



# Ramsar wetlands

## Biodiversity

In 1971 New Zealand joined other nations at a convention in Ramsar, Iran, to formulate plans for protecting the world's wetlands. At that time the world's remaining wetlands were fast disappearing under an ever-increasing demand for agricultural land and industrial sites. These changes were occurring at an alarming rate without recognition of the important roles wetland ecosystems play in providing freshwater and natural resources for use. The meeting resulted in the development of the Ramsar Convention for the Protection of Wetlands which is celebrated by World Wetlands Day, on 2nd February each year.

### Where are they?

By 2006, New Zealand had established 6 sites, covering at least 40,000 hectares, designated under the Ramsar Convention as Wetlands of International Importance. They are:

#### Waituna Lagoon, Southland

Southland was one of the first places in the world to have a wetland officially recognised under the Ramsar Convention when 3500 ha of peatland area, known as the Waituna Wetland Scientific Reserve was registered in 1976. The area is soon to be extended to include another 16,500 ha of estuarine area.

#### Farewell Spit, Nelson

Farewell Spit is particularly important as a staging area for migratory shorebirds on the East Asia –Australasia migratory shorebird flyway. A total of 83 species of wetland birds have been recorded there.

#### Whangamarino, Waikato

This is the second largest bog and swamp complex in the North Island of New Zealand. The Ramsar site includes peat bog, swampland, mesotrophic lags, open water and river systems. It is managed as both wetland and wildlife management reserves by the Department of Conservation but also includes significant areas of freehold land and land managed by the Auckland/Waikato Fish and Game Council.

#### Kopuatai Peat Dome, Waikato

Kopuatai Peat Dome is the largest raised bog in the southern hemisphere. It is also the only significant unaltered bog left in New Zealand supporting an indigenous restiad vegetation type, which is unique on a global scale.



Farewell Spit  
D. Veitch





### **Firth of Thames, Waikato**

The estuarine and mangrove southern shorelines of the Firth of Thames support dense populations of wetland-dependent birds. Most of the bird species using the mud and sand flats or adjacent shallow waters are waders, that migrate to NZ from the northern hemisphere, but a range of NZ's internal migrants can also be observed there. Many of them are rare or uncommon in New Zealand.

### **Manawatu Estuary, Foxton**

This coastal estuary is a nationally significant habitat for many rare and threatened bird and fish species, notably brown mudfish and the globally threatened Australasian bittern/matuku and wrybill/ngutu pare. It is especially important as a site for migratory birds such as the wrybill, godwits, red knots and royal spoonbills. It is also valuable as a relatively unmodified estuarine area and has recreational value for boating and fishing.



Greenhood orchid  
G. M. Crowcroft

### **Why protect wetlands?**

Over the years, most NZ wetlands have been turned into pasture or reclaimed for industrial use. Other wetlands have been modified by changes in water levels or polluted with effluent or high nutrient run-off. Wetlands have also suffered from the introduction of aggressive pest plants and animals.

As recently as the 1970s, wetlands were still officially listed in many regions as wasteland. By the beginning of the 1980s, nearly 90 percent of North Island and over 60 percent of the original wetlands in the South Island were irreversibly modified in some way. In the process a number of wildlife species found nowhere else in the world disappeared.

By protecting remaining wetlands we are helping to protect rare ecosystems, improving the health of our waterways and potentially improving our own health.

### **What are the benefits?**

Wetlands are among the world's most productive environments. They are cradles of biological diversity, providing the water and primary productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival.

The Ramsar wetlands in NZ are major strong holds of a number of native species. For instance, the fernbird/mata is an endemic species whose range and abundance has reduced dramatically along with its habitat. Native freshwater fish, including several whitebait species, eels and native waterfowl also rely on the wetlands for survival.

### **How do wetlands gain Ramsar status?**

The Convention applies to a very broad range of wetlands, including marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt. It includes marine areas that do not exceed a depth of six metres at low tide.

The Ramsar Convention sets criteria for wetlands to meet the criteria for international importance.

The Minister for Conservation is responsible for nominating sites that meet the criteria for inclusion on the Ramsar list and which could be significantly safeguarded by the enhanced status. Other government bodies, iwi or community groups can also apply to the Minister to nominate particular sites.

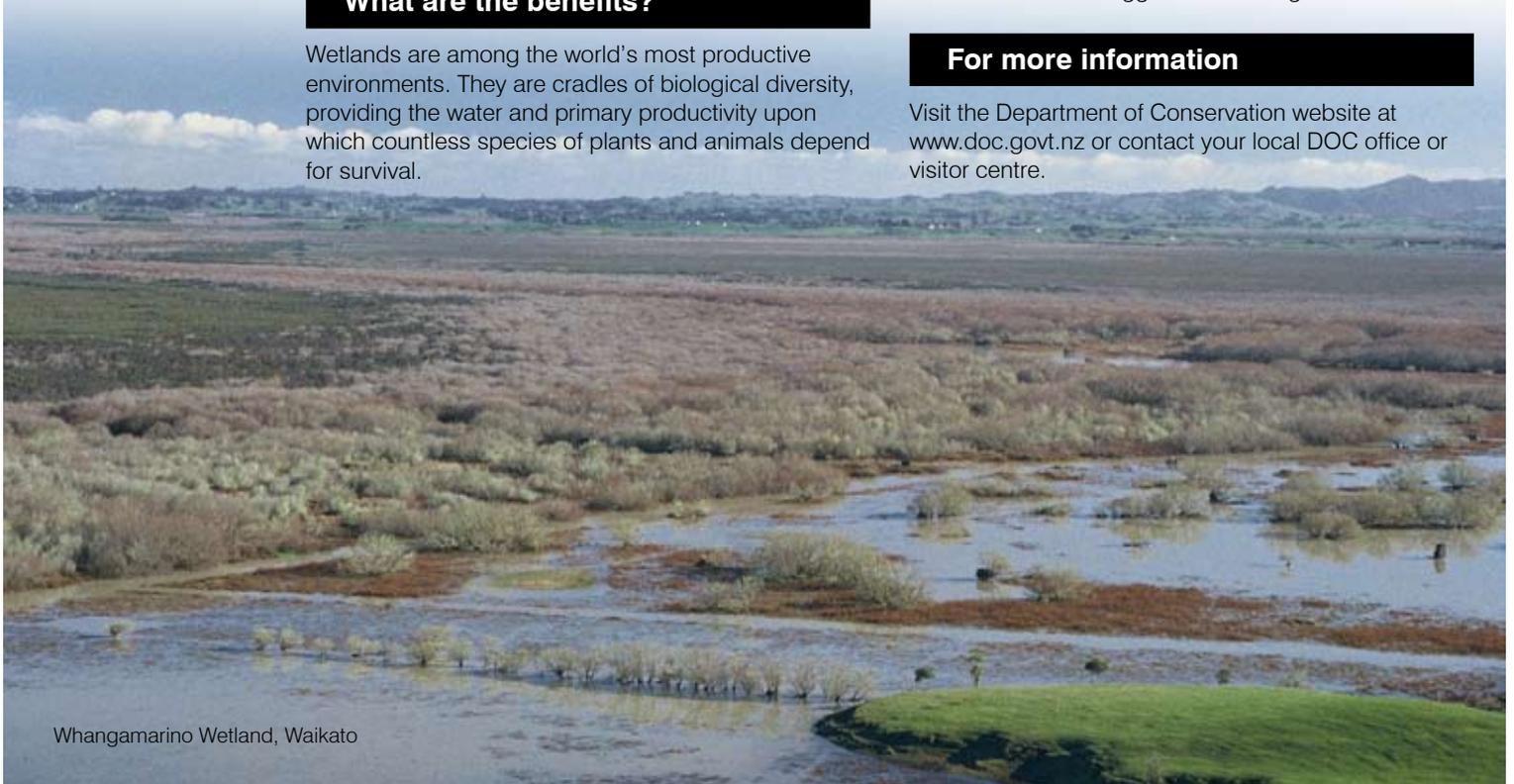
### **What can you do?**

Wetlands are vulnerable to invasion by pest fish and weeds because it is very hard to detect them until they are a problem. Once they have invaded a waterway and become pests it is then very difficult to remove them. To help control the spread:

- don't move fish and other water animals around or release them to new waters;
- don't collect aquatic plants from the wild or release weeds into the wild by emptying aquariums into waterways; wash your boats, trailers and fishing gear down carefully after use to prevent water weeds and fish eggs from hitching a ride.

### **For more information**

Visit the Department of Conservation website at [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) or contact your local DOC office or visitor centre.



Whangamarino Wetland, Waikato