

Wetlands to visit in the North Island



1. Te Werahi, Northland

You can start your journey of magical wetlands near the northern tip of New Zealand in a remote but highly natural and scenic landscape. Te Werahi is a good stopping place on your way to or back from Cape Reinga. From the road, you will see a large freshwater wetland system, which has three raupō swamps linked by narrow sandy streams. It is an important site for wetland birds such as Australasian bitterns/matuku, grey ducks, grey teals/tētē, NZ shovelers/kuruwhengi, pied stilts/poaka, pied shags and little shags.

Places to explore

The wetland can be accessed via boardwalks down the Twilight-Te Werahi Loop track. The full 16 km loop takes 4-5 hr and passes through farmland, dunes, shrubland and coastal wetlands, as well as the raupō swamp.

Highlights: Wetland birds, spectacular views of dunes, headlands and beaches.

Getting there

Follow State Highway 1 north from Kaitiaki and then the Cape Reinga Road from Te Pahi. Look for the signposted Te Werahi gate about 4.5 km south of Cape Reinga.

Further information

Cape Reinga Coastal Walkway at www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Parengarenga Harbour—a large, relatively unmodified harbour visited by migratory shorebirds.

Waitahora Lagoon—a coastal lagoon at Spirits Bay.



Te Werahi wetland.
Photo: DOC.

2. Lake Ohia, Northland

Lake Ohia is an other-worldly place of charred stumps and gumland scrub that casts a strange sort of magic over you. The area was once an ancient kauri forest, then a lake that was subsequently drained in the 1900s for gum digging, exposing a maze of 30,000-year-old kauri stumps. It is now an important habitat for rare ferns, mosses and orchids. Lake Ohia is an ephemeral lake that usually dries out in summer and is wet in winter.



Places to explore

The Gumhole Reserve Walk is a 10 min loop through mānuka scrub and passes a series of holes excavated by gum diggers. Many of the holes are deep so keep to the track. Throughout the walk you'll find information about the history of the site and areas of significance. It's an ideal place for the family with plenty of tables and shady areas—perfect for a picnic.

Highlights: Gum-digger holes and their history, kauri stumps.

Getting there

From Kaitiaki, head north to Awanui, onto State Highway 10 and then onto Inland Road to the Gumhole Reserve parking area, 21.5 km from Kaitiaki.

Further information

See www.doc.govt.nz for more information.

Other places to visit

Kaimaumu Swamp—a complex and extensive infertile freshwater wetland between Houhora and Rangaunu Harbours. Good views from the road.

Lake Ngatu—a gem of a dune lake in the Sweetwater lakes system, popular for recreation and with a 4 km walking track.



Lake Ohia.
Photo: Bev Clarkson.

3. Kai Iwi Lakes, Northland

Three clear, blue, rain-fed dune lakes, with no rivers or streams flowing in or out, and white sand beaches surrounded by gumland and wetland. Extensive native revegetation is under way following the removal of pine trees. These are amongst the deepest dunelands in the country, supporting rare native fish as well as kōura/freshwater crayfish, crabs, mussels, eel/tuna and introduced rainbow trout. Popular for watersports, fishing, swimming and camping.

Places to explore



There is a walking track around Lake Taharoa, the largest of the three lakes, as well as a 2.5 km walking track from the lake to the coast. Or just spend time camping or picnicking by the lakeshore, maybe doing some fishing or boating. No motorised craft are allowed on the smallest lake so it is a pleasant place to enjoy a 30 min walk around its shore.

Highlights: Clear, blue waters contrasting with white sand beaches, many recreational opportunities.

Getting there

Located 35 km north of Dargaville off State Highway 12 via Omamari Road then Kai Iwi Lakes Road, leading to the Taharoa Domain.

Further information

The Taharoa Domain is managed by a Governance Committee of the Kaipara District Council and Te Kuihi and Te Roaroa iwi. See www.kaipara.govt.nz or www.kai-iwi-lakes.co.nz.

Note: *These lakes can be combined with a visit to see Tāne Mahuta, the giant kauri tree in Waipoua Forest.*



Kai Iwi Lakes.
Photo: Darren Jones.

4. Limeburners Creek, Whangarei

This is a large estuary in Whangarei Harbour with mangroves, saltmarshes and mud flats of lush eel grass. Freshwater areas have also been 'constructed' here to act as a filter for part of the city's sewage treatment system. Native rushes and sedges planted to filter nutrients also add to the wildlife values and beauty of the area. The entrance is well marked by a covered gateway and information panels.

Places to explore



Two flat, all-weather tracks traverse the wetland. One goes alongside Limeburners Creek with boardwalks and information panels; the other is a longer walk of 2 hr along an old railway formation and through mangroves. The mangrove section is easily accessed from the car park along a boardwalk that zig zags through the trees (20 min return).

Highlights: Tall mangroves, views over the estuary.

Getting there

Access via Kioreroa Road off State Highway 1 at the southern entrance to Whangarei (signposted to Port Whangarei).

Other places to visit

Waitangi mangroves—a walk through mangroves and coastal forest near the Treaty House at Waitangi in Bay of Islands.



Limeburners Creek.
Photo: Jan Simmons.

5. Tawharanui Regional Park, Auckland

A special feature of this site is the pest-proof fence that has allowed native species to flourish. Brown teal/pāteke have been reintroduced and can be seen enjoying the wetlands. The mix of coastal lagoon, saline wetlands and freshwater habitat also support Australasian bitterns/matuku, spotless crakes/pūweto, banded rails/moho pererū, blue reef herons and variable oystercatchers/tōrea, with numerous pūkeko. These wetlands are all within Tawharanui Regional Park, a great place for walking, mountain biking, camping and swimming in a stunning coastal location north of Auckland.



Places to explore

From the lagoon car park, a boardwalk crosses the edge of the coastal lagoon with abundant *Plagianthus divaricatus* and other saltmarsh vegetation, and a wide variety of birdlife. There is a good view of the Mangatawhiri wetland on the opposite side of the road. Mangatawhiri Track (25 min) can be accessed via the kissing gate and across the paddock. This is a grass track with boardwalks that includes Thompson Loop around a wetland reconstructed in 2007 from a wet paddock. It has involved countless volunteer hours from the community.

Highlights: *Pest-proof fence, brown teals/pāteke and pūkeko, stunning location.*

Getting there:

From State Highway 1 at Warkworth, follow the signs to Matakana. Just past Matakana turn right at the Omaha turn off and drive along Takatu Road to Tawharanui Regional Park.

Further information

The park is managed by the Auckland Council with the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Society actively involved in restoration. See www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz or www.tossi.org.nz.

Other places to visit

Whangateau Harbour and estuary—an important resting and feeding area for migratory birds.

Tomarata Lake—access is available for boating, waterskiing, kayaking, swimming and fishing (by permit).

Okorormai Wetland at Shakespear Regional Park.



6. Whatipu Dunes, Auckland

A spectacular and remote wilderness area, Whatipu is an extensive sandflat on Auckland's rugged west coast. Water impounded by dunes supports white-faced herons, little shags, bitterns, spotless crane/pūweto, fernbirds/mātātā and pied stilts/poaka. The dunes are also breeding grounds for NZ dotterel/tūturiwhatu. In the dune hollows and damp sandflats, saltmeadows with a range of herbs, including the rare sand spike sedge (*Eleocharis neozelandica*), are found. There are campgrounds and walking tracks in the area.



Places to explore

From the car park at the end of Whatipu Road, the coast walk leads out to the beach. Follow the high tide mark north as far as you want to go past coastal dunes and wetlands in an inspiring landscape. For a longer day tramp, cross the wetland and connect up with the Pararaha Valley Track and other inland tracks to return to the car park. Swimming is not recommended at Whatipu beach as the surf and tidal conditions are extremely dangerous.

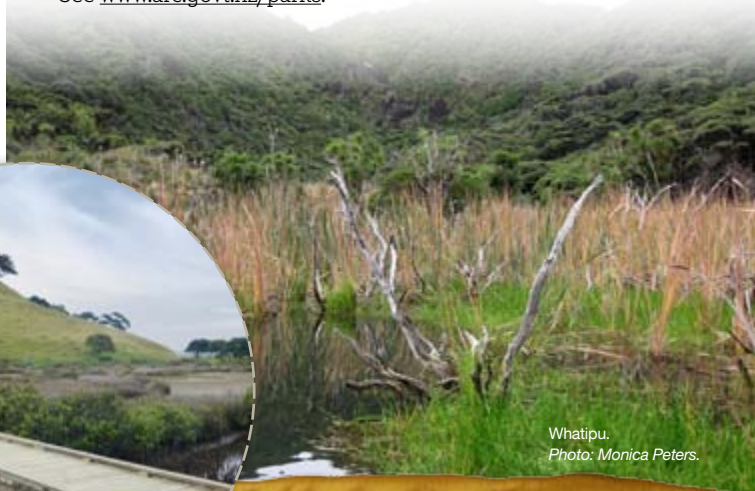
Highlights: *Stunning coastal wetlands and scenery.*

Getting there

Take Huia Road from Titirangi to Huia then continue onto Whatipu Road, which is mostly unsealed and winds over the hills to the coast.

Further information

Tracks and facilities are managed by Auckland Council. See www.arc.govt.nz/parks.



Whatipu.
Photo: Monica Peters.

7. Firth of Thames, Auckland/Waikato



If shorebirds are your interest, this is definitely the place to be, especially around October when Arctic migrants like the eastern bar-tailed godwit/kuaka, the turnstone and the red-necked stint arrive after an arduous 10,000 km journey. At the same time, birds from the South Island like the wrybill/ngutu pare, pied oystercatcher/tōrea and the white heron/kōtuku, which have over-wintered in the Firth of Thames, fly back to their southern breeding grounds. The shallow tidal flats, globally rare shell banks known as a 'Chenier plain', mangrove forest and saltmarsh make the Firth of Thames/Tikapa Moana a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.



Places to explore

It is worth starting your visit at the Miranda Shorebird Centre where there is a wealth of information about the site and its occupants. You can then walk out to two specially built hides that enable viewing of the birds at close quarters. Binoculars or a telescope are definitely worthwhile.

Highlights: *Number and variety of shorebirds.*

Getting there:

Located on the East Coast Road, between Kaiaua and Miranda.

Further information

See www.doc.govt.nz or www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz.

Birds at Miranda.
Photo: DOC.



Whangamarino, Photo: Shorebird Trust

8. Whangamarino Wetland, Waikato



This 7000 ha mosaic of floodplains and peat domes around the Whangamarino and Maramarua Rivers makes up the internationally recognised Whangamarino Wetland. It is home to fernbirds/mātātā, black mudfish/waikaka, rare orchids, bladderworts and a range of native fish species. It is also the national stronghold for Australasian bittern/matuku with 20% of New Zealand's bittern population estimated to be living here. Whangamarino is part of a substantial and effective flood control scheme on the lower Waikato River. Recreational pursuits include gamebird hunting and coarse fishing for introduced species such as rudd, catfish and koi carp.

Places to explore



For one of the best views over the wetland, park at the Whangamarino flood control gates just off State Highway 1 and walk up to the Whangamarino Redoubt and Te Teoteo's Pā (which are of historical significance). There are also good views along the Waikato River. Another option is to take a scenic drive around the wetland via Island Block and Falls Roads—from high points on these roads you have a panoramic landscape of the wetland. There are boat ramps on both these roads for those wishing to get a little closer to the water and explore the wetland by boat or kayak.

Highlights: *Scenic views, historic sites.*

Getting there

Access Whangamarino Redoubt off State Highway 1 south of Mercer via Oram Road; Island Block Road at Meremere; or Falls Road from Te Kauwhata.

Further information

National Wetland Trust Trail Guide:
www.wetlandtrust.org.nz.

Other places to visit

Lake Hakanoa in Huntly—a circular walk around the lake with themed gardens and wetland vegetation.



Arawai Kākāriki
wetland restoration programme
Whangamarino

Kopuatai Peat Dome

Huge, but essentially hidden from sight, the Kopuatai Peat Dome, at 10,201 ha, is the largest unaltered restiad peat bog in New Zealand and is also unique globally. Restiads are peat-forming rushes. At Kopuatai, the smaller wire rush *Empodisma minus* and the endemic giant cane rush *Sporadanthus ferrugineus* dominate the peatland vegetation. The vegetation of the dome is fragile and easily damaged so entry is by permit only.

The wetland is an important habitat for the Australasian bittern/matuku, banded rail/moho pererū, marsh crane/koitareke and the fernbird/mātātā, with fish species including black mudfish/waikaka and longfin eel/tuna.

Peat lakes

A distinctive feature of the landscape south of Hamilton is the number of small lakes visible from State Highway 3—just some of the 16 or so peat lakes remaining in an otherwise intensively farmed area. One of these, Lake Serpentine, is being considered as the future site for a National Wetland Centre—a state-of-the-art centre with research and educational facilities, wetland gardens and heritage trails. The National Wetland Trust is developing plans and raising funds for this ambitious project—see www.wetlandtrust.org.nz.

The most accessible of the peat lakes is Lake Ngaroto with a boat ramp, picnic area and 1 hr 30 min loop walk through wetland and shrubland. See www.teawamutu.co.nz.

Lake Serpentine in mist.
Photo: Karen Denyer.



9. Te Waihou Springs, South Waikato

Experience the magic of Te Waihou where the clear blue waters bubble out of the ground at a rate of 42 cubic metres (9240 gallons) per minute. This is some of the purest water you will find, with the springs supplying 60% of New Zealand's bottled water. Small waterfalls set amongst native bush add to the scenic beauty of the area, and introduced trout are plentiful.

Places to explore



Te Waihou Walkway follows alongside the Waihou River, and it takes only 15 min from Whites Road to arrive at the Blue Spring where the clear blue of the water contrasts sharply with the bright green of the waterweed. Boardwalks cross wet ground and there are stiles and steps in places as well as viewing platforms. The full walkway takes 1 hr 30 min from one car park to the other, or go as far as you like before returning the way you came.

Highlights: *Clear, blue water, scenic vistas.*

Getting there

Access is from Whites Road off State Highway 1 north of Putaruru or State Highway 5 between Tirau and Rotorua.

Further information

This reserve is managed by the South Waikato District Council. See www.southwaikato.govt.nz for more information.



Te Waihou Walkway.
Photo: Adrienne Grant.

10. Sulphur Bay, Rotorua

At the southern end of Lake Rotorua lies Sulphur Bay, a mystifying geothermal wetland that the Rotorua region is famous for. This is an active and constantly changing landscape with sinter terraces, sulphur and silica flats, and active mud pools and steam vents. The milky colour of the water is the result of suspended sulphur particles. Although not a good source of food, the warmth and proximity to other feeding grounds and its wildlife refuge status makes this a safe haven for over 60 different bird species including banded dotterel/pohowera, NZ dabchick/weweia, scaup/pāpango, three gull species and pied stilt/poaka.

Places to explore



A walkway starts at Motutara Point on the Rotorua lakefront following along the lake edge behind the Government Gardens, past the Polynesian Pools and through the geothermal area. You can access this walkway from many points, walking as little or as much of it as you like. The section from the Lake Plaza Hotel to Puarenga Stream is known as Te Arikiroa and is a dual-use walk and cycleway. You must keep to the tracks—this is a dangerous and fragile environment. Information panels explain some of the rich history and features of the area.

Highlights: Active geothermal area, specialised plants suited to the harsh conditions.

Getting there

The wetland is easily accessible from the central city area in Rotorua.

Further information

Rotorua Walkways brochure available from www.rdc.govt.nz/recreation/walkways.

Other places to visit

Waimangu and Waiotapu Geothermal Reserves featuring walkways, guided tours, and gift shops (entry fee applies).

Lake Okaro—a small lake with a 1.8 km walkway.

Lake Okareka—a walk through a restored wetland filtering farm runoff that takes you to a bird hide on the lake shore.



11. Kaituna Wetland, Bay of Plenty

With vision and determination, wetlands can be restored and recreated, and the Kaituna Wetland is a good example of what can be achieved with agencies and community conservation groups working together. This lowland swamp now has an abundance of cabbage trees/tī kōuka, flax/harakeke and raupō along with kahikatea and swamp maire. The threatened fernbird/mātātā, spotless crane/pūweto and Australasian bittern/matuku are present along with pūkeko, ducks, shags and pied stilts/poaka. The area is popular for gamebird hunting (so if you are not a hunter, it is best not to visit during May and June).

Places to explore



Several walking tracks, a kayak trail and a viewing hide enable you to fully experience the wetland. The Kaituna Wetland Loop Track starts at the car park off Pah Road and meanders through flax/harakeke and fescue, tussockland, cabbage tree/tī kōuka forest and raupō reedland alongside sections of open water (45 min to 1 hr 15 min). Information signs are in place to explain some of Kaituna's special places and features.

Highlights: Kayak trail—provided water level is high at 760 mm. (Check with Bay of Plenty Regional Council before you go.)

Getting there

Access the wetland at the corner of Pah and Kaituna Roads off State Highway 2 near Te Puke. There is a small car park at the entrance to the wetland.

Further information

Kaituna Wetland brochure available from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Matata Lagoon—a coastal freshwater lagoon that is gradually being restored.

Ohiwa Harbour—a large harbour with estuarine wetlands. The Nukuhou Saltmarsh and walkway are worth visiting.



12. Ruapani Tarns, Te Urewera

A stunning complex of seven unmodified high-altitude mires and bogs close to the pristine Lake Waikareiti in Te Urewera National Park. Local past geological events have created a landscape of humps and hollows in which the Ruapani Tarns sit. Each wetland is different from the others and include open water, sedgeland, sphagnum moss and wire-rush-dominated bogs, herbfields and shrublands. Most are ephemeral with constantly fluctuating water levels. Scaups/pāpango, grey ducks/pārera, Australian coots and little black shags may be seen.

Places to explore



Ruapani Circuit is a tramping track taking about 6 hr and can be traversed in either direction. It is accessed from the Waikareiti Track, which follows in part the shoreline of Lake Waikareiti, one of only two major North Island lakes with no exotic macrophytes (aquatic plants) present. The track passes through red/silver beech forest with occasional podocarps and a profusion of neinei. Interesting plants found in the wetlands include insect-eating sundews, native orchids and a rare native grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*).

Highlights: *High altitude pristine wetlands in a tall beech forest setting.*

Getting there

Waikareiti track begins 200 m from the Aniwanuiwa Visitor Centre, Lake Waikaremoana, on State Highway 38.

Other places to visit

Kaipo Lagoon—a wire rush/sphagnum moss bog, 2–3 hr walk from Ruapani Tarns on the Manuoha Track.

Arohaki Lagoon—a 3–4 hr return walk to an ephemeral lagoon surrounded by towering kahikatea forest.

Ruapani Tarns.
Photo: Paul Cashmore.

13. Ahuriri Estuary, Hawke's Bay

This long, narrow estuary with its wide range of fresh to salty, shallow to deep, and sandy to muddy habitats supports an extremely diverse range of birds, fish, invertebrates and plant life. Over 70 species of resident and migratory waterbirds use the estuary as a feeding and resting area. Bar-tailed godwits/kuaka, knots and golden plovers migrate here each year from their arctic breeding grounds. Wrybills/ngutu pare, oystercatchers/tōrea, pied stilts/poaka and royal spoonbills/kōtuku-ngutupapa over-winter from their South Island homes.

Places to explore



This wetland is clearly visible on the drive in to Napier but it is worth going to the car park in Humber Street and doing the 2.7 km loop track, which takes around 1 hr to walk. It is mostly flat with boardwalk sections and a bridge over the main channel, and has great views of the estuary. Seating is provided along with information panels. There is also an 8 km section of cycleway passing close to the middle estuary with wildlife viewing points.

Highlights: *Estuarine features and views.*

Getting there:

Access is via Humber Street, off State Highway 2 or from Pandora Road north of Napier.

Other places to visit

Lake Opouahi—a 30 min lake loop walk through regenerating native bush skirting a picturesque lake with a predator-proof fence protecting native birds.

Pekapeka wetland—a wonderful restored wetland with a number of walking trails. www.hbrc.govt.nz.

Wrybill/ngutu pare.
Photo: Andrew Walmsley.

14. Waihora lagoon, Waikato

'Magical' is the only word to describe the Waihora Lagoon when you see the tall trees reflected in the water. This is a shallow ephemeral wetland in a completely natural setting surrounded by swamp forest—from sedges and herbs through to tall kahikatea and rimu trees. Even when there is no water in the lagoon, it still has a special beauty.

Places to explore

It is a short 10 min walk from the car park to the lagoon. There is a well-formed track with a boardwalk (the timber was specially selected to cope with the rise and fall of the wetland) snaking through the trees to a platform beside the lagoon.

Highlights: Tall trees, reflections, tranquil setting.

Getting there

From State Highway 32 west of Taupo, turn into Waihora Road and travel 7 km on a gravel road (rough in places) then left into the car park.

Further information

Pureora Forest Park tracks brochure available from DOC.

Waihora Lagoon.
Photo: Karen Denyer.

Swamp forest

Swamp forests are periodically inundated with fresh water (rain water in the case of Waihora Lagoon). Kahikatea is the dominant tree of swamp forest growing densely on matted roots and silt, along with swamp maire, pukatea, cabbage tree/tī kōuka, pōkākā and occasionally rimu. Both kahikatea and pukatea have developed buttress roots to cope with long periods of standing in water.



15. Tongariro River delta, Lake Taupo

Pushing its way into the southern end of Lake Taupo, the Tongariro River is continually depositing alluvial material to create a wonderland of wet and swampy areas. These areas are utilised by at least 48 species of birds and a wide variety of plants such as kānuka, mānuka, kōwhai, kōhūhū and lancewood. Further from the river, the area is less well drained with predominantly flax/harakeke, toetoe, raupō, oioi, rushes and sedges. Tokaanu Bay and the Tongariro River delta is a wonderful area for kayaking, boating, fishing and bird watching.



Places to explore

Launch your boat or kayak at the Tokaanu tailrace boat ramp and head into the bay towards the Tongariro River delta, where hundreds of swans and other waterfowl gather. A kayak will allow you to explore the quieter waters of the river channels and lagoons, with a good chance of seeing dabchicks/weweia, pied stilts/poaka, shags and, on occasion, bittern/matuku. From a boat or from the shoreline, the Tongariro River delta is a good place to fish for trout (a Taupo fishing licence is required). Kayaks can also be launched at the Tongariro River bridge (access is from State Highway 1).

Highlights: Recreation opportunities.

Getting there

From Turangi off State Highway 1 at the southern end of Lake Taupo.

Other places to visit

Tongariro National Trout Centre—learn about the Taupo Fishery and see rainbow trout through an underwater viewing chamber. Also view native fish in the Genesis Freshwater Aquarium.

Tongariro River walking tracks—take in views of the river's calm pools and rippling rapids as you walk along the high banks.

Tokaanu Thermal Walk—geothermal wetland with steaming hot mineral pools and spluttering mud amidst native bush.



Trout.
Photo: DOC.



Kōwhai. Photo: John Barkla.

16. Potaema Bog, Mt Taranaki

You don't have to be a trumper to enjoy Egmont National Park! There are many short walks and easy walking tracks on the lower slopes of Mt Taranaki that weave their way through lush lowland semi-swamp forest of rimu, rātā, kāmahī, kahikatea and swamp mairie. Tucked into a frost-hollow, the Potaema Bog is a little touch of magic amongst the tall forest.

Places to explore



The Potaema Track is wheelchair friendly and starts at the Potaema Picnic Area. Raised boardwalks take you through rimu and kahikatea forest dripping with mosses and lichens to a viewing area overlooking the wetland, with Mt Taranaki as a stunning backdrop (15-30 min return). The boardwalk provides close-up views of sedges, orchids and insect-eating sundews.

Highlights: Easy access to pristine wetland.

Getting there

The Potaema Picnic area is about 3 km in from the park boundary on Pembroke Road (which starts at the northern end of Stratford township).

Other places to visit

Ahukawakawa Swamp on the Pouakai Circuit in Egmont National Park (for the more adventurous).

17. Lake Rotokare, Taranaki

Stop a while at Lake Rotokare and you'll understand why there is a local group passionate about looking after this magical place! The lake and extensive wetlands are surrounded by forested hills and totally enclosed within a predator-proof fence. This has allowed wetland birds such as fernbirds/mātātā and spotless crakes/pūweto a safe home amongst the raupō, flax/harakeke and purei, whilst in the bush, tūi, bellbirds/korimako, kererū, grey warblers/riroriro, and North Island robins/tououwai are all thriving. Eels/tuna and banded kōkopu are found in the streams and lake, plus there is the usual range of waterfowl on the lake. The lake is also popular for boating and is open to power boats over the summer.

Places to explore



A 4 km walkway begins at the picnic area and follows along the southern edge of the lake. It passes through a number of wetlands (where there is a good chance of seeing or hearing fernbirds/mātātā) as well as though native bush dominated by tawa, rewarewa and māhoe. Allow 1 to 2 hr to enjoy this walk.

Highlights: Abundant wildlife.

Getting there

Situated just 12 km from the township of Eltham, South Taranaki, via Rawhitiroa and Sangster Roads.

Further information

The reserve is jointly administered by the South Taranaki District Council and the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust. See: www.rotokare.org.nz.



Mt Taranaki.
Photo: Ross Henderson.



Lake Rotokare.
Photo: Jo Ritchie.

18. Manawatu Estuary, Foxton



Further south is the Manawatu Estuary, an internationally important wetland for its number and diversity of wading birds. The saltmarsh ribbonwood and rushes provide habitat, and extensive tidal flats offer feeding grounds for birds such as the migratory bar-tailed godwit/kuaka, wrybill/ngutu pare and Caspian tern/taranui. In all, 95 bird species have been recorded at the site.

As a rich source of food and transportation highway, this has always been an important place for Māori. Many recreational activities also occur here including boating, fishing, windsurfing, kayaking and bird watching.

Places to explore



Walking access to the estuary is off Holben Parade where there is a car park and small picnic shelter. It is a 10 min walk to the estuary and the sandspit through a gap in the dunes and then left through the bollards. Turning right will take you to the river mouth and ocean beach (15 min). You can loop back along the beach to the surf club and Holben Parade.

Another option is to take the path upstream along the edge of the estuary to the Boating Club, which will give you good views of feeding birds along a very scenic route. There is also a viewing platform and bird identification sign at the end of Dawick Street part way along.

Highlights: *Special events in March and October to welcome and farewell migratory birds, chance of seeing white royal spoonbills/kōtuku-ngutupapa, especially in winter.*

Getting there

Turn off State Highway 1 at Foxton for a 10 min drive to the settlement of Foxton Beach via Seabury Ave and then turn left into Holben Parade.

Further information

Horizons Regional Council, Horowhenua District Council and DOC work together with the Manawatu Estuary Trust to manage this area as a Ramsar site. See www.wetlandtrust.org.nz/Manawatu for further information.

Other places to visit

Pukepuke Lagoon—a dune lake and wetland near Tangimoana, on the Manawatu coast. Requires a permit to visit. See www.doc.govt.nz for more information.

19. Lake Papaitonga, Levin

Papaitonga (also known as Waiwiri) is a 61 ha dune lake within a scenic reserve comprising lush coastal forest and wetland, and supporting a wide range of endemic freshwater fish and bird species. The area is rich in Māori history. Two constructed islands, Papaitonga and Papawhaerangi together with the lake are regarded as tapu (sacred) to local iwi.

The reserve has an intact progression of rare coastal forest to wetland, with pukatea and swamp maire forest and excellent stands of mature kahikatea; while lower wetter areas contain flax, raupō and sedges.



Places to explore

An easy 10 min forest track and boardwalk takes you to a picnic and lake viewing area. A loop track (20 min) continues on to a second lookout at the southern edge of the lake, which adjoins farmland.

Highlights: *Abundance of forest and wetland birds, watch shags perched on specially constructed roosts, chance of seeing giant Powelliphanta snails in undergrowth.*

Getting there

The reserve entrance is at the end of Buller Road. Turn west off State Highway 1 approximately 5 km south of Levin.

Further information

Papaitonga Scenic Reserve factsheet from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Waikanae Estuary—walk along the sandspit and riverbanks to see wading birds.



Lake Papaitonga.
Photo: Sue Galbraith.

20. Pauatahanui Inlet, Wellington

This is surely a magical place with its extensive, relatively unmodified estuarine area containing a mosaic of tidal mud flats and native vegetation such as marsh ribbonwood, searush, eel grass and some raupō. The Pauatahanui inlet is home to waterfowl, both local and migratory waders, the most likely to be spotted being pied stilts/poaka, white herons/kōtuku, NZ shovelers/kuruwhengi, paradise shelducks/pūtangitangi and black shags/kawau. The area around the inlet has been inhabited for at least 600 years and is rich with wāhi tapu (sacred sites), archaeological features, and historic places.

Places to explore



A number of walking tracks lead from two car parks, with information boards to guide visitors. These provide options for walking along rush-lined streams (with a possible glimpse of the native fish, banded kōkopu), through marshy areas and even a stretch of coastal forest. Many tracks include a bird hide for quietly watching for birds—or in some cases, mud snails and crabs.

Highlights: *Estuarine features, coastal birds.*

Getting there

Pauatahanui Inlet is an east-west running arm of Porirua Harbour, 30 km north of Wellington. Public access is from Pauatahanui Village off State Highway 58 and Motukaraka Point on Grays Road.

Further information

Pauatahanui Reserve is managed by DOC, with Forest and Bird and a local community group, Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet (www.gopi.org.nz), who are actively involved in restoration of the inlet.

Other places to visit

Taupo Swamp—a lowland freshwater mire with a walkway/cycleway connecting the seaside settlements of Plimmerton and Pukerua Bay along State Highway 1.

Waitangi Park, Wellington City

This 1 ha constructed wetland on the Wellington waterfront is a great example of a coastal wetland ecosystem in an inner-city setting. It also illustrates how wetlands can be used in low-impact urban design to mitigate the effects of storm water run off.



Mud crab. Photo: Lindsey MacFarlane

21. Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park

This is a wetland and lake on a large scale and although it lacks the intimacy of some of the other sites, Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park is an awesome place, with the Rimutaka Ranges providing a scenic backdrop to the area. From Lake Domain at the north end of Lake Wairarapa to Onoke Spit, 30 km away at Palliser Bay, the park covers over 9000 ha, offering a rich diversity of mudflats, lagoons, sandflats, marshlands, saltmarshes and back waters, which are regularly flooded or exposed, depending on the season. It is home to more than 100 birds species, rare plants and native fish and is revered by Māori as a source of well-being for the region.

Places to explore



The park has many access points and a variety of recreation activities including boating, yachting, fishing, duck hunting and walking. There is a large open recreation area at the Lake Domain, but for seeing birds, the best place is Matthews and Boggy Pond Wildlife Reserve, where there is a viewing hide accessed via an 800 m walking/cycling track or a longer 2.6 km loop track. Alternatively, walk along the Onoke Spit at Palliser Bay.

Highlights: *Open vistas, recreational opportunities.*

Getting there

Lake Domain is around 8 km from Featherston via South Featherston Road. Matthews and Boggy Pond is accessed via Paera Road off Kahutara Road. Onoke Spit is at the end of Western Lake Road.

Further information

Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park factsheet from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Carter Scenic Reserve—an easy walk through a flooded kahikatea forest and along the Ruamahanga River.



Lake Wairarapa. Photo: Greater Wellington Regional Council.

Wetland plants

These are some of the plants you might see in the wetlands depending on the location.



Eel grass



Mangroves



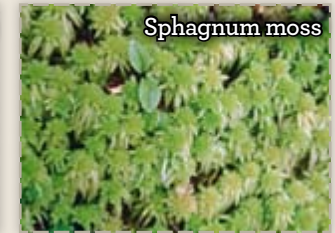
Wire rush



Raupō



Marsh ribbonwood



Sphagnum moss



Sundew



Cabbage tree/tī kōuka



Kahikatea

You will find eel grass, mangroves, wire rush and marsh ribbonwood in salt water environments and the other plants in freshwater wetlands.

Photos: DOC.