Bronger joined the Board.

On July 7, 1979, the Board comprised Ian Pirani, Paul Pirani, Neil Hayes, Dudley Bell, Sig Bronger, Bud Jones, Gary Girvan, Peter McLeod, Di Pritt and Julian Nelson Parker. Some appointments are not recorded in *Flight*.

In July 1980, Paul Pirani took over from his brother Ian as president and Dudley Bell became vice-president. Ian stood down from the Board in 1986 and Paul in 1987.

At the AGM in 1981, Mark Newcomb, Jim Campbell and Allan Elliott came onto the Board.

In 1982, Neil Hayes replaced Dudley as vice-president and took over as *Flight* editor.

Cheryl Pirani, Paul's wife, was thanked in the December 1982 *Flight* for her eight years as editor after producing 32 issues. Cheryl was also secretary for the first five years.

Jim Campbell was president from 1985 to 1989 when Neil Hayes took over. Jim resumed the role of president when Neil stood down for health reasons in June 1991.



David Smith

In July 1992, David Rice became president and Jim Campbell became the first DUNZ chairman. This role was created to ensure the Board retained knowledge on current issues.

David Rice served until 1994 and, by this time, a two-year term for president had been established.

I took over the position until March 1996. Alan Wilks succeeded me, followed by Graham Gurr, Craig Worth (son of Jack Worth), then Neil Candy. In 2004 Neil was succeeded by Ross Cottle.

In 2006 the wheels fell off our succession plan. Ossie Latham, then vice-president, was unable to take up the presidency and Ross continued in the role until March 31, 2010 – a six-year stint.

On April 1, 2010, I again became president but in January 2012, I was sworn in as a District Court judge and, due to the possibility of conflict, was unable to continue as president and subsequently retired from the Board.

Ross Cottle was the only person then prepared to take over as president and he did so until John Cheyne took on the role in August 2013.

John stepped down in early 2018 having done more than two terms. Again, Ross stepped up and has continued to this day – more than 12 years as president.

I think the current situation is unfair to Ross, but he can speak for himself. Our current situation is due in large part to the lack of new members.

Continued next page

# 49th AGM and Conference

## from previous page

In the past, our chapters, which are now largely defunct, provided a steady flow of appropriate people. Those of us who remain struggle to remember our own names, let alone those of our fellow members.

I do not have a solution but would be overjoyed if someone came up with one.

## GROWTH

The initial newsletter notes membership as 45, including two life members. By December 1974, membership was up to 100.

By March 1978, membership was 2525, up by 437 from the year before. Our yearly accounts give an idea of the health of the society with income that year being \$4,084.

Income had doubled by 1981 and by 1984 it was \$26,004 and 1986, \$87,939.

The income and outgoings climbed significantly when fundraising for the Sinclair Wetlands began when yearly income was about \$120,000.

In March 1976, Miss D Pritt was noted as a member. All ladies were referred to as either Miss or Mrs, males by their initials only.

In June 1976 Jim Campbell's membership was noted. From that time on, Jim started appearing in some of the *Flight* photos.

He was not bearded and woolly haired as many were, but he did seem to enjoy

being bare chested.

The number of women members have been few and those on the Board even less. Di Pritt was a director from 1978 until 1996 – 28 years – and is now one of DUNZ's two patrons along with Jim Campbell.

Glenys Hansen was appointed a director in 1986 and retired in 1999 – 13 years. She was treasurer for nine of those years.

Rachael Mitchell was on the Board for one or two terms and, more recently, Emma Williams was a director.

Adrienne Bushell has been a director since 2018 and has just been re-elected for another two-year term.

I think it appropriate to note that the wives and partners of current and past members, particularly Board members, though not necessarily members themselves, have made a significant contribution by their support, which enabled our interests to be pursued.

DUNZ followed the lead established by DU Inc in the USA by establishing chapters. By March 1985, chapters existed in Hamilton and Taumarunui, and Eketahuna and Wellington were



Jim Campbell with a commemorative cap.

established at that time. Later that year, the Bay of Plenty Chapter was formed. Subsequently chapters were started in Auckland, Manawatu and, I think but am not sure, Dunedin.

The chapters were at the forefront of our fund-raising activities. Annual dinners coupled with raffles and clay target shoots provided not only funds but also camaraderie. It was fun to belong. By and large, the chapters are now defunct, and the income received via those still standing is a mere shadow of that received in the past.

The struggle with chapters has been mirrored in North America though not to the same extent in part because both DU Inc and DU Canada have permanent staff dedicated to running dinners and fund-raising functions.

The Board saw the need for a person to run our organisation and, in September 1988, Dr Grant Dumbell was appointed executive director. Grant's main strengths were in his knowledge of wildfowl.

He provided DUNZ with gravitas in that area, which continues today. He put in place systems and maintained records, an area that we lack these days.

With the drop in income in later years, it became impossible to retain Grant and, in 1997, we parted ways. I am grateful for Grant's support while I was president.



SAME PLACE, SAME DAY: A Woodville wetland on the opening weekend of duck season. Morning fog followed by brilliant autumn sunshine. Photos Theresa Morris (Candy)

# 50 years devoted to conservation

**Operation Gretel** – The first newsletter in August 1974 announced Operation Gretel, our first major project. The aim was to raise the national population of grey teal from an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 within 10 years. Jack Worth took charge and facilitated the construction of teal boxes.

On June 14, 1975, teal boxes were placed on Tony Flexman's property in north Waikato and others were later placed in various locations around Waikato.

Operation Gretel was also in full swing at the Sinclair Wetlands, Otago.



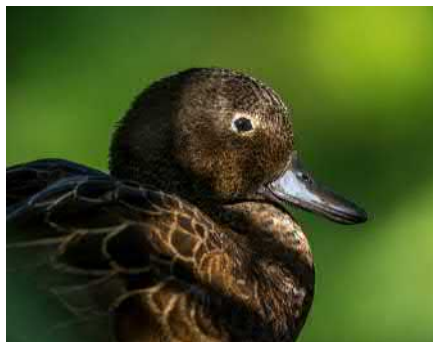
**Operation HQ** – This project was announced in DU's first year. The intention was to acquire land for headquarters, with enough land to have displays of birds. Reference to this in early *Flights* had sketches of what it could look like but nothing further is recorded.

**Operation Pateke** – This was announced at the AGM in 1975. Pateke, brown teal, are endemic to New Zealand and are relatively easy to breed in captivity.

DU members and the National Wildlife Centre at Mt Bruce, Wairarapa, were able to breed good numbers that led to liberations of birds from North Auckland to as far south as Fiordland National Park.

On December 6, 1980, 32 brown teal were released on Matakana Island and, also that year, 40 were released at Puke Puke Lagoon, Foxton. By March 1981, it was reported that the brown teal at Puke Puke were breeding.

Birds were later placed at Mimiwhangata, in Northland, near Helena Bay.



David Smith reviews DUNZ's changing priorities, from pioneering efforts to save endangered native waterfowl to an ongoing programme of wetland restoration and support for wetland development and student research.

**Operation Branta** – By June 1977, Operation Branta had begun. Canada geese were brought from the South Island to establish them in the North.

Two were transported in 1977 followed by 30 in early 1980, many (if not all) going out to Jim Campbell's property. By December 1980, there were 600 Canada geese in the North Island, 12,000 nationally.

In December 1988, 50 geese went from the Wairarapa to Manawatu. So far as I can see, that was the last relocation.

As the geese are now declared a pest due to their numbers, you can decide whether to declare the project a success or not.



**Operation Blue Duck, later Operation Whio** – In March-April 1978, Operation Blue Duck commenced.

Whio are endemic to New Zealand. Field surveys indicated they were declining and in some locations had disappeared entirely. A captive breeding programme to provide birds for liberation began.

Unfortunately, this proved to be a real challenge as whio exhibit breeding behaviour (pairing, incubation) which is different to other New Zealand waterfowl.

The small but capable group of DUNZ members with experience in captive waterfowl breeding rose to the challenge and modest numbers of birds were bred and released.

Ian Pirani was the first person recorded as raising whio in captivity in 1980.

Predation by stoats, ferrets and cats was, and still is, a major problem. This encouraged the Department of Conservation and community-

based conservation groups to focus on sustained predator control using trapping and some aerial 1080 control.

This resulted in the population at many of the whio management sites increasing threefold, provided ongoing predator control was maintained. The initial liberation of captive-bred whio proved an essential catalyst for this to happen.

**Operation Aythya** – This project to focus on scaup/black teal was announced in the December 1979 *Flight*, but after that, there is no further mention.

**Operation Royal Swan** – White swan are the only species of introduced waterfowl in New Zealand with the highest level of legal protection under the Wildlife Act. They sit in the same "absolutely protected" category as whio and pateke.

DUNZ has supplied interested landowners with a modest number of swans, mainly from Peacock Springs, Christchurch.

This operated successfully for a number of years but unfortunately there appears to be a major problem with fertility and few birds have been bred in recent years.

They are currently the rarest waterfowl species on the mainland of New Zealand. A solution to unsuccessful breeding needs to be found.



**Sinclair Wetlands** – While not noted as a project, the Sinclair Wetlands was a significant endeavour which had some lasting lessons. Today it would come under Wetland Care. The subtitle to this section should be "all that glitters is not gold".

Horrie Sinclair developed the extensive wetlands adjoining Lakes Waipori and Waihola in Otago. It had been farmland drained by a large pumping system and when he bought the property, he turned off the pump. This caused the water levels in nearby properties to rise, much to the consternation of his neighbours.

Horrie hunted waterfowl all his life. He

Continued next page

from previous page

was an early DU member and actively supported our cause, signing up new members to such an extent he came to the notice of the Board. Directors visited him and the wetland.

He instigated discussions about signing the wetlands over to DUNZ and this took place on July 12, 1985.

The agreement provided for management by DU and QEII Trust jointly, the construction of a centre that would provide accommodation for Horrie for life, with shedding for machinery and rooms to conduct education courses.

To meet the agreement, there was a concerted fund-raising. DU Canada, DU Inc, the Ministry of Tourism and DOC all made substantial grants. Governor-General Sir Paul Reeves opened the complex on February 5, 1988.

I came onto the Board in July 1990. The flow of funds into the Sinclair Wetlands was barely enough to meet our obligations, much to Horrie's increasing concern.

Our members became restless. All our funds were being sucked into the Sinclair Wetlands, and little or none was going to habitat construction elsewhere.

Our membership was, and still is, primarily in the lower North Island and was dropping, with a corresponding drop in income.

The only way out was to sell the property. Fortunately, the Government was looking for land to settle Ngai Tahu's land claim.

The property was ultimately used for that purpose and personally, I am pleased. Ngai Tahu have an excellent management structure and are excellent guardians of the land.



Jan Abel and the photo board, a look back at the past 50 years, compiled by Jim Campbell and John Cheyne.

The price we got for the property was reduced because it was sold with the obligation to house Horrie for the rest of his life. That could have been decades, but he died not long after the transfer to Ngai Tahu.

We achieved our goal of preserving the Sinclair Wetlands, but it was nearly at the cost of our demise.

DUNZ now recognises we do not have to own a wetland to protect it, provided the protective QEII covenant is in place.

**Pearce Wetlands** – DU created ponds on the Pearce Wetlands on the side of Lake Wairarapa in 1985. The property was bought from Mark Pearce in 1988.

Owning that property while we struggled with the Sinclair Wetlands exacerbated our financial woes and we were fortunate to be able to sell it to a former Board member, Brendan Coe.

Apart from the purchase price, which we subsequently recovered, its cost to us was mainly operation costs.

**Wetland Care** – This important part of DUNZ operations focuses on providing practical advice to landowners and assisting them with the cost of creating wetlands together with some practical bulldozer driving.

We have provided advice and financial support for about 150 wetland projects

across New Zealand. The two largest have been Wairio Wetland and Home Lagoon, were are both close to Wairarapa Moana. Most others are on private land.

The Wairio Wetland project (134ha in total, with 100ha winter flooded) is the largest wetland restoration project in New Zealand over the past 30 years involving water level management. DUNZ can justifiably be very proud of this project.

A total of \$286,776 has been spent on Wairio, with most coming from DUNZ fund-raising campaigns. The most critical funding in the early years was from DU's membership and the Australian wine company, Banrock.

Subsequently, Nikau Foundation, Rotary, Game Bird Habitat Trust, Pharazyn, Muter and AMP Trusts, individual donors and GWRC's Fresh Water Fund have all been critical in the success of the project.

**Student research projects** – DUNZ has for some years offered scholarships for university graduates to carry out relevant research on wetland conservation.

Their studies have included wetland restoration comparisons, carbon sequestration, nitrogen dynamics, and rat behaviour and response to different lures.

**Education** – DUNZ members have been involved in doing presentations on wetlands and wetland birds to schools and service clubs who in return have often assisted with tree planting and bird surveys at different wetland sites.

**The future** – The future of DUNZ is reasonably clear. Without an injection of new members and with the depletion of the trust fund, dissolution is almost certain. I hope I am wrong.

## Hunt on for #155

**Dudley Bell**, one of DUNZ's founding directors, has the complete collection of *Flight* magazine – minus one.

If anyone has a copy of #155, published in April 2013, and would like to part with it, please email [dudleygbell@gmail.com](mailto:dudleygbell@gmail.com), or call Dudley on 027 479 1752.

DUNZ is also looking at publishing a history of its first 50 years and would love to hear of anyone who has good photos and/or memories of DU.

We can organise the scanning and photographing of any material that you have. Please contact the *Flight* editor, contact details on p2.



**PROGRESS REPORT:** One of DUNZ's more recent projects has been to contribute funds towards a large pond on Paddy and Deb Chambers' farm in Raetihi. In May, Director Will Abel visited and took this photo, showing how the pond is maturing, another link in the network of wetlands and ponds in the region.

# Greetings from Ontario

A message from Henry Lickers, founding director

**To my good friends** at Ducks Unlimited New Zealand, shekon or kia ora (greetings in Mohawk and Māori). I hope this message finds you and your families in good health and spirits.

Fifty years sure passes fast. It seems like only yesterday that Bev and I arrived and then left New Zealand. Many good memories.

We have been married for 54 years this August and we have three children: Kimberley, 46, David, 44, and Donald, 42.

After finishing my thesis on black swans at Lake Whangape and heading home to Ontario, I found myself looking for a job. With a stroke of good luck, I landed a job with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne as their biologist.

Akwesasne is an "Indian Reserve" that straddles the US-Canada border. It is in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec and New York State, and has some of the finest marshes and wetlands in Eastern Canada and Northeastern US.

While we have no black swans here, we do have millions of Canada geese, snow geese and every type of waterfowl and marsh birds that exist in North America. I felt right at home.

We also had one of the first Ducks Unlimited wetland restoration projects on an "Indian Reserve", and a huge part of it was declared an international Ramsar site.

The area was also plagued with industrialisation and so much damage was done to the St Lawrence River that it was unsafe to eat the fish or wildlife.

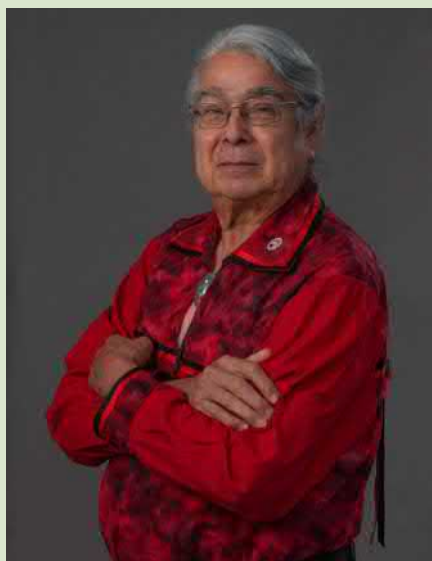
The Mohawk people used the wildlife and wild plants as food and medicine but they were also farmers with dairy herds and beef animals. Corn, beans and squash – the three sisters – were the main crops grown for consumption.

The land supports about 17,000 Mohawk people with their own plants, shopping area, schools and governments.

My work with Māori encouraged me to seek out the knowledge and wisdom of our farmers, fishermen, hunters and our women while using the sciences to understand the problems and seek solutions.

My elders and leaders taught me how to use the Great Way of Peace to bring people together to formulate solutions and enhance the environment that had been destroyed.

Along the way, many non-indigenous people began to take notice and worked



with the Mohawks and our Department of the Environment. The Mohawk Council was recognised as a leader in environmental protection.

Our children began to see environmental sciences as a pathway to a better future and it wasn't long before the Department was hiring our own biologists, conservation officers and environmental specialists.

However, the path forward was fraught with conflicts, as the Mohawk population grew and the environment was degraded.

The economic system on the reservation began to shift from traditional barter/farming economies to non-traditional economies such as smuggling, drugs and casinos which brought the community into conflict with the US and Canadian governments.

Armed groups began to fight for the control of the illicit trade and the normal people of the community began to fear for their lives.

This culminated in open conflict in 1990 with the Canadian and US armed forces being invited into the community to quell the conflict and establish a peace.

Today, the community has worked to heal the wounds of the conflict and a peace exists. A new culture of merging traditional Mohawk cultural values with modern economic drivers has forged a new path to benefit everyone.

The federal, provincial and state governments have all viewed the Mohawk People of Akwesasne as a progressive and beneficial partner; while we may not always agree, we have designed protocols and procedure that help us come to peaceful resolutions.

During this time, the Department of the Environment was a force for protecting the environment, a basic tenet for the Mohawk people. As its Director, my knowledge of my culture and the science became stronger and tested.

I have served on the International Joint Commission, established by Canada/USA in 1912 under the Boundary Water Treaty to regulate water levels and flows between the two countries.

My first appointment was to the commission's St. Lawrence River Levels Advisory Board then to its Science Advisory Board and finally, since no good deed goes unpunished, as a Canadian Commissioner. I was the first indigenous commissioner after 115 years; I guess it was about time.

As I sit here thinking, I remember the people who supported me during my time in New Zealand.

Jack Worth comes to mind, with his dry sense of humour and down-to-earth advice. I still have many treasured pictures of his ducks.

Ian Pirani, as a dedicated driver who was going to succeed, no matter what. I saw him as my role model for my own tenacity to succeed by finding solutions.

Dudley Bell, as a scientist and caring person, always looking for people who could help and advance the cause of environmental protection.

Farmer Beverland, whose block house became a refuge on Lake Whangape during the storms and swan-upping expeditions.

Dr Anna Chapman, who didn't quite understand this strange new student but helped as much as she could.

And where would I be without the humour of Murray Ball and Footrot Flats – I have met many Wals in my travel and I would have loved to talk to The Dog for a while.

To all of my New Zealand friends, I say niawa gowa (a big thank-you) and I will remember you and tell your stories, which is only fitting and the true meaning of forever.

I am proud to have been one of your first directors and am proud of you and all your good work.

Please keep it up – the blue duck and grey teal deserve it!

Skennen (In Peace)

**Dr Francis Henry Lickers**

# Waituna – ‘It must not happen again’

The water in Waituna Lagoon, which is part of the Awarua Wetland, a Ramsar wetland of international significance since 1976, appears to have recovered from a serious algae bloom that affected it over summer.

Now local landowners say it did not need to happen and must not be allowed to happen again.

The lagoon, southeast of Invercargill, was opened to the ocean at the end of January to let sea water in to help contain the spread of the toxic algae.

Environment Southland chief scientist Karen Wilson said in May that the lagoon was no longer in a state of bloom, and recent testing had showed that the quality of the water had returned to normal levels.

“... considering our monitoring work and that done by the Department of Conservation, as well as our collaboration with experts in the areas of the complex ecosystems that make up the Waituna Lagoon, we are expecting the lagoon to return to a state of ecological health over time”, she told the *Otago Daily Times*.

Waituna Catchment Group chairman Maarten Van Rossum, who has farmed in the Waituna Catchment for 14 years, however, said the toxic algal bloom should not have happened and cannot be allowed to happen again.

The agencies responsible for Waituna Lagoon – Environment Southland, the Department of Conservation and iwi – were too slow to react as conditions in the lagoon deteriorated, he said in *farmnews.co.nz*.

The water level in the shallow brackish lagoon had dropped over summer and algae had begun to dominate. The once clear lagoon was affected by toxic cyanobacteria (algae) and turned a murky green.

The community in Waituna, many of whom have lived and farmed alongside the lagoon for decades, had been calling for a commonsense approach in managing the lagoon for months, if not years.

Maarten said the previous consent to open the lagoon to the sea was held by the Lake Waituna Control Association and, as part of its consent renewal application, it held continuous rights.

The community advocated to keep this but the continuous rights were lost “and now no one can legally open the lagoon to the sea”.

“It may have been a simple way that



Waituna Lagoon. Shellie Evans CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 Deed

the Control Association managed the lagoon – water levels were the trigger for opening and varied between 2m and 2.2m depending on criteria such as time of year.

This also allowed fish passage and ruppia, a sea grass considered an indicator of lagoon health which grows on the floor of Waituna Lagoon, to grow and flourish.

“There is now none of that,” he said.

Jo Crack, another local farmer and editor of *farmnews.co.nz*, said: “The locals believe this level [2m to 2.2m] to be appropriate for both the health of the lagoon, allowing for more frequent flushing and to prevent flooding of farmland, erosion of feeder creeks and then resulting sediment loss.”

Before the emergency opening of the lagoon by Environment Southland on January 31, it had not been opened since September 2021. In September 2023, water levels were high, over 2.4m.

Maarten said: “In that time, nutrients and sediment had built up in the lagoon, the water had become too deep and the ruppia which does not want to be submerged at 2.3m for more than 20 days had been starved of light and subsequently died.

“The locals believe this dead seagrass then decomposed, adding to the retained nutrient loading and ultimately setting off the algae bloom.”

It is well known that nutrients and sediment are the leading cause of the issues at the lagoon. The blame for this has always been laid at the door of the farming community.

“And, there will be nutrients flowing

into the lagoon, just like any other area throughout the country, whether that be from a natural or modified catchment.

“The key to unlocking the potential of those nutrients and keeping them on the land is through science and data.

“If all the data could be publicly made available, then all stakeholders could figure out ways to achieve the desired goals.

“Efficiencies across all layers of this issue need to be improved within the organisations who see themselves as guardians of Waituna.

“We also need better communication with them, on any number of levels, particularly in relation to a sustainable way forward for the catchment and for the lagoon,” he said.

## TIMELINE

**Nov 6, 2023** Environment Southland (ES) testing shows toxic algae present in Waituna.

**Jan 11, 2024** ES issues a toxic alert for the lagoon, which was affected by toxic cyanobacteria (algae) and turned a murky green.

**Jan 31, 2024** ES opens the lagoon to the sea under emergency powers. The saltwater from the sea continued to flush the algae, nutrients and sediment from the lagoon until it pushed up enough pea gravel to end the cleansing process.

**April 2024** Lagoon closes to the sea naturally.

**May 2024** ES says water quality is back to normal levels.



# Wetland Care Scholarship

*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 of \$5000 each in two funding rounds a year, with applications closing on March 31 and September 30.

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

## INTERESTED? WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Please email [scholarships@wetlandcare.org.nz](mailto:scholarships@wetlandcare.org.nz) with your questions.

Terms and conditions, plus an online application form, are on the Ducks Unlimited NZ website, [www.ducks.org.nz](http://www.ducks.org.nz).



## Ducks Unlimited NZ Membership Form

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

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All subscriptions include GST.

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



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