

Flight

ISSUE 170

February 2017



Aussie visitor impressed
Cajan Capers
Saving the bitterns

from the PRESIDENT

New Year's greetings to members and readers and I trust you all had an enjoyable time over the festive season.

In Hawke's Bay it looks like we are heading into a very dry summer as is most of the east coast of the North Island. Water is so important to both the entire community and the natural ecosystems which our country very much depends on. Without water and, for that matter wetlands we are doomed. We need to manage them sustainably to ensure the values we cherish are maintained.

Ducks Unlimited NZ has been at the forefront of wetland conservation and wetland bird recovery programmes for a number of decades and can be proud of our achievements.

We were instrumental in the formation of the NZ Game Bird Habitat Trust which receives \$2 from every game bird hunting licence and annually allocates about \$100,000 to wetland projects throughout NZ. I am privileged to be the DU representative on the Trust and participating in the Trust activities. This work is in addition to the wetland projects that DU have directly contributed financially to, or provided practical advice on.

DU and our members have also played a major role in initiating recovery programmes for a number of threatened wetland bird species. These include pateke (brown teal), whio (blue duck), white swan and matuku (bittern). Other agencies may now play a greater part in some of these programmes but it was DU that provided the important support initially.

Ducks Unlimited's involvement in these activities and DU membership generally has been important in the establishment of many networks and lifelong friendships.

Your Directors have recognised the importance of these achievements and consider it is worth documenting. We are in the process of commissioning someone to write the history of DUNZ so the evolution of our organisation is recorded. I look forward to seeing this exercise completed.

John Cheyne



New member

Stephen Procter, Palmerston North

Stop Press

The DUNZ AGM is to be held in the Wairarapa this year at Brackenridge in Martinborough. Dates etc to be announced soon.

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All to be camera ready. Discounts for long-term adverts.

Waterfowl adverts free to members.

Contact the Editor to book space or check discounts.

Contributions to Flight from members or other readers are welcome.

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Ring me if you have a problem. New publication dates are February, May, August, November.

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Cover photo: Emma Williams and spotter dog
Kimi take their work seriously.

Photo: Lauren Buchholtz.



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
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Cape Kidnappers pateke release, 2008 and 2009
Fiordland pateke release, 2009.

For further information, please contact:
William Abel - Director, Wetland Care
New Zealand, phone 06-362 6675
PO Box 281 Levin.

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

Other water birds

Wetlands

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

Three photos only in each category.

Email to: liz.brook@farmside.co.nz
or if you do not have email, send prints to:



Decoy: Make sure you have your glasses on.

Liz Brook, Brightnook Farm, RD9, 766
Beaconsfield Valley Rd, Feilding 4779.
(Check Flight, bottom of page 2). 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.**

Take part in the Photo Competition

The weather has not been helpful for photos but photographers are tough. They know to get the best shot they have to persevere and brave all weathers.

Water birds in NZ

An unusually high proportion of New Zealand's native birds are wetland species – 30 percent, compared with less than 7 percent worldwide. This includes 15 species that have become extinct since humans first settled in New Zealand, around 1250–1300 AD.

Today some native wetland species are very rare, with less than 1,000 birds. New species have also become established, either by being deliberately introduced or arriving independently.

Loss of wetlands

Wetlands are areas of high biological productivity, and their fish and birds were important food for Māori. When Europeans arrived in New Zealand, freshwater wetlands covered around 672,000 hectares. But many areas have been drained for conversion to farmland or urban development – 87 percent have been lost since around 1800, and they now cover just 2 percent of New Zealand.

In some of the remaining wetlands, the water quality has declined. Eroded soil from

disturbed land can build up in the water and choke aquatic organisms. Extra nutrients from fertiliser runoff can cause rapid algal growth, oxygen depletion and toxicity, which threaten the invertebrates, fish and plants that wetland birds depend on.

Restoring wetlands

Many community groups, regional bodies and landowners are re-creating or restoring wetlands on private and public land. Organisations such as Ducks Unlimited rear native ducks in captivity and release them at suitable sites, and populations of some wetland bird species are starting to increase.

Go on line to check out Water birds in NZ. Or head to the local library to find a book and take home for a quiet read.

Take a camera when you go looking for native birds. Or possibly birds you think are not native, but that you have not seen before.

The photographic competition closes March 31.

Email to: liz.brook@farmside.co.nz or post to:

**Liz Brook, Brightnook Farm, RD9, 766
Beaconsfield Valley Rd, Feilding, 4779.**

Eye catching signs in Southern Wairarapa



Picturesque: Signs worth a look.

Photo: Anna Burrows.

Links to Boggy Pond, Wairio Wetlands, Lake Ferry, Onoko Spit and Pounui Lagoon, all in southern Wairarapa.

South Featherston School designed some signs for the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Project to help raise awareness of the threatened birds

breeding around these areas. The signs were put in place and each has an attached map and some photos showing the locations.

Anna Burrows, ranger and operation (Biodiversity) for DoC oversaw and organised the locations, and now it is time to take them

down.

“I’ll pull them all back in at the end of February once the birds have finished breeding,” Anna said.

Hard work at Boggy



Aerial of the Boggy Pond area.

Steve Playle of the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) was on the job in early January getting trapping work done around Boggy Pond in the Southern Wairarapa.

“I started back at GW on the 9th and my first job was to get the trapping work done over 10/11 January..

“Predators caught were **5 ferrets, 1 weasel,**

8 rats, 21 hedgehogs, 4 mice, 1 magpie, 1 rabbit and 1 thrush. Water levels were still very high in the Wairio Restoration Block and at the southern end there were a couple of big flocks of Pied Stilts in residence. At Boggy Pond the Royal Spoonbills were back in residence where Tony Silbery took his photos of breeding birds last year. I am assuming there may be breeding taking place again this season.

“The total major predators taken since the trapping commenced in July 2013 now stands at **62 cats, 140 ferrets, 8 stoats, 53 weasels, 652 hedgehogs and 295 rats.** There was a period prior to Christmas where it went quiet on the ferret scene but obviously there has been some movement over the festive break. It is great to see the water levels so good in the Wairio Restoration Block,” said Steve.

There for the Long Haul

One of our DUNZ directors featured recently in an issue of the National Farming Review. That person is Dan Steel of Blue Duck Station. The writer was none other than Lou Sanson, Director-General of the Department of Conservation.

Dan was eager to point out that Blue Duck Station is 100 percent effective. Every square metre does its bit for biodiversity in one way or another, be it pasture, native bush, wetland, river bank or the sites housing beehives.

Mr Sanson says DOC cannot achieve all its conservation targets alone and he therefore considers Dan Steele as one of the enthusiasts contributing to DOC's 2025 targets for pest management and attracting international visitors.

As most DU members will know, Dan has his own freehold property along with a family lease that covers 2800 ha. This farmed area carries 5400 breeding ewes, 1000 hoggets, 100 deer, 330 breeding cows and 470 other cattle.

However it is the blue duck (Whio) and kiwi populations on which Dan has focused efforts for the last 10 years. After losing a brood of ducklings he quickly set about organising an efficient pest control programme.

Pest control is only part of the answer as flooding streams and rivers mean the Whio nests and eggs can easily be washed away. Dan recovers eggs and sends them to incubate at



Determination: Dan Steele, Blue Duck Station.

Photo: Des Williams.

nest egg facilities. After hatching they go to DOC's blue duck hardening facility at Turangi, and eventually return to the river.

Dan said the Whio are still only holding their own, though kiwi numbers are increasing.

(The above material are excerpts from the original story in the December issue of National Farming Review, written by Lou Sanson, Director General, DOC).

Australasian bittern battling for survival

This was written by Nicki Harper, a reporter with Hawke's Bay Today newspaper, and was printed on 24 December 2016.

In January 2016, Nicki Harper caught up with Massey University doctorate student Emma Williams at Lake Whatuma near Waipukurau.

Emma Williams has been researching Australasian bittern for five years. This month we caught up with her again to see what progress had been made during the year.

It may not have the celebrity status of the kiwi or the kakapo, but the wetland dwelling bittern faces an equally uncertain future in New Zealand, recognised by its endangered classification moving up to "critical" in the past 12 months.

The threat to this species, also known as matuku, is such that work around the country to locate and monitor the secretive birds, of which it's estimated there are fewer than 1000 in New Zealand, and falling, has been increasingly important, said Emma Williams.

"The DOC database shows the decline has been happening over the last 40 years and it's been very steep, which shows how vulnerable they are."



Lake Whatuma is home to about 25 percent of the total Hawke's Bay bittern and its accessibility has provided important information, particularly about the male birds. Supported by volunteers, Emma, continues her work as a private consultant, has been locating

and monitoring the bittern at Lake Whatuma for five years and last year caught and attached transmitters to 10 males.

This year one of the birds died, with the cause of death being investigated by Massey University.

However, the lifespan of the transmitters meant only about five continued to be monitored.

Work continues with an increased focus on the females and chicks.

Information gathered about the males has been a "massive leap forward" in finding out about their behaviour, she said.

This showed the birds were loyal to their habitats, leaving the lake during summer and autumn when the water level dropped, consistently heading to the same spots on neighbouring farmland, before returning in August to breed.

Research in the South Island this year revealed that when the bitterns leave their breeding grounds they travel a lot further than previously thought.

"One that we were tracking near Christchurch, a female juvenile, went more than 100 kilometers away," said Emma Williams. Read more P7 & 8.

Cajun Capers

From New Zealand it was easy over the internet to book some days duck shooting and fishing. However the doubts begin to creep in when you travel all the way to the "Great Wetlands of the South" in this case Louisiana, USA.

The Judge and I travelled to New Orleans by car starting from Dallas, then down the only road that leads into the most southern of the Louisiana marshes the road ending at Venice.

The trip down the road had been a revelation in itself, six years after Hurricane Katrina with scars still visible where houses had been washed away, the rebuilding was impressive with all the houses and even a new high school built 18 feet off the ground.

Katrina had almost wiped Venice off the map, but rebuilding had given it a go-ahead feel and our accommodation was like everything else, built 18 feet up in the air.

At 5am in the morning waiting, for our guide who was fashionably late, it was a dark and lonely place. The only other person we had seen was the cook at the bar cum restaurant who had made us a breakfast sandwich when she opened at five.

Eventually a bearded young man turned up towing a flat-bottomed duck boat. Yes, he was our guide and we should get in.

Winston Churchill once described the English and Americans as two people divided by a common language, with this guide it was more of an insurmountable gulf than a divide. Suffice to say he thought we talked funny! From our part he was almost unintelligible.

The trip through the wetlands was interesting in pitch dark with no lights. We either went flat out or with alarming severity dead slow. With dawn breaking, the boat slowed again and our guide started throwing out decoys.



Captain Cajun: Didn't even slow down for the turns.

This must be the spot we surmised. After going in circles for a few minutes we eased into a slot cut in the reeds, a thin screen of stalks kept us hidden from the ducks.

"Load up!" came the command from our intrepid guide. Loaded I looked up to see a duck set its wings to come into the decoys, our guide had his head down looking at his cellphone, so I shot it. Our guide exploded from his seat demanding to know "what **** * was I doing?" I pointed out I had just shot a gadwall (type of duck), which was now as dead as the proverbial dodo and was drifting away on the current.

This got a lecture from our guide which when condensed amounted to us only shooting when he said to do so.

About an hour later I enquired if we might see any more ducks at this spot as apart from the one I had shot we had not seen another.

Our guide explained that he was mystified by the absence of ducks as he had shot limits from this very spot every day so far this week!

The Judge at this point went very quiet.

I asked if we had a plan "B" as it was not a happening thing where we were. With some muttering our guide started the engine and backed us out of the hide. We helped pick up the decoys and the gadwall I had shot which was hung up on a branch touching the water some hundred metres away from the hide.

We were soon speeding through the marshes. In the daylight they were pretty amazing, vast impenetrable forests of reeds occasionally a few trees far in the distance surrounded by reed, narrow channels which suddenly opened up to vast expanses of open water. Almost unbelievably, some of the areas were in private ownership and the duck hunting rights to those areas are fiercely protected. And almost more amazingly, oil pipelines ran from offshore platforms through the marsh to holding tanks many miles inland with marker posts every time they crossed under open water, and there were a lot of them. Birdlife was patchy; on open water areas there were sometimes a flock of birds, spoonbills, pelicans, wading birds and most importantly ducks. They say there are 735 species of birds, fish and mammals that use the Louisiana wetlands.

We arrived at a lagoon, which was open to the sea on one side although the sea was probably a few miles away, but I could just see the white water from the waves breaking over rocks or a sandbar.

Out went the decoys again and we slipped in between two screens of reeds growing in



Colourful: Marsh from first blind (whatever that is?)

--- and frustrated shooters

the middle of the lagoon hundreds of yards away from any cover. This time we were in the right place as there were ducks trading around.

Our guide started calling, it went something like, quack quack quack, "Keep your head down," quack quack, "I said keep your head down," quack quack "KILL'EM."

At which point we were supposed to leap up and shoot the ducks, the problem was that with our heads down when we got up to shoot we had no idea where the ducks were, if they were directly in front no problem but if they were to the side or behind us by the time we turned to shoot they were already out of range. Added to that a Cajun yelling "KILL'EM" at the top of his voice flared the ducks before we even had a chance to stand.

This happened a couple of times with the inevitable lack of success, the next time our guide called the ducks in range after yelling "KILL'EM" he promptly fired his shotgun in the direction of the ducks.

Enquiring if he was shooting his own birds, he replied to the effect that he was shooting our limit as if he didn't we would be going home empty handed.

The Judge, at this point suggested that our guide might care to indicate just where the ducks were before he yelled "KILL'EM." He pointed out the positions of a clock – 12 o'clock in front, 6 o'clock behind, 9 o'clock to the left and 3 o'clock to the right, pointing up he said high, pointing down low.

Really the morning had just reached a new low, at least I thought it had, but I was wrong. While we had been discussing how to tell the time some teal had dropped in and were sitting in the decoys about 40 metres



Two goodies: The Judge and the author with a couple of good sized red fish.

away. "Kill em" said our intrepid guide "NO way ", said I, "They are on the water", "Don't matter," says our guide. "Th're trash birds and it is legal to sluice them on the water." The teal had at the sound of our raised voices had the good sense to flock off.

To be honest after that my heart wasn't in it, we scratched down enough ducks for two limits with our guide shooting most of the time. The Judge not to be out done was faster than a yelling Cajun and shot well including a beautiful Bald Plate American Widgeon, in full breeding plumage, which our guide informed us was his, as it was the best he had ever seen.

Not being the most intelligent human being

I had ever met, our guide had forgotten to count the gadwall I had shot first thing and we were one bird over our two limits. One of the birds was deposited at the bottom of the decoy bag incase we met the warden and we were off back to the dock in time for lunch.

We consoled ourselves with a good lunch and some alcoholic beverages and assured each other that the morning was over and fishing this afternoon would be much better with our fishing guide.

We arrived at the dock at the appointed hour to meet our fishing guide; nosing into the dock was a sleek 20 foot fishing machine with you know who at the helm. To say the reception was frosty would be putting a good face on it.

As it turned out, our intrepid guide was a better fishing guide than a duck-hunting guide and by the end of the afternoon we had almost forgiven him for the morning. We were fishing for red fish and we got into some seriously good fish. It's a sad fact that even though we were not taking any fish away with us every legal fish that came on board was promptly knocked on the head. It would appear to be a matter of pride for the guides not to come back to the dock without limits of fish for everyone in the party. In the end we gave the fish away to the people on the dock.

After a successful afternoon our feelings towards our guide had softened to the point we invited him to join us for a beer or two at the bar by the dock.

He refused!

Graham Gurr



From water level: The view was mostly of the reed beds, the splashes are birds taking off.

On the Scent

It's a beautiful morning on Lake Whatumā. As the last of the fog lifts and disperses, leaving the lake's clear water exposed, Kimi and I float along the edge of the western shore quietly in our kayak. We're looking for bittern nests and listening for the tell-tale bubbling call of chicks.

Nearby, peering out of two separate maimais are the heads of Finn McCool and Bernie Kelly. They're watching careful for any signs of movement within the Raupo – an important job. Kimi and I can't see more than a few metres in front of us as we move through the Raupo so we always need 'spotters' to detect the birds that are present but try to sneak away from us.

Suddenly, Kimi's black Labrador nose begins to twitch. She's picked up some scent. Her tail flicks up and begins to bounce from side to side as she reaches forward across the kayak.

I slip off the kayak giving her permission to do the same. It is at this moment that we transform into our swamp alter egos. Kimi becomes an elegant torpedo - her otter-like tail propelling her beautifully through the water, until she silently disappears into the Raupo.

And me?

Not so much.

My transformation is somewhat less fortuitous. Knee deep in mud, one foot already stuck and water up to my waist - my movements are best described as cloddish and ungainly. I slosh awkwardly after her trying my best not to sound like a heffalump bombing in a swimming pool.

As I enter the Raupo, my radio crackles and Bernie announces that a bittern has flushed south of our location. We can never be sure of the sex of a bittern when we see one, but there are a few tell-tale signs that give us a

clue. Firstly, females are noticeably smaller than males, and secondly, in the case of Lake Whatuma, we know that none of the females are wearing radio-transmitters (yet!).

Both Bernie and Finn carry radio-receivers. These devices detect the pulse-like signals emitted from any bird that's been caught and still carries a Ducks Unlimited transmitter. If a radio-signal is detected, Finn and Bernie can identify the bird and follow its movements even if they can't see it in the thick Raupo – so when a relatively small bittern flushes and they don't get a signal on their receivers they know it's likely to be a female.

The excitement in Bernie's voice tells me this bird fits this criteria even before his words confirm it.

Another female is great news. We've been searching bittern territories at Lake Whatuma for females and nests for a while now. We started unobtrusively by watching over known territories in October for something known as a 'female foraging flight'. These flights are supposedly undertaken by females when they leave the nest to find food, a behaviour they have to do regularly because the males don't feed them or the chicks. Such flights are noticeable and have enabled researchers to find nests overseas. By November, we have only witnessed a handful of these flights, and after investigating them further none suggested the presence of a nest.

This surprised us. In previous years we've found nests by accident and all of them were (or would have been) at chick stage by November.

It was time to up the ante...and go in with the dog.

Since November we've swept every known territory on foot looking for evidence of



Emma & Kimi: Not the best of places when your feet sink into the mud ...

Photo: Lauren Buchholtz.

nesting. Up till now, and with the help of spotters like Bernie and Finn, we've been able to find at least four small unmarked birds (females), but none of them appear to show any interest in breeding. This latest bird would be the fifth.

Bitterns are polygynous, meaning males often have more than one female. So it's reasonable to expect up to five females to every male. To only find five on the whole lake – a site with at least twelve booming males – is somewhat concerning. If not down-right depressing.

To add to our concerns – the five males that still carry Ducks Unlimited transmitters at Lake Whatuma have been very unstable in their territories. They started off well, with all five returning to the lake in August to boom as usual and fight over the usual patches of real estate. Yet by October only two appeared to have claimed a Raupo patch. The others had spent all their time interfering with their neighbours before leaving to try elsewhere. Why are they not finding what they need at L. Whatuma?

So when Bernie confirms a fifth female. I think we can be forgiven for thinking we'd won the lottery. He immediately directs me southwards towards where the bird came up...but Kimi has different plans and starts heading northwards into the breeze.

I pause for a second.

On one hand I have a confirmed sighting to the south. A rare opportunity to reward the dog on fresh scent and a possibility that there was a nest nearby. On the other hand my dog clearly thinks she's onto something better, and as I can't be sure what the dog nose knows and John Cheyne is always telling me to 'always trust your dog'...I decided



Handy Andy: Local landowner Andy, tracking a bittern with the use of an aerial.

Photo: Emma Williams.

-- and on the brink ...

to abandon the sterling advice of the spotter and follow Kimi's lead.

I wasn't disappointed. It took us awhile to find the four perfectly formed olive eggs that were tucked away on a carefully constructed platform in the thick Raupo. We think the nest belonged to the same bird that the spotter saw. Kimi has been trained on feathers and the live bird's scent, and in this case the wind would have been wrong for her to detect the flushed female. Instead we suspect that the female moved south to evade us as we entered the Raupo. Kimi hit its scent track and was able to follow it back through the vegetation. It was definitely a team effort requiring all parties - the spotters, dog and handler.

There are several reasons why we're particularly interested in finding nests this season. We have little knowledge of how successful bitterns are in breeding and whether chicks survive to adulthood. Nests are notoriously difficult to find and this is part of our problem. To date we've had great success in developing methods for monitoring male bitterns (through their conspicuous booming call) but have no means for detecting females and chicks.

Yet it's the females and chicks that are our capacity to save the species. Just like money in the bank, the more we start with, the greater the capacity to grow our fund (or bittern population). One male can fertilise several females, so it's the females that limit the size of our deposit. The more eggs she lays the higher the interest rate, and the more chicks that survive the greater the deposit in the following year.

...and of course to achieve this you have to prevent your significant other from hammering your credit card (prevent threats) in the meantime - this is tricky for bitterns



Spotters: Watching for foraging flights of females from a maimai, Kimi spotter dog in kayak. From left Lauren Buchholtz, Bernie Kelly and Kimi.

Photo: Emma Williams.

as we're still working out how many we've got, who's hammering the bittern credit card and how much they're spending...and there are so many potential spenders out there i.e. predators, poor water clarity, fluctuating water levels, poor food availability.

We have many reasons to believe our bittern credit card is out of balance. In the last 12 months five starving nestlings have been found by members of the public right in the heart of urban areas - two females in Christchurch, and two males and a female in Tauranga - unusual behaviours for a secretive wetland specialist species. What happened to the parent that caused these birds to wander? Why were they nesting near to such accessible, high-disturbance areas in the first place?

All five birds went into captive care and four survived to be released later in the year with healthy weights. We followed these birds post-release using Ducks Unlimited transmitters. To date two have died of starvation, one is missing - leaving a lone female surviving in Tauranga as our starting deposit.

As recently as 2010, surveyors at Whangamarino wetland - a site touted to be the national stronghold for bitterns - regularly recorded 50 + bittern calls within 15 minute long surveys. The number of birds calling could be as many as 12 individual birds per listening post and there were 40 listening posts - that was a lot of noise and a lot of birds. So many that observers regularly complained that they couldn't keep track of them all.

Sadly these days are gone. Now the same locations are eerily silent, and observers are lucky to find seven birds across the whole wetland.

The Australasian bittern is no longer Nationally Endangered. It is now Nationally Critical - the same threat classification as Kakapo - and the last threat classification before Extinction.

The clock ticks...all year around multiple threats hammered away at the bittern credit card...and once a year there's a short opportunity for bitterns to make their deposits.

...how much longer before the balance turns red?

Emma Williams



Trapping team: The crew at Lake Whatuma ready to put out traps. Daniel Winchester - checked shirt, had earlier demonstrated how to handle the traps.

Photo: Emma Williams.

Australian - duck shooting – here in NZ

The onset of autumn sees not only the change in seasons, it also signals a hugely exciting time of the year with hunters and their canine companions excitedly make their plans for the annual ritual of spending time in the field hunting duck, quail and deer.

Autumn signals the start of waterfowl seasons in three states of south eastern Australia, waterfowl hunting in the Northern Territory gets underway later in the year.

Keen quail hunters spend days assessing habitat in readiness for quail hunting seasons around south eastern Australia. These elusive game birds are Australia's premier game bird for pointing and flushing breeds of gun dogs.

Whatever the views held about hunting by our increasingly urbanised community, the longstanding cultural tradition of hunting game holds an important place in the human ecology. In 2013 hunting contributed \$439 million into the Victorian economy, and that doesn't include the important work on conservation and management of habitat. Conservation and hunting are intrinsically linked, a fact that has been demonstrated for generations. However this link is not intuitively evident to our urbanised community, where thanks to technology people are more connected than ever before. Yet these same people are largely more disconnected than ever before from the practical realities of how food is sourced, indeed from many of the realities of rural life.

Hunters also contribute to research, and Field & Game Australia has been active in collecting data for several studies. Some programs have run for many years, others are emerging opportunities, such as research into Avian Influenza.

The past two years have presented me with very different hunting experiences. While I remain very involved in hunting and related issues, there's very little time to participate in hunting. The weeks are spent working and liaising with government, agencies, media, and the unfortunate reality that is the anti-hunting movement in a highly politicised environment. The irony is this, in spite of all the drama generated by the anti-hunting activists in an attempt to draw public sentiment; it's difficult to see where all the anti-hunting effort demonstrates any significant access to habitat or improved breeding conditions.

The fact is that duck hunting in Australia, and in particular in Victoria, continues to grow. The unique public/private partnership created in 1958 between government and conservationists in response to reports that the Pacific Black Duck (Grey duck in NZ), could be extinct in as little as 10 years due to loss of habitat.

This unique private/public partnership created a game licensing system, and the funds from licences purchased by hunters delivered revenue that allowed government to acquire threatened wetlands. These wetlands provide critical breeding sanctuary for native waterbirds, offsetting habitat lost by drainage for agricultural and other purposes, and facilitate legal hunting during the prescribed season – a purpose that is

often overlooked.

This important initiative established a network of State Game Reserves (SGR), that today encompasses more than 75,000 hectares of wetlands in Victoria, and there are more in South Australia, for the purposes of conservation, and hunting. The most recent SGR was announced in August 2016, and is the 200th SGR in Victoria and recognises the role that habitat plays in sustainable hunting, as well as the importance of access to public land for lawful hunting activities.

It's acknowledged by many, although not the anti-hunting and animal rights activists, that habitat, not hunting, is the single biggest factor affecting waterfowl populations.

The 2016 duck season provided significant challenges and interference. Hunters were moved off a State Game Reserve on the eve of duck opening because of the presence of blue bill ducks. While these are a rare species, they are however one that demonstrates vastly different behaviour to game species.

Other wetlands were closed to hunting due to the presence of Australasian Bittern, again on a State Game Reserve purchased and preserved thanks to hunters working with government. However that historical approach to delivering practical environmental outcomes in partnership has become lost with the current management approach that defers to extreme precaution, is not based on facts and data, and defers to a strategy that actively avoids any notion of 'disturbance' of wildlife. It's not clear what 'disturbance' means from a scientific perspective, I'm pretty sure a fox hunting the wetland fringe creates its fair share of disturbance, yet that appears acceptable.

It's in this context that I travelled to New Zealand's North Island for my first experience of duck opening "across the ditch." What a wonderful experience, memorable for so many reasons.

As an aside, to hear mention of the Bittern during my trip to NZ put me into a sweat! That there is research into this cryptic bird, funded by DU in NZ, is to be commended. I'm looking forward to reading the conclusions that are reported from this study.

Making new friends and the local customs of duck hunting in NZ made for a very enjoyable experience. The use of maimais was a novel and very comfortable method of hunting. By contrast so much of the Australian waterfowl hunting experience is about being mobile, scouting for ducks and habitat in a vast and largely dry landscape.

The "Gamebird Festival" is a sensational initiative. We are unable to bring game into the commercial food system in Australia; there are exceptions around the country with commercially harvested game and pest animals. To sit down to professionally prepared, cooked and presented ducks after a hunt is exceptional. Yet it's also a no-brainer for any hunter seeking to put wild food on the table for family and friends.



Reed shelter: Australian David Macnab enjoyed our style of duck hunting.

I also enjoyed listening to stories of the Friday school bus run before opening day, with students swapping notes with each other about where their family was hunting the next morning.

I'm a long time rugby fan and acutely aware of how Kiwis value their rugby, more often than not to my chagrin. To learn that rugby games are deferred on the opening weekend of duck season due to a lack of players is so refreshing, and a practical demonstration of the acceptance of the cultural traditions of hunting. This is a highlight to be celebrated.

The properties I had the privilege of hunting in my NZ trip shared the commitment by hunters to wetland rehabilitation and improvement. Developing and maintaining these wetlands requires real commitment, time, money, diesel, access to plant and equipment. Yes, they provide a wonderful hunting experience. And it's this hunting experience for a few short weeks each year that generates the motivation and the revenue to create wetlands and reverse the trend in land use everywhere that sees wetlands drained for agricultural or residential development.

The lessons are the same everywhere. Create value for our natural resources, and the same people who seek to use that resource are motivated to ensure its use is sustainable.

Field & Game Australia was invited to present at the conference for the Conservation through Sustainable Use of Wildlife. The paper prepared for the conference is available at the FGA website www.fieldandgame.com.au.

The conference brought together a huge array of specialists in a variety of wildlife. In addition to the FGA presentation, topics covering game birds were presented by Delta Waterfowl from North America, the UK's Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust on their fascinating grey partridge projects, and your own Fish & Game. I had the pleasure of spending time with the Fish & Game team during my visit to NZ, and I'm

Continued next page

pleased to continue to develop the great relationship that exists between our two organisations.

In our presentation, FGA covered the initiatives we have been busy putting in place. I'll draw on elements of my presentation to provide the following overview of our initiatives.

FGA has responded to this changed environment including making a series of recommendations to the regulator. Our recommendations are based on securing greater commitment to improving wetland habitat for water birds, and an adaptive management model, through greater focus on monitoring abundance with unmodified seasons to standardise and simplify management of our waterfowl populations. This permits the collection of more accurate data for the long-term regulation of hunting.

In addition, FGA is doing the following:

- Addressing the misconceptions and perceptions around hunting through our new publishing and media platform. This includes targeted messages on radio, billboards and digital media, with brand ambassadors telling their stories as "Australia's most surprising conservationists".
- In conjunction with Associate Professor Graham Hall from the University of New England, we have identified the need for surveys of key regions and wetlands to gather evidence and data on those wetlands that are consistently important in providing breeding habitat. This aligns with the need to develop a more cohesive approach to gathering specific data relevant to the requirements of game management.
- Conducting, and assisting with scientific research into Australian waterfowl, including hybridisation with introduced Mallard ducks, avian influenza, and Ross River virus.
- Working with government and other authorities to ensure the best practice for sustainable hunting and the improvement and conservation of our wetland habitats.

FGA is also proud of its achievements through its 20 years journey of establishing a recognised environmental trust, the WET Trust. This has created practical conservation partnerships, that are highly valued and delivering great ecological and social outcomes. The WET Trust has developed a model to restore degraded wetlands after 100 years of agriculture, funded by hunters who value the privilege of access.

The Heart Morass, near Sale in Victoria's Gippsland region, is one of the WET Trust success stories. After 10 years of hunter-led conservation, this wetland has been transformed from depleted grazing land with salinity problems to a thriving wetland with healthy biodiversity and improved water quality.

Importantly, it has demonstrated that good environmental projects create great partnerships. A new model of private partnerships to acquire and rehabilitate wetlands has since emerged. This is underpinned by dedicated, local volunteers.

The issue is whether the multitude of government resources applied to manage our



Duck team - the home crowd: Chris Thomas, David Macnab, Diane Pritt, Graeme Berry and John Clayton. (Yes, ducks were shot).

natural environments through parks and public land (including SGRs) are delivering the optimal ecological and environmental outcomes. This can be determined by the response to the question: Is this multi-layer management designed to achieve specific outcomes, or is it an outcome of a broader bureaucratic organisational design?

The WET Trust is nearing completion of the first stage of another project, the Connemara Wetlands Centre (CWC). Near Geelong in Victoria, this project includes construction of a building designed for community and educational use, a feature wetland, and access to the adjoining Lake Connemara Complex of State Game Reserves, declared in 1983 a "wetland of international significance" under the Ramsar convention.

Success stories in practical conservation such as the Heart Morass and CWC provide evidence that private conservation models with pools of volunteer resources have the potential to deliver great outcomes for conservation.

Hunting has other benefits. The Victorian state government has offered \$10 per fox scalp in a bounty program that began in 2011. Since then, over 410,000 foxes have been removed by hunters in Victoria. Aside from the conservation impact, one of the most valuable aspects of the fox bounty program is the ability to collect data on hunter activity – raw numbers – that will allow better informed decisions and policy in the future.

We can't forget, or indeed ignore, the role of people in the complex equation of wildlife management.

People have created this highly modified landscape. People have the privilege of harvesting our natural resources.

People today have an obligation to manage the landscape and our natural resources.

We also have an incredible opportunity. With access to technology to gather facts and data, we are more connected than we have ever been and can share knowledge and information.

That connectivity we enjoy today provides us with access to world best practice in habitat and wildlife management.

Australia provides an incredible landscape and diverse climate that gives us the opportunity to bring these aspects together. However that's not to say we need collaboration, in fact we need

to be wary of collaboration unless it delivers practical results that create a tangible benefit, and doesn't provide the excuse for people to engage in activism, rather than focusing on real outcomes.

FGA is a hunter organisation but we are heavily invested in conservation, always have been, we want science and public policy that supports better habitat for wildlife and for us – the people in the equation, to utilise.

In the Australian context our priority remains on an increased commitment to habitat and water for our native waterfowl. Complemented by the gathering of data and real insight to build greater knowledge of our Australian waterfowl, leads to the opportunity to manage a dynamic population. This is in contrast to managing population dynamics. Underpinned with a cohesive strategy and an adaptive resource management model, that integrates research and monitoring in a systems approach. The opportunity is here to embrace technology such as drones, remote tracking devices, game cameras, satellite imagery of hydrology. However, it is critical that the data collected is designed for the purposes it will be used for; too often we find decisions on hunting in Australia are not based on data designed for game management.

We have the wonderful opportunity that comes with public land access for hunting, a diversity of game species, and a culture of hunting developed over many years that is underpinned with a conservation ethos. In Victoria, game is managed by a statutory authority, a first in this country. And yet we continue to work furiously to maintain the status quo in a highly politicised environment, where decisions are made by bureaucrats and politicians in capital cities. The debate remains fixed on whether to hunt ducks or not, rather than improving and creating more vital habitat for our Australian waterfowl.

I experienced a wonderful visit to NZ for the 2016 duck opening, personally and professionally. My sincere thanks to everyone who made my visit so welcoming. I can still picture those mallards circling the hills beyond our maimai at the edge of a pristine wetland developed by keen hunters/conservationists, watching the birds as they make another pass and waiting expectantly with my fellow hunters and our canine companions.

David Macnab



Safe haven: Whio (Blue ducks) enjoy the peace of a bush stream.

Photo: Liz Brook.

Why wetlands are important

Wetlands are important features in the landscape that provide numerous beneficial services for people and for fish and wildlife. Some of these services, or functions, include protecting and improving water quality, providing fish and wildlife habitats, storing floodwaters and maintaining surface water flow during dry periods. These valuable functions are the result of the unique natural characteristics of wetlands.

To access more information about wetlands, please visit Wetland Factsheet Series. At <http://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/wetlands/why-wetlands-are-important/>

Wetlands and Nature. Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to rain forests and coral reefs.

An immense variety of species of microbes, plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish and mammals can be part of a wetland ecosystem. Climate, landscape shape (topology), geology and the movement and abundance of water help to determine the plants and animals that inhabit each wetland. The complex, dynamic relationships among the organisms inhabiting the wetland environment are called food webs. This is why

wetlands in Texas, North Carolina and Alaska differ from one another.

Wetlands can be thought of as “biological supermarkets.” They provide great volumes of food that attract many animal species. These animals use wetlands for part of or all of their life-cycle. Dead plant leaves and stems break down in the water to form small particles of organic material called “detritus.” This enriched material feeds many small aquatic insects, shellfish and small fish that are food for larger predatory fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals.

The functions of a wetland and the values of these functions to humans depend on a complex set of relationships between the wetland and the other ecosystems in the watershed. A watershed is a geographic area in which water, sediments and dissolved materials drain from higher elevations to a common low-lying outlet or basin at a point on a larger stream, lake, underlying aquifer or estuary.

Wetlands play an integral role in the ecology of the watershed. The combination of shallow water, high levels of nutrients and primary productivity is ideal for the development of organisms that form the base of the food web and feed many species of fish, amphibians, shellfish and insects. Many species of birds and mammals rely on wetlands for food, water and shelter, especially during migration and breeding.

Wetlands’ microbes, plants and wildlife are part of global cycles for water, nitrogen and sulfur. **Scientists now know that atmospheric maintenance may be an additional wetlands function.**

Wetlands store carbon within their plant communities and soil instead of releasing it to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. Thus wetlands help to moderate global climate conditions.

Wetlands and People

Far from being useless, disease-ridden places, wetlands provide values that no other ecosystem can. These include natural

water quality improvement, flood protection, shoreline erosion control, opportunities for recreation and aesthetic appreciation and natural products for our use at no cost. Protecting wetlands can protect our safety and welfare.

Environmental benefits water quality

[http://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/wetlands/why-wetlands-are-important.](http://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/wetlands/why-wetlands-are-important/)

Wetlands improve water quality. As water moves into a wetland, the flow rate decreases, allowing particles to settle out. The many plant surfaces act as filters, absorbing solids and adding oxygen to the water. Growing plants remove nutrients and play a cleansing role that protects the downstream environments.

Flood control

Wetlands can also reduce the impacts of flooding, as they can absorb heavy rain and release water gradually. Downstream water flows and ground water levels are also maintained during periods of low rainfall. Wetlands help stabilise shorelines and riverbanks.

Wildlife habitat

Many wetland plants have specific environmental needs and are extremely vulnerable to change. Some of our endangered plant species depend totally on wetlands.

Wetlands support great concentrations of bird life - far more species than a similar forest area. The survival of threatened species such as the Australasian bittern, brown teal, fernbird, marsh crane and white heron relies on remnant wetlands.

Native fish need wetlands too. Eight of New Zealand’s 27 species including inanga, short-finned eels, kokopu and bullies are found in wetlands, while the whitebait fishery depends on the spawning habitat offered by freshwater wetlands. The decline in native fish populations is directly related to massive reductions in freshwater habitat.

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/wetlands/why-wetlands-are-important/>



Spoonbills in flight: Found throughout New Zealand. Black spoonbill and black face, also black feet.

Photo: Emma Williams.

What are waterbirds?

If you have never heard of many of these birds, you are not alone.

Waterbirds have been defined as “species of bird that are ecologically dependent on wetlands”.

1. This is the definition used by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. For the purposes of the International Waterbird Census, all species in the following families are considered by Wetlands International to be waterbirds: *Gaviidae* (Divers/Loons), *Podicipedidae* (Grebes), *Pelecanidae* (Pelicans), *Phalacrocoracidae* (Cormorants), *Anhingidae* (Darters), *Ardeidae* (Hérons), *Scopidae* (Hamerkop), *Ciconiidae* (Storks), *Balaenicipitidae* (Shoebill), *Ciconiidae* (Storks), *Threskiornithidae* (Ibises and Spoonbills), *Phoenicopteridae* (Flamingos), *Anhimidae* (Screamers), *Anatidae* (Ducks, Geese and Swans), *Gruidae* (Cranes), *Aramidae* (Limpkin), *Rallidae* (Rails, Gallinules and Coots), *Heliornithidae* (Finfoots), *Eurypygidae* (Sunbittern), *Jacaniidae* (Jacanas), *Rostratulidae* (Painted Snipes), *Dromadidae* (Crab Plover), *Haematopodidae* (Oystercatchers), *Ibidorhynchidae* (Ibisbill), *Recurvirostridae* (Stilts and Avocets), *Burhinidae* (Thick-knees), *Glareolidae* (Coursers and Pratincoles), *Charadriidae* (Plovers), *Scolopacidae* (Sandpipers, Snipes and Phalaropes), *Pedionomidae* (Plains Wanderer), *Thinocoridae* (Seedsnipes), *Laridae* (Gulls), *Sternidae* (Terns) and *Rynchopidae* (Skimmers).

Only a few wetland birds are excluded by considering entire families in this way. Conversely, the inclusion of whole families results in the waterbird list containing a few non-wetland species such as some coursers and thick-knees. These rather minor anomalies are thought to be outweighed by the convenience of a whole-family approach to the definition of the term ‘waterbird’ and, in particular, considering the complications that would arise from applying the definition rigidly to every species.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands recently widened its approach to include more families traditionally regarded as seabirds, as well as certain raptors and passerines, and it is possible that a small number of additions will be made in the coming years to the families and species included in the IWC.

Why count waterbirds?

2. The International Waterbird Census uses information collected by four continental-scale censuses over the long term to provide crucial information which underpins conservation of waterbirds and their wetland habitats.

The aims of the census are as follows: To monitor the numerical size of waterbird populations; To describe changes in numbers and distribution of these populations; To identify wetlands of international importance for waterbirds at all seasons; To provide information to assist protection and management of waterbird populations through international conventions, national legislation and other means. The rationale behind the census was summarised eloquently by Matthews (1967) at the time when international coordination of waterbird counting was beginning: “...while man is recklessly unleashing new insults on his environment, background monitoring of

populations is essential to detect the threats as they develop and before they become catastrophes apparent to all”.

Waterbirds are well-known indicators of the quality of certain types of wetlands. A powerful tool which makes use of this characteristic is the so-called 1percent criterion, whereby any site which regularly holds 1percent or more of a waterbird population qualifies as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The 1percent criterion has been adopted by the European Union to identify Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the Birds Directive. It is also used by BirdLife International in the identification of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in wetlands throughout the world.

Standardised monitoring of Arctic breeding species, and species dependent on inter-tidal habitats is even more important in the light of human induced climate change, the seriousness of which is now generally accepted (Houghton et al. 2001). Global warming is expected to have especially pronounced effects on tundra and other Arctic environments, and, through sea level rise, on intertidal habitats (Boyd & Madsen 1997). The IWC will play a significant future role in monitoring the effects of these changes on the millions of waterbirds which depend upon these habitats.

3. What is the International Waterbird Census?

The International Waterbird Census (IWC) is a site-based counting scheme for monitoring waterbird numbers, organised since 1967 by Wetlands International, formerly the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB). The Census operates at a global level, and the former division into four separate continental-scale surveys was superseded in 2003 by a new strategy for global coordination. Coordination at continental level takes place as follows:

- Global coordination, and the counts in the Western Palearctic and southwest Asia are organised from Wetlands International headquarters in Wageningen, The Netherlands
- The African Waterbird Census is coordinated from a sub-regional office in Dakar, Senegal, which began operating in 1998
- The Asian Waterbird Census, which includes Oceania, is coordinated from Wetlands International's Asia Pacific office in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- In the Americas, the Neotropical Waterbird Census is coordinated from the Americas office of Wetlands International in Buenos Aires
- Establishment of IWC in North America began in 2003, from a new Wetlands International office in Washington DC. The census takes place every year in over 100 countries with the involvement of around 15,000 counters, most of whom are volunteers. More than half the effort is concentrated in Europe, but involvement in other parts of the world has increased markedly since 1990. Between 30 million and 40 million waterbirds are counted each year around the world, and details of the counts and the sites where they take place are held on the newly upgraded, state-of-the-art IWC database. The



IWC is thus by far the longest running and most globally extensive biodiversity monitoring programme in the world.

4. How to count waterbirds. Anybody who can identify birds can contribute to waterbird monitoring activities.

Identification Correctly identifying all the waterbird species present at a site is the first necessity of waterbird counting. Bird identification is a skill which takes time to master and beginners make more mistakes and miss more scarce species than experienced observers. Correct identification includes a process of elimination, and knowing which species are most likely to occur at a site in a particular season reduces the number of species that need to be eliminated from consideration. The best way to learn is to spend time in the field with an experienced observer who knows which species to expect and who is familiar with the field characteristics of each species. Careful and copious note-taking and field sketching also enhance an observer's powers of observation and reinforce memory of field characteristics. This manual is not an identification guide, and when learning to identify birds, time should be spent consulting identification guides and becoming familiar with the plumage patterns, behaviour and annual cycles of each species. Videos and CD RoMs are also available which provide additional “homework” material for those learning to identify birds, but there is really no substitute for experience in the field, preferably under the guidance of a knowledgeable birdwatcher.

Any experienced birdwatcher can count waterbirds, and a count on foot of a small to medium sized site is quite a straightforward undertaking. The methods used to count waterbirds in the field depend on many factors, for example: - the species being monitored; - the size of the site; - the accessibility of the shoreline; - the availability of vantage points from which the site can be scanned; - the amount of time available to complete the count; - the number of people involved; - the available equipment. The most important element of waterbird monitoring methodology is standardisation.

Want to know more?— check out Wetlands International online.

Reconciliation of Introduced Species in NZ:

Understandings from Three ‘Exceptional’ Case Studies

From around the mid-19th century, introduced species have often been considered an undesirable form of wildlife in many countries.

Introduced ‘invasive’ species have been routinely identified for removal in the belief that they damage or otherwise compromise the natural purity or integrity of ecosystems.

However, diverse literatures within both the natural and social sciences over the past few decades have questioned some of the assumptions underpinning these beliefs. In contrast to the relatively static and human exclusive constructions of nature in the past, many authors now emphasize a nature characterised by indeterminacy, flux, interconnectedness, and hybridity. In consequence, discursive moves toward more reconciliatory approaches to the understanding of introduced species have become increasingly common.

Noting these developments, this thesis investigates whether changing discourses of nativism and authenticity are influencing the reconciliation of introduced species into socio-environmental systems in New Zealand. Recognising its efficacy for exploring discourses of ‘nature’ and ‘the environment,’ I employed biopolitical theory, along with concepts from the wider constructionist literature.

Biopolitics focuses attention on the expression of power over life itself and its attendant

consequences. It highlights the discursive means through which ‘exceptions,’ such as introduced species, are delineated and removed.

An analysis grounded in a biopolitical framework asks not only why death is considered necessary, but also why this death in particular is justifiable.

It thus offers a powerful means of exploring contestation over the supposed place or role of introduced species within constructions of an appropriate nature. I employed a critical discourse approach to interviewing, documentary research, and observations to investigate three case studies on introduced game species in New Zealand’s North Island. Introduced game species were selected because they do not fit with common understandings of introduced wildlife in New Zealand, often being both demonstrably ‘damaging’ to native ecosystems and valued.

As such, they provided a vehicle for exploring both the types of discourse that may be necessary to reconcile introduced species more generally and how effects might be discursively rationalised. I found that species, whether native or introduced, were reconciled primarily as a factor of their perceived contribution to the national identity and economy. Species that were not considered useful were marginalised or ignored. Despite the optimistic contributions of many authors arguing for the reconciliation

of introduced species, I show that any broad-scale reconciliation – at least in terms of a compassionate reconsideration – may be unlikely in New Zealand.

As evidence, I show that notions of ecological balance and human-exclusivity remain popular in constructions of nature in New Zealand. These beliefs necessarily exclude human introductions and, perhaps more notably, construct a belonging for humans in New Zealand as guardians or ‘archivists’ of native wildlife. Furthermore, a positioning of humans as ‘moral predators’ against a foreign invasion of introduced species reconciles peoples’ own place in nature.

Though often accepted as inaccurate, rhetorics of warfare work by suppressing nascent doubts about the need to kill introduced species. I show that human tensions with certain introduced species are only reinforced by the truth discourses of science, which further promote moral predation, and the economics of pest management, which have created an important industry out of introduced species’ removal. Together, these findings suggest that any reconciliation of introduced species, though intellectually compelling, is unlikely to be advanced on any broad-scale in New Zealand until alternative human roles within nature are identified and propagated.

Jamie Steer

Letters

Dear Editor

For more than 40-years I was a prominent supporter of the Wildfowl & Wetland Trust (WWT), and sent NZ Brown Teal, NZ Shoveler, NZ Grey Duck and NZ Scaup to Slimbridge in the UK in the early 1980s, and in 1977 visited all WWT centres in the UK. But having witnessed the WWT’s anti-lead shot stance I am no longer associated with them.

I have been involved in shooting sports since I was 15 and since the early 1990s have been a major importer of shooting sports equipment. In addition I am a Royal Chartered Environmentalist, hold a PhD in Environmental Management and in 2005 was awarded a Queens Service medal for my 20+ years of involvement in helping to save the endemic NZ Brown Teal from extinction.

So, I have qualifications and experience to be able to discuss lead shot and the effect of its use on bird populations.

Whilst a number of western-bloc countries have a restriction on the use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting in wetlands it is now known that wild waterfowl do not die from ingesting lead shot – nor does any bird species!

The move by our Dept of Conservation and the NZ Fish & Game Council to place a total ban on lead shot for waterfowl hunting in wetlands is simply a political and anti-shooting sports decision and one that is likely to result in the demise of waterfowl hunting and the demise of the NZ Fish & Game Council.

The only legitimate, independent and professional research covering in ingestion of lead shot by waterfowl was carried out in the Waikato between 2001 and 2004, when over 700 mallards were shot and autopsied during the duck seasons.

This research determined that 4-4 percent of the mallards had lead shot in their gizzard and that the condition of the birds was in no way indicative that they were in the process of being poisoned and, like all birds shot were in very good condition – and were flying when shot.

But even if it were proven that wild waterfowl die from ingesting lead shot, the numbers that die would be insignificant in comparison to the number shot and not recovered when alternatives to lead shot are used.

The number of birds shot and not recovered

when alternatives to lead shot are used has risen from six percent when lead is used to between 30 and 90 percent – according to research conducted by the Humane Society in the USA.

What our bureaucratic dictators also forget (or don’t know/care) that the life expectancy of a wild mallard is only 1.2 years – but thanks to bureaucratic incompetence the life expectancy of a wild mallard is now in the vicinity of just 9-months! Having spent a lifetime in wetlands with my Labradors (I’m now on my 6th), we have never found a mallard – or any other waterfowl species – that looked as though it was dying from lead shot poisoning; remembering that “scientists” claim that it takes three weeks for waterfowl to die from ingesting lead shot.

Since 1967 I’ve been privileged to hunt on some of New Zealand’s finest wetlands but mallard numbers in the North Island are now so low it is very unlikely that I will ever purchase another duck hunting licence.

Neil Hayes

Hayes & Associates Ltd
New Zealand

Looking back



How to stop Board members from being bored? Take them into the hills.

Found this photo among some archive packages I inherited. (editor).

Directors meeting many years ago that included a semi-wet trip into the Mangone hills. Do you recognise the faces?

Those present from left: Jim Campbell (patron), Graeme Gurr, Di Pritt (also now patron), David Johnston, David Smith and Rachel Mitchell (both on the bike), Ross Cottle, Graeme Berry, Ossie Latham, Neil Candy (chairman) and John Dermer.

Liz Brook

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