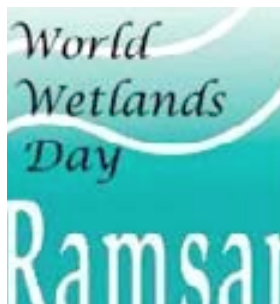


February 2003

Take a walk through some of Wellington's wetland gems

DOC CELEBRATES WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2003



In 1971, the international community agreed on the concept of "Wise Use of Wetlands" through the Ramsar Convention, a global accord protecting wetlands and waterbirds globally. Each year since 1996, on 2 February, we celebrate the important role that wetlands play in our culture and environment with World Wetlands Day. It highlights the links between wetland health, biodiversity, and economic security throughout the world. The Department of Conservation is commemorating this day by inviting you to visit some of our most beautiful wetland sites.

Lake Papaitonga



The entrance to Papaitonga Scenic Reserve is at the end of Buller Road, 5 km southwest of Levin off State Highway 1.

Papaitonga, a tranquil dune lake in the Horowhenua coastal plain, is an important refuge for wetland and forest birds. The 27.5-ha scenic reserve and the lake itself make up 122 ha of protected area. Wetland and lush coastal forest surround one half of the lake, while the wetlands of the other side merge into rustic farmland. The lake contains two islands Motukiwi (Papaitonga) and Motungarara (Papawharangi), the latter constructed by Muaupoko residents in 1820 to extend their village. Muaupoko people settled in the area during the early part of the 19th century, but were driven away in 1822 by Ngati Toa people, led by the famous Te Rauparaha. In 1897, Sir Walter Buller purchased an area including Papaitonga with the vision of protecting the land around the lake for future generations.



Lake Papaitonga. Photo: Jeremy Rolfe.

What you can see

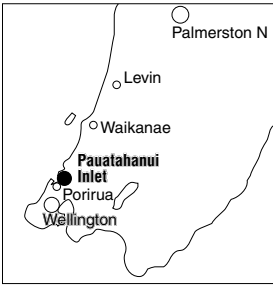
Papaitonga is home to waterfowl and wading birds as well as forest species on the lake's margins. Within the reserve is the only intact sequence from wetland to mature dry terrace forest in Wellington and Horowhenua. The wetland forest associations of kahikatea/pukatea, tawa and pukatea-tawa-swamp maire are now rare. The manuka growing on the forested side is habitat for the rare leafless mistletoe *Korthalsella salicornioides*.

Tracks through the reserve give easy access to this historically and ecologically important area and there is a picnic and viewing area, surrounded by native bush. Access to the islands on the lake is not permitted. Because this is an ecologically sensitive area, we do not allow dogs, fires, hunting, trail bike riding or mountain bike riding. Please stay on the tracks and defined lookout areas at all times.



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Pauatahanui Inlet



Public access to the Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Reserve is via the Forest and Bird reserve at Pauatahanui village from State Highway 58. Parking is available. From State Highway 1, you can get onto the route around the estuary by turning off at the Paremata roundabout or at Grays Road in Plimmerton.



Right: The view from a hide in Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Reserve. Photo: Sue Galbraith. Below: Water runs past rushes along a tidal creek at low tide. Photo: Greater Wellington.



Pauatahanui Inlet is the largest in Porirua and the most extensive relatively unmodified estuarine area in the southern part of the North Island. The area around the inlet has been inhabited for at least the last 600 years and the area is rich with wāhi tapu, archaeological sites, and historic places. Among four areas administered by DOC within the inlet is the beautiful **Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Reserve**, a coastal wetland containing a mosaic of tidal flats and indigenous marsh vegetation. The reserve is bisected by the Pauatahanui-Plimmerton (Grays) road which has influenced tidal movements, drying out an inland portion. Day-to-day management is undertaken by a management committee under the auspices of Forest and Bird which operates a nursery, an information kiosk and a car park on land it owns adjacent to the reserve.

In the eastern half of the inlet is the **Pauatahanui Inlet Wildlife Refuge**, set up to protect wildlife from disturbance, especially hunting. **Duck Creek Scenic Reserve**—on State Highway 58 where Duck Creek flows into the inlet—is a shallow wet basin mainly covered in rushes and is surrounded on three sides by roads. The **Horokiwi Wildlife Reserve** is an estuarine wetland to the west and south of Grays Road near Horokiwi Stream.

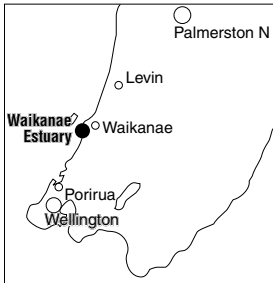
What you can see

The inlet is home to waterfowl, both local and migratory waders, with occasionally a rare visitor such as the bar-tailed godwit, *Limosa lapponica*, for the birding enthusiast. The inlet is the only large area of salt-marsh and seagrass in the Wellington region. Look into the water and try to see small snails crawling about. These are the mud snail, *Amphibola crenata*. These walnut-sized animals hold a critical place in the wetland food web: as they chew on the organic material that

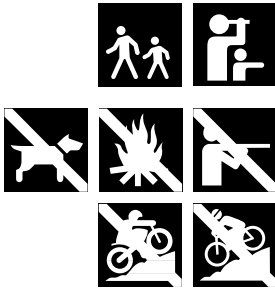


forms their food, they stimulate the growth of bacteria that return nutrients into the water. If you keep still, you can also see mud crabs scampering timidly about. A careful walk along the rush-lined streams can also offer you a glimpse of the banded kokopu, a beautifully patterned native fish that can reach up to 250 mm. Within the Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Reserve there are viewing hides, tracks, a visitor centre and a picnic area. We do not allow dogs, fires, hunting, trail bike riding or mountain bike riding in this area.

Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve



Access is from Manly Street
North at Paraparaumu
Beach.



Waikanae Estuary is connected to the Kapiti Marine Reserve and thence to Kapiti Island Nature Reserve, providing a rare sequence of protection for animals which move between sea, river and land habitats. The reserve protects a natural mosaic of freshwater lakelets, saltwater lagoons and marshes, tidal sand flats and sandy beach at the mouth of the Waikanae River. It is a nationally-significant estuary providing habitat for local and migratory waders, seabirds, waterfowl, and native fish. The area also has historic connections for both Maori and Europeans. At least three pa have been constructed in the vicinity and it was a resting post for European settlers travelling the coast.

What you can see

Waikanae Estuary and Paraparaumu Beach are good places to take in magnificent scenery. Walk along the sand spit and river banks to see wading birds, such as variable oystercatchers and banded dotterels, digging for worms and shellfish in the tidal zone. Keep an eye out for Caspian terns. They are the largest of the terns and have a stout red bill. In spring and autumn, look closely to see whitebait swimming up the mouth of the Waikanae River. Shags frequent the area to hunt the larger fish that feed on schooling whitebait. You might also be lucky enough to see a royal spoonbill in the estuary using its paddle-like bill to stir up small animals from the mud. Over 60 species of birds live here: herons, seagulls, swans, and ducks are also common, and many breed here during the spring. Look for the regionally threatened sedge *Carex litorosa* that grows at the waterline around the estuary.

There are many picturesque places to have a picnic. Please stay on designated trails, though, as birds nest on the beach sand and eggs blend into the sand. This is a fragile site, so we do not allow dogs, fires, hunting, trail bike riding or mountain bike riding.

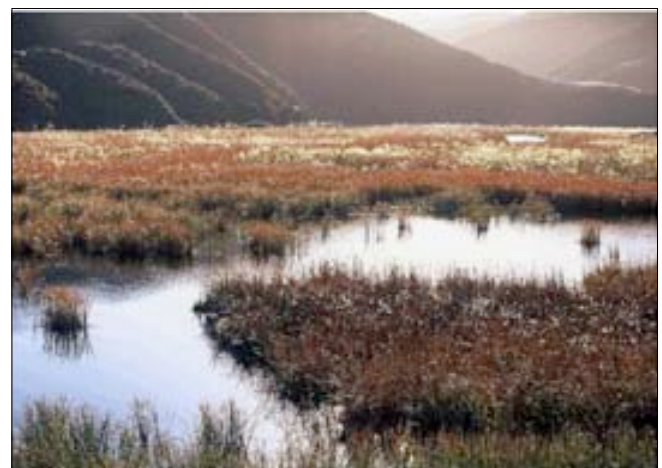


A royal spoonbill on the lagoon with black swans, shovelers, pied stilts and a pukeko. Photo: Jeremy Rolfe.

Other Wellington wetlands

Wellington has other fresh and saltwater wetlands, many of which also can be visited. The **Pencarrow Lakes** are tucked in behind Pencarrow Head at the entrance to Wellington Harbour. A bit of a trek or mountain bike ride along the coastline from Eastbourne, they provide perfect spots for a secluded picnic on a sunny day.

Pencarrow Lakes. Photo: Greater Wellington.





Boggy Pond, part of the Lake Wairarapa wetlands complex.
Photo: DOC.

Lake Wairarapa also has extensive wetlands and the area offers many activities, including fishing, birdwatching, or perhaps just a stop off to take in the scenery while visiting the Martinborough wine country. Look for more information on these and other wetlands by visiting our website, see below.

One of the main jobs of the Department of Conservation is to restore wildlife habitat that has been degraded through human use. In 1998, the Department undertook a major project to create **Waikoko wetland** on Mana Island, on the site of one that existed before the island was developed as a farm in 1832. A network of drains through the short grass was all that was left by 150 years of sheep and cattle grazing. The restored wetland is now home to shags, shelducks, and the nationally-threatened goldstripe gecko, which is now abundant here. It will eventually provide habitat suitable for North Island fernbird, brown teal and a range of threatened wetland plants from the Cook Strait and Wellington Ecological Districts. To find out how to visit Mana Island, visit our website, see below.



Waikoko wetland on Mana Island.
Photo: Robin Gay.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts

It's important to think of a wetland as a whole, not just the sum of its parts. Just like a jigsaw puzzle, the individual pieces mean very little until you put them together to form the picture. Similarly, only a fully functioning wetland 'behaves' properly, purifying water through filtration, helping to control flooding, offering food and useful products such as flax, not to mention the opportunities for tourism, recreation, and relaxation. Estuarine wetlands are also important spawning and feeding habitat for several species of marine and freshwater fish. Understanding that wetlands must *function* properly, means that we must pay attention to what goes into the system, such as water and sediments as much as what comes out, like fish.

Wellington's wetlands under threat

Although sections of wetlands, like those mentioned here, are well-protected within nature reserves, many problems that our wetlands face, such as sedimentation, low flows, and environmental pollutants can come from well upstream due to water abstraction for industry, agriculture, and urban runoff. These changes to habitat adversely effect spawning fish such as eels and trout. Recreational boat users and casual visitors can also upset these fragile ecosystems by distributing harmful weeds such as hornwort that clings to boat hulls or by dumping pest fish such as koi carp and mosquito fish (*Gambusia*). Because of the wide variety of threats to wetlands, it is vital that areas outside reserves are treated with as much care as those parts that are specifically protected.

Our wetlands are here for everybody to enjoy. It is vital that we develop and adopt methods for sustainable development so that future generations can benefit from the irreplaceable resources that wetlands offer us.

For more information

To find out more about places you can see in Wellington, visit our website www.doc.govt.nz, or ring our Conservation Information Centre, 04 472 7356. You can find out more about World Wetlands Day by visiting the Ramsar website www.ramsar.org.