

Flight

ISSUE 169

November 2016



**Keen predator hunter
The daring who do
New Bittern sanctuary**



Top job: President John Cheyne reads the annual report at the AGM.

from the PRESIDENT

Spring is here again and the wetlands are bursting into life with fresh plant growth and increasing breeding activity amongst the birds.

This was well illustrated recently when I visited James and Jane Hunter's property at Porangahau, Central Hawke's Bay. They are DU members and recently received a grant from DU Wetland Care Trust to assist with the construction of a complex of five dams along a swampy gully. Passionate wetland conservationists they typify what DU is about.

This on-going interest from private landowners and support from DU is vital for wetlands and waterfowl. Read more about their achievements latter in this issue on page 5.

John Cheyne



Lucky ducklings: Whio ducklings raised with care. See page 6.

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Ring me if you have a problem.

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Cover photo: Tranquillity for this happy pair with just the occasional spat with ducks.

Photo: Liz Brook.

Ducks Unlimited Photographic Competition 2017

A chance to show off your photographic skills.

Flight will have space for three winners from each of four categories.

So take your camera where ever you go these coming months. We are looking for photos of ducks and other water birds. Or good scenic shots of the wetlands where they live.

Categories are:

Ducks

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Under 16 years old (the photographer not the bird).

Three photos only in each category.



Decoys: Make sure you have your glasses on.

Email to: liz.brook@farmside.co.nz
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Send photos before March 31. 2017.

There will be an independent judge, not a member of DUNZ.

PS – There are prizes – good ones. And one outstanding top prize that includes a stay at Blue Duck lodge.

wetland care
NEW ZEALAND



Our business is to harness community, business and government resources to restore and develop lost wetland areas within New Zealand.

Wetland Care members recognise that wetlands are vital to the wellbeing of the environment, acting as huge ecological sponges by soaking up pollutants and filtering water before it reaches streams, rivers, lakes, aquifers and the sea.

Our initiatives focus on matters as far-reaching as groundwater replenishment, flood control, nutrient and contaminant management and climate change – all critical factors for the conservation of freshwater and saltwater wetlands and marshes.

We want to preserve and conserve the flora and fauna of our most endangered ecosystem so that vibrant wetlands are our legacy to future generations.

Funding for projects comes from the Waterfowl and Wetlands Trust established by Ducks Unlimited New Zealand Inc in 1991 and for specific reasons from an assortment of trusts and community based charitable organisations that like our work. Membership donations and corporate memberships also help.

Central to Wetland Care New Zealand's mission is forming partnerships with people and organisations with similar aims.

Tutukaka Landcare Coalition
Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Society Inc.
Ducks Unlimited Operation Pateke
Port Charles release 2005 at Coromandel
Henley Trust, Masterton
Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, Wellington
Kitchener Park, Feilding
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Wetland Trust New Zealand, Rangiriri
Waitakere Branch Forest and Bird
Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust, Dunedin
Cape Kidnappers pateke release, 2008 and 2009
Fiordland pateke release, 2009.

For further information, please contact:
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PO Box 281 Levin.

Keen predator hunter protecting Whio

The Ruahine Whio Protection Trust (RWPT) is a registered charity formed in late 2014 and functions through the efforts of a small group enthusiastically led by chairwoman Janet Wilson. Its purpose is to raise funds to help protect and raise the number of Whio in the Ruahines and surrounds.

Janet has tramped for years in the Ruahines as a member of the Palmerston North Tramping and Mountaineering Club (PNTMC), and whio are often spotted on the river. Although being a protector of whio was not Janet's original ambition, she took the opportunity to become a protector of the whio living and trying to survive in the area. Janet took over the running of the Oroua Valley Blue Duck Protection project from the NZDA (Manawatu Branch) in 2011. This expanded in to the Pohangina River in 2012.

"Life hasn't been the same since," said Janet.

Trapping began in the Ruahines in 2007. Several groups now look after approx 1800 predator traps, predominantly DOC 200's. These range from the Aorangi-Awarua Trust's lands in the North to the Pohangina River in the South. In 2015 a Ruahine Whio Management Plan was developed by these groups with support from DOC, and along with the RWPT, they now make up what is known as the Ruahine Whio Protectors Collective.

Janet still coordinates the Oroua and Pohangina projects. Between July 2015 and June 2016, 110 stoats and weasels were



Trap checking: Janet Wilson finds the best kind of stoat – a dead one.

Photo: Graham Peters.

caught, as well as 450 rats. She has a good team of willing volunteers but is always keen to hear from experienced trampers and hunters who might like to help out the whio. For many a tramp in the bush is no longer just a Sunday outing. It has become an ongoing war against the stoats, weasels, rats, and any other likely whio enemy.

Whio is the most endangered bird in the Manawatu and Janet is keen to raise the profile of our \$10 duck locally. Janet said the Oroua and Pohangina rivers have the most southern population in the North Island. There are no known whio in the Tararua and Rimutaka ranges.

Wairio Wetland is full



Wario full: Bund wall seems to have made the difference.

Photo: Ross Cottle.

For the first time since the final bund wall was installed the wetland is full of water.

Water runs the full length from the Oporua stop bank in the north to the stage one bund wall in the south, and in parts from the Parera Rd to the edge of Lake Wairarapa.

The water ranges in depth from a meter to shallow margins with small islands scattered throughout.

A wide variety of birds were there including Black Swan, Canada Geese, Dabchicks and lots of Ducks.

Also thousands of Frogs making a huge noise.

I am confident that with this amount of water there at the start of spring that we will still have water there at the end of summer, unlike last year when the wetland dried out completely.

Ross Cottle

Hunter Wetlands - Porangahau

James and Jane Hunter are justifiably proud of what they have achieved with creating and restoring a significant complex of wetlands on the family property Rangitoto at Porangahau in Central Hawke's Bay. Recently, the DU Wetland Care Trust helped fund the construction of a series of five interconnected dams.

They farm 660 hectares (effective 551ha) running a successful sheep and beef operation. The balance of 109ha comprises woodlots, fenced wetlands, stream margins and forest areas many of which have added protection through QEII Trust protection covenants.

The Hunter family are original European settlers in the area and first acquired a much larger block in 1854, which was later subdivided in 1928. James is the fourth generation to farm the family property.

James won the 2012 East Coast Balance Environment Award and he is a former Hawke's Bay Farm Forester of the Year. Recently, he finished three three-year terms on the QEII National Trust.

James interest in birdlife, wetlands and native forest goes back many years and he is passionate about protecting these habitats and enhancing overall biodiversity values. He also recognises the important role these areas play in maintaining water quality by reducing the movement of nutrients and sediment into waterways and minimising impacts of floods.

So far he has restored and fenced 20ha of wetland, 7kms of stream banks and 41ha of mature and regenerating native forest. Covenanteeing of Rangitoto's pockets of native bush started in the 1990s with most of it now under permanent protection.

The restored wetlands are well designed and constructed with the largest being 5ha. Most of these wetlands involve a low dam and include extensive shallow margins, irregular edge and numerous small islands. While a range of wetland plants have been planted, there has also been good regeneration of rushes and sedges. The combination of these features provides excellent feeding and breeding areas for a wide range of water birds (waterfowl, shags, dabchick, herons, bittern). Eels and native fish have also benefitted from this work.

The protected wetlands and native forest extend over some of the better land on the farm and James reflects on this by saying "We played our part sacrificing grazing land to create bird habitat, which is disappearing elsewhere. Isn't this the story we want to be selling? It is not just about how you grow your sheep and cattle but showing what you're doing is positive for biodiversity on the farm while limiting the negative impact beyond it."

The Hunters are a good example of landowners doing their bit for conservation whilst also farming sustainably and hopefully profitably!

John Cheyne



Before: This was before the DU funded ponds were constructed.



After: The ponds constructed with Wetland Care/DUNZ funding and taken from the same place as the before photo.



Efforts rewarded: James Hunter in front of the 10 hectare wetland he constructed about 10 years ago.



Protected: Fenced and planted (flax) riparian stream margin with an area of native forest in background which is fenced and protected by a QEII Trust covenant.

Photos: John Cheyne.

Cushy start for baby Whio

Playing mother duck comes naturally to Judy Fentress, the woman who can't say no to an egg. Therefore it is not surprising she recently hatched three Whio ducklings – in an incubator. Well what did you think?

Judy has been in the hatching business for some time and in 2012 Flight ran a story about her and her passion for ducklings.

She thought we might be interested to know about the three Whio ducklings. Judy said she used the very same incubator, mentioned in the article in 2012. It was given to her by Hamilton DU members.

In August this year she was given the Blue Duck eggs to hatch for the Otorohanga Kiwi House and Native Bird Park (Judy is an honorary life member after 15 years service as treasurer and helping with their wildlife breeding programme).

On September 8, these three little Whio ducklings hatched.

Some of us may remember the cheeky pukeko that became the star of the Genesis Power TV ads which were to help fund the protection of the Whio. Well Judy was the person who hatched that “cheeky pukeko”.

“Now I have hatched these three little Whio ducklings that will get to benefit from that very project.”

Judy was given another old incubator in 2013 from a DU member in Rangiwhia. “I cleaned it up, installed a digital thermometer, some egg racks and a few hatching baskets. This incubator is now working perfectly and has been hatching all sorts of eggs over the past few years.”

During the egg laying season, Judy said she



Bundles of fluff: Keeping Judy Fentress busy this hatching season.

Photo: David Fentress.

can have 3 to 4 large incubators going and full of various eggs.

“I incubate a lot of rescue eggs, where the nest or mother has been destroyed, or left the nest. If the eggs get into my incubators soon enough, there is a very good chance they

will survive. I hatch a lot of rescue mallard eggs (60 so far this year) from Fish & Game as well as individuals finding eggs in need of help.”

Well done Judy, and long may you keep up the good work for some time come.



The Mataku Link: A glimpse of part of the view. See next page for story.

BirdsNZ members brave the weather



The weather was not wonderful, but Robin and Heather List are seasoned birders and the pair set off to Wario to check on birds and do a count.

Robin said “The expedition consisted of Heather and me. We have the gear and do wetlands in squalls right cheerfully, so there was no grumbling in the ranks, though the waterproof notebook was abandoned in favour of the little recorder, which worked well under wet, windy conditions. The sun broke through at times and the whole place was looking grand as wetlands in winter can.

“There wasn’t a feather of a Dabchick nor yet a Bittern to be seen, so we’ll go looking in other haunts. It is possible they haven’t read the books and aren’t breeding yet, but it has been a mild winter.

“What we did see or hear in the space of 2 hours 10 minutes, not counting the walk along the road back to the car was, here in random order.”

Black swan 135, Mallard X Grey 26, (possibly a couple of Shovellers among the tussocks at the sheds pond, but I think they prefer Boggy

Pond) Teal 25, Yellowhammer 15, Harrier 4, Blackbird 4, Welcome Swallow 6, Pukeko 6, Magpie 4, Kingfisher 3, Silver-eye 37, Goldfinch 15, Black Shag 1, Skylark 2, Spur-wing Plover 5, Grey Warbler 1.

All up 16 species were seen by this intrepid pair, who also had an enjoyable lunch and excellent company in beautiful surroundings.

“Who could ask for more?” said Robin.

Photo: Robin List.

Makutu Link is taking off

Long seen as a logical extension of Forest & Bird’s Matuku Reserve, the property adjacent to Habitat Te Henga became available after many years.

Although a large donation was received nine years ago, from a generous benefactor, with the rising cost of Auckland property more fundraising was needed, and three of us from the Native Restoration Trust and the Waitakere branch of Forest & Bird started on a roller coaster ride to reach the \$2 million target.

The 37ha property has a maturing mixed podocarp Kauri forest and a wetland edge on the Waitakere River. This wetland aspect has even more importance, with the development of the Habitat Te Henga project and its effective predator control, leading to pateke releases over the last two years.

The forested portion was seen as the last link in the ecological chain of the corridor from the predator controlled Ark in the Park and its buffer zone to Makutu Reserve.

Tomtit, not seen for over 30 years since the purchase of the reserve, have become

established. Robins, whiteheads, and even a kokako, from those translocated to the Arc have made their way through. But it isn’t just one way traffic – pateke have dispersed upriver and when the importance of the river’s edge as a foraging and commuting corridor for long-tailed bats is added, the value of the property to conservation is irrefutable.

With the wetland, the biggest in the Auckland region with no public access, creating easy access to a river edge and wetland could give further value, and a house has scope to accommodate the many overseas and local students studying at Makutu or Arc in the Park. A small barn has potential as a wetland education and display centre.

We obviously just had to succeed!

Many trials and tribulations later, and many disappointments, when organisations we felt would be supportive were not, we came to the stage where we had sufficient support to make an offer that has been conditionally accepted. That support included some loans, which we are confident of repaying over several months. Purchasing the property is just the first step

as the house will undoubtedly need some changes to make it suitable as a field base and student accommodation. The barn, likewise, will morph more slowly as a wetland display centre, and the 2 – 3 ha of buttercup filled paddocks will require planning and plating to return them to alluvial sedge land and forest.

Fundraising will be ongoing and our Givealittle Appeal ran to October 27, but more support will be welcomed at any time. (See www.Givealittle.co.nz/project/makutulink)

An important part of our presentation to raise funds has been an excellent video shot from a drone operated by local drone company, X-craft. Experimenting with drones to receive the multiple signals from our transmitter-carrying pateke has been one part of X-craft’s assistance, but this easier task of videoing shows aspects of our wetland and forest that make this area a special one for conservation and education. The video can be seen on www.matukulink.kiwi.

John Sumich

Taupo - a great place for the AGM



Blokes at the bar: This two photo sequence was captured by Sharon Stevens-Cottle. Leaning on the bar they appear to be in serious discussion – but when they all turned around the serious matter was the drink in hand. “Typical blokes stuff,” said Sharon. **Photos:** Sharon Stevens-Cottle.



Concentration: Serious stuff for Jim Law and Paul Mason checking the numbers.



Old friends meet: Nancy Payne and Jan Abel have a good catch up chat.



Plant selection: The difficult matter of which plants to buy. Dan Steele has a little help from friends.



Embarrassed editor: Surprised at being presented with the wonderful carved duck trophy.



Bird feed: Sharon Stevens-Cottle has the technique and the bread is quickly snatched from Sharon's hand. This duck had plenty of experience at the game.

The company; the food; the weather all played a part.



Old friends meet: From left, Lyn Sutherland, Nancy Payne and Sheryl Wickham. **Photo:** Sharon Stevens-Cottle



Secretary at work: Mary Mason and John Cheyne keep an eye on proceedings.



Another bird in hand: Will Abel holds this specimen aloft and entices a bidder.



Flower surprise: Secretary Mary Mason delighted with her bouquet while husband Paul looks on.



Carved rocks: Amazing ancient rock carvings held DU members attention, mesmerised by the gentle rocking of the launch and the skill of the rock carvers.



Resolute: It takes tenacity to cope with broken bits, but Brian Simmons kept a cheerful face and persevered throughout the AGM.

Judgment at Cold Bay

Izembek Lagoon is 330,000 acres of National wildlife refuge halfway down the Aleutian Chain in Alaska. It is a staging ground for millions of birds on their migration from the Arctic to points south. Home to one of the largest natural eel grass areas in the world it is also home to almost the entire population of Pacific Brant geese (last count 150,000) many of which migrate to Mexico and back each year, but a significant number remain all year round. It is perhaps the best place in the world to see Pacific Brant, Seller's eider, Empire geese and cackling geese the miniature version of the Canadian goose we are so familiar with here.

Just going there has been on my bucket list for years, when the opportunity arose to go to hunt ducks and geese and do a little salmon fishing on the side I asked DU's favorite legal professional if he would care to join me. Strangely he accepted at once.

We flew from Anchorage in a twin engine Saab, to Cold Bay. Cold Bay has an all-weather runway long enough to take the largest Jumbo jet and the US Air Force's largest planes. It is also home to a listening site run by the US Government, you can't miss it as it sits on top of the largest hill just out of town pointing, one assumes towards Russia which is only a comparatively short distance away. Cold Bay has a permanent population of about 56 people which doubles during the hunting season and interestingly, a lot of the locals like to take their winter vacation in New Zealand and Australia.

We were met at the airport by Jeff, owner and head guide and his crew Mark and Scott (aka Scooter) from Four Flyways Outfitters. All the locals were in T-shirts; personally I found it bloody cold. Taken back to the lodge and shown our accommodation twin share rooms with a lounge dining area and two bathrooms. We were the first guests for the season and there were in all four of us, two others Rob and Bob a father and son duo, for the first week. Jeff suggested we get in a hunt before dinner, which is just what we did, picking up a boat



Happy hunters: Graham Gurr (left) and "the Judge" David Smith.

and decoys, we boated to a point a few miles from town and arrived to find Mark, Scott and Rob had gone by car, walked in a couple of miles across untracked land and had the decoys already for us when we arrived.

Laying out on the beach and covering ourselves with dead eelgrass we lay back and waited for the Brant to arrive. All the decoys both the silhouette and floating full body decoys were Brant so I assumed that's what we were here for. Brant was one of those species I have always wanted to hunt, it turns out at the beginning of the season they are as hard as early season parries. Some reassuring calling by the guides and they just came straight into the decoys. We had a couple of hours of regular flights and all of us ended up with at least two and some three (a limit) Bob stole the show shooting a double-banded bird.

Back to the lodge for dinner. Audrey, Jeff's wife, did the cooking and mighty fine it was too, limited by the lack of fresh vegetables she managed to turn out superb meals every evening along with desserts. All goods come into Cold Bay by air or barge, the barge comes

every two and a half weeks and the fresh veg lasts about a day. Potatoes US\$0.40 each! Milk US\$10 a carton. Wine and beer about double the price you would pay in Anchorage. The local pub was open three nights a week, and was the social hub of the town, the Judge and I went twice and I think if we had gone to all three open evenings would have met everybody that lives there - as it was we seemed to meet most of the local inhabitants. Rose the lady behind the bar made sure of that.

A couple of days later we were heading out to a more distant location, everything revolved around the tides and the weather forecast. We set off in two boats a Zodiac and an aluminium hulled whaler, one of the things I discovered is that the majority of the Izembek Lagoon is only a few feet deep at low tide most of the eelgrass beds are out of the water and navigation is done by using the shifting channels, which change from year to year. So a 30-minute ride in a straight line may take a couple of hours using the channels at low tide. Jeff is the only guide service using boats on the lagoon so in the whole week we only saw one other boat.

Our destination turned out to be towards the Pribilof Islands, which are out on the Bearing Sea. A wide river came into the lagoon and as soon as we were in sight of it we started to see bears, 10 before we even landed. One mother and three almost full grown cubs was going to defend her patch of estuary where the salmon were running against all intruders, and came across the estuary towards us. Jeff shouted at her "Hey Bear" Go away Bear" and similar type comments which did the trick, first we saw the cubs rush off into the scrub and finally when they were out of sight the sow turned and ambled after them.

We dropped the decoys on the tide edge and backed into the long grass along the shoreline. The tide was coming in and had the decoys floating within a short while.

The first to decoy were the Brant, Jeff called them as they flew past and most groups would



Onlookers: Seals rest in the eel grass.

Continued next page

The adventure continues

turn into the decoys and give us a chance at a shot. Green wing teal were also trading up and down the shoreline, problem was they flew so fast the first thing you knew about them was watching them depart, sometimes though they would turn and fly right back over the decoys.

As the tide came in it was moving a lot of other birds, the honkers (Canada geese) need fresh water to drink unlike Brant who can process salt water, so as the tide pushed them off the eelgrass beds they would fly inland to feed and drink. Mostly they flew behind us, which required a swift about face to get a shot. I had placed myself with a large rock to act as cover and a backrest so I would be more comfortable, turning around became somewhat of a chore. In the end I moved a couple of yards so I could shoot behind which was just as well as three honkers passed right behind just after I had moved. Bob got one then the Judge got one and I managed to scratch down the last one as they sped by.

They turned out to be cacklers, the smallest of the Canada goose family, there are two types of cackler one slightly smaller than the other with a shorter bill. I took a picture with a green wing teal to show just how small they were. I would have liked to have it mounted but Jeff said we would probably get a better one for mounting by the end of the week. Turned out to be the only one I got all week.

We returned to the same spot a couple of days later and after shooting our limits of Brant hiked up onto the tundra where we set up a couple of hundred windsock decoys and lay in the tundra waiting for the geese to come to us. It almost worked, there were plenty of geese flying but in the end we only got one that Bob shot between us.

Another location we hunted was right out towards the Bearing Sea a spit of land with a short stream, again the salmon were running past in their hundreds possibly thousands



Brant Geese: At rest on quiet sea.

mostly chum (dog) salmon. The first day we were attacked by hordes of pintails and mallards, so many that we all ran out of ammo, we almost all limited out that day I think we were two ducks short. Limit is eight ducks each and there were five of us shooting. Plus three Brant geese. We went back two days later with enough ammunition to start a small war, but the sun shone and while the Brant flew the ducks had mostly gone elsewhere.

We ate the Brant as we got them, they are easily the best eating goose I've ever tasted, Jeff did a number on the grill and made jerky with some, and we took the rest back to Anchorage and gave them to a friend who lives there, he agrees they taste fine and was more than happy to take ours.

The other reason we were in Cold Bay was the salmon fishing, the weekend we arrived it was the local salmon fishing derby, so all the

locals were out fishing, it is a huge community fundraiser, and a lot of people come in just for that weekend. Cold Bay also has one of the more famous (notorious) DU Fundraisers in Alaska, people fly in for that one just for the dinner and associated activities.

We had over the week four sessions salmon fishing, the first we went to a small stream on the edge of town you could jump across most of it and not get wet. Some of the salmon in it though would have difficulty turning around, they were as long as parts of the stream were wide. Under overcast skies and intermittent rain we used spinning rods to catch some salmon. The judge and I kept one each and we ended up eating one of the fillets for dinner a couple of nights later.

I mentioned to Jeff one evening that the weather was looking good, he said to give it five minutes and it would have changed. We are used to four seasons in one day here in New Zealand. Cold Bay can have four in one hour!

Our other salmon fishing was done on Russell Creek; the locals have taken the road right to the best pool on the river so it is easy access for them. The Judge and I fly fished, where as most of the locals used spinners.

To say the fishing was good would be an understatement, it was superb, in three sessions totalling only eight hours of fishing I landed 21 salmon, most were silver salmon (best eating) but also pinks (aka Humpies) and chum (aka dog). Both the Judge and I lost a whole lot more.

In fact our last session was the morning of our departure and we managed to get two hours in before we had to go back and check in at the airport for our flight back to Anchorage.

The Judge's judgment on the trip was, "Bloody marvellous, where shall we go next?" Personally I'd go back tomorrow anyone want to join me?

Graham Gurr



Good haul: David Smith happy with his catch.

Northland farmer gets help with bittern sanctuary

Living Water - the Fonterra/Department of Conservation partnership – is helping Ian Lupton create a sanctuary for an endangered native bird on his Northland dairy farm.

When Ian bought his farm - eight kilometres north of Dargaville – he saw no native wildlife on the property. This changed after he reduced the amount of nitrogen fertiliser and chemical spray being applied on the farm.

“Within three years frogs, eels, pheasants, and herons were common daily sightings. I even began seeing bittern fishing for eels in a canal and drainage ditches on the farm,” said Ian.

Australasian Bitterns, or matuku, are endangered native birds that live in wetland areas. The brown, heron sized birds, are very shy and have excellent camouflage. They feed mainly at night, on fish, eels, frogs, freshwater crayfish or koura and aquatic insects.

“Regularly seeing bitterns on my farm gave me the idea of establishing a bittern sanctuary because a successful dairy farm and native wildlife can go hand in hand,” said Ian.

Living Water is a 10 year partnership between Fonterra and DOC working with dairy farmers, iwi, conservation groups, schools and other agencies in five key catchments in significant dairying regions. The focus is on increasing ecosystem resilience and farm profitability, which includes improving water quality and increasing the abundance and variety of native wildlife in the catchments. With help from Northland Regional Council, Ian sought funding from Living Water for his bittern project.

Fonterra North Island Project Manager Tim Brandenburg said “Ian’s dream of creating a sanctuary for bitterns fits perfectly with Living Water’s goal to increase the variety

and abundance of native wildlife in our catchments.

“The first step in building the sanctuary, is finding out how many bitterns are living on the farm,” said DOC Ranger, Olly Knox, who is co-ordinating the sanctuary work.

“Male bitterns make a booming sound, with each male making its own distinctive sequence of booms. Living Water funding will be used to buy digital recorders to record the bitterns booming on Ian’s farm. The recordings will be analysed to establish the number of bitterns on the property,” said Olly. The funding will enable Ian to control stoats and feral cats. These predators eat bittern eggs and chicks. It will also be used to control weeds that smother native plants and trees. Enabling native vegetation to flourish on the farm will increase the habitat for the bitterns.

Living Water is also providing native plants and grasses to go on the banks of the canal and drainage ditches on the farm. This will create more bittern habitat, which will encourage more breeding.

“Riparian planting also improves water quality by reducing the run off of sediment and nutrients into the canal and drainage ditches. And it provides habitat for the fish, eels, frogs and aquatic insects in the waterways. Having more of these freshwater species will increase the bittern’s food supply,” said Olly.

Dargaville High School has supplied native trees, flax and grasses for the riparian planting. Enviroschools Northland secondary schools facilitator, Jacque Knight worked with teacher, Tim Pratt to establish the nursery. Jacque has also involved Dargaville High students in the bittern project.

“The students are making monthly visits to the farm to record sightings of bitterns, noting details of the vegetation and conditions they favour,” said Jacque. “These are secretive birds. If we can learn more about the habitat and conditions they like, we can recreate these as we build the sanctuary.”

Local iwi, Te Roroa, is supporting the establishment of the sanctuary as it will enhance the local habitat and contribute to a healthy environment for the Matuku.

Northland Regional Council Land management adviser, Pete Graham, is working with Ian Lupton to implement a Farm Water Quality Improvement Plan on the farm. “Creating the bittern sanctuary meshes really well with our water quality improvement plan. Pete said “The riparian planting improves water quality and creates habitat for bittern.”

Living Water programme

Living Water is a 10-year partnership between Fonterra and the Department of Conservation



Wetland: Ian Lupton near his bittern sanctuary.

(DOC) working with dairy farmers, iwi, conservation groups, schools and other agencies to improve the health of five key catchments in significant dairying regions throughout the country.

Living Water is working to increase ecosystem resilience and farm profitability, which includes improving water quality and increasing the abundance and variety of native wildlife in the five catchments.

To achieve this includes planting native trees, shrubs and grasses along waterways. This reduces sediment and nutrient run-off into the waterways. Animal predators and weeds are also being controlled, enabling native wildlife and plants to thrive.

Living Water catchments are:

- Kaipara Harbour - Northland - focusing on Hikurangi catchment north of Whangarei.
- Firth of Thames / Tīkapa Moana - Hauraki Gulf - and Pūkoro / Miranda catchment.
- Waikato peat lakes - focusing on lakes Areare, Ruatuna and Rotomānuka.
- Te Waihora / Lake Ellesmere - Canterbury – focus is the Ararira/LII catchment.
- Awarua - Waituna - Southland - focusing on Waituna catchment.

About Fonterra

Fonterra is a global leader in dairy nutrition and is a market leader with our own consumer dairy brands in Australia/New Zealand, Asia/Africa, Middle East and Latin America. The farmer-owned NZ co-operative is the largest processor of milk in the world, producing more than two million tonnes of dairy ingredients, value added dairy ingredients, specialty ingredients and consumer products every year. Fonterra is one of the largest investors in dairy based research and innovation in the world. Staff work across the dairy spectrum from advising farmers on sustainable farming and milk production, to ensuring we live up to exacting quality standards.



Safe place: A Bittern takes a stroll near wetland edge.

Photos: supplied.

Plovers go to Russia for love

Two small migratory shorebirds - Grey Plovers from the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary - made it once again all the way to the remote Wrangel Island off the coast of Russia near the Arctic Circle.

On their annual migration to breed the birds fly over 13000kms from Thompson Beach, north of Adelaide, including an incredible 7000km non-stop stretch from Adelaide to China.

“Who would have thought that a bird at Thompson Beach would, just a few months later, be roosting among polar bears and musk ox?” said Natural Resources Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Manager of Coast and Marine, Tony Flaherty.

Mr Flaherty said the plovers were tagged with tiny solar-powered satellite trackers, to discover what parts of the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary and Gulf St Vincent they use. Researchers also wanted to learn where they go and stop along their epic journey to the Arctic breeding grounds.

“Little was known about the migratory route of the plover, and knowing where these birds go really helps with conservation efforts to protect shorebirds,” Mr Flaherty said.

The tagged plovers left in March to fly along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, taking distinctive routes to the northern hemisphere.

Mr Flaherty said uncovering this Grey Plover migration route can also help with international efforts to conserve their stop-over sites in



Plover pair: Distinctive and tough birds.

China and nesting sites in the Arctic.

“Disturbance and impacts to coasts across the birds’ migratory route all add up. What we do on our local beaches can also help these birds prepare for these incredible journeys.”

Researchers were also surprised at how little the birds moved from Thompson Beach during the Australian Summer. Here they spent their time feeding on the rich tidal flats and roosting on the beaches and nearby salt marsh and lagoons.

During the warmer months, the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary, located north of

Adelaide, is home to approximately 27000 resident and migratory shorebirds. The area provides a safe haven for the shorebirds and a smorgasbord for feasting.

The research has been carried out by a partnership between Friends of Shorebirds SE, the Victorian Wader Study Group and the South Australian Department of Environment, Water, and Natural Resources, with funding support from the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board Shorebird Project and the Australian Government-funded Samphire Coast Icon Project.

UNESCO protecting a world heritage site

On July 17 this year, the Marshlands of Southern Iraq, often referred to as the ‘Garden of Eden’, were named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Mesopotamian Marshlands in the lower floodplains of the Euphrates and the Tigris are the largest wetland in the Middle East. The source of the water is upstream in the mountains of Turkey, Iraq and Iran.

The Ahwar of Southern Iraq, as the marshlands were known, are home to hundreds of thousands of birds and at least 40 fish species. The marshes are a stopover point for many birds as they migrate from Central Asia to Africa. These wetlands also play a part in preventing dust storms, which are extremely detrimental to the economy, living conditions and health. They also moderate the temperature in this very hot part of the world. Throughout millennia the area has supported various peoples and their livelihoods, including ancient cultures such as the Sumerians. The World Heritage site unites these natural and cultural aspects.

Wetlands International welcomed the decision to inscribe the marshes on the UNESCO World Heritage List. However, the marshlands face serious constraints to maintain and strengthen

the intrinsic values they were inscribed for. The marshes have only partly recovered from severe damage by past drainage and warfare. By 2000, 90 percent of the marshes had been destroyed due to large scale drainage during the Saddam Hussein regime. After the fall of the regime around 40-60 percent of the marshes were reflooded.

The partially recovered wetlands and the people who depend on them are under threat again from developments such as large dams and agricultural schemes further upstream, which significantly reduce the amount of water flowing to the marshes. Solutions need to be found so the precious river water available is used wisely for the marshes, drinking water and agriculture, and that the oil industry does not compete for water nor pollute the area.

The marshes’ World Heritage status is an important incentive for increased (international) support for the protection of these marshes, including the resources they provide to local people. We hope this nomination will lead to better water management, increased knowledge of its biodiversity values and a sustainable integration of the conservation of the marshlands with social and economic development.

We have been working in this region for many years and were involved in preparing the nomination of the site for World Heritage status. Over the coming years we hope to continue our work to help restore and conserve this iconic wetland and reduce potential impacts from the oil and gas industry.



Ruffit Lodge opening day



Hunters: on the trail, but no ducks in sight.

Amazing how keen some folk are to get out there on opening day, rain or shine, they have the kit ready to go and hope to catch something in their sights....

An intergenerational hunt on Opening Day, with 11 hunters, plenty of camo, (and ammo presumably) and lots of enthusiasm, but no ducks.

But out at Ruffit Lodge on that day as a group trudged through the undergrowth to reach the optimum positions, other exciting things were taking place.

Up to 22 ducklings had huddled together, if that was wise or not, I do not know, but Julie Candy certainly took a few photos of those little fluffy birds. Julie said there were actually two clutches of duckling, with 22 in one clutch.

And then there was the case of the lost frog. How it ended up on Neil Candy's thumb I am not sure, but he recognised it as a tree frog – imported of course.

After a couple of emails to a helpful boffin at Victoria Uni, we had an actual scientific name. The frog is an introduced Australian brown tree frog (or whistling frog) *Litoria ewingii*. Now how is that for name!



Ducklings: 22 in one clutch, I hope they all make it.



Whistling frog: How that little frog ended up on Neil's thumb I don't know, but it does look very cute.

Photos: Julie Candy.

Keeping their eye in



Good shoot: A spot of sun helped these keen sportsmen. From left they are Rob Minton, Ken Barnes, Mike Oleary and Paul Hullet.

Photo: Ross Cottle.

A DU shoot was held at James and Di Martins place at Waitawa just north of Martinborough on October 9.

scored with 84 out of 100.

Weather was overcast with the odd light showers, but a great day.

There were 50 shooters, so plenty of competition. Paul Hullet top

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