Our friend Philippe Gerbeaux and his colleague Peter Johnson have completed a highly detailed and lavishly illustrated study of New Zealand's wetland types that provides both an excellent look at that country's wetlands themselves and an enlightening discussion of wetland classification systems and how to work with them. Here is the press release that accompanied the publication. -- Editor.


This book is the final output of a Ministry for the Environment project on coordinated monitoring of New Zealand wetlands (see the following link for previous outputs: http://www.wetlandtrust.org.nz/news.html#publications). This project has sought to develop a coordinated approach and standardised eco-classification to facilitate international reporting under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and national state-of-the-environment reporting under the Resource Management Act on changes in wetland extent and condition. One aspect of the project has been to develop a wetland classification system that is based primarily on wetland function. This system allows for wetlands to be recognised at several sequential levels of a hierarchy, from broadly defined hydrosystems, to wetland classes, then structural classes of vegetation, and finally wetland 'types' distinguished by their composition of dominant plants.

The emphasis of this book is on inland freshwater wetlands, those near coastal estuaries, and those of lake and river margins. Fully aquatic systems of lakes and rivers are covered in much less detail, these topics having their own complexity of literature in hydrology and limnology. A draft structure for classification of geothermal and plutonic hydrosystems and of marine, lacustrine, and riverine hydrosystems has yet to be finalised.

Its main purpose is to describe and illustrate how wetland types can be recognised and named. Section 2 deals with the classification system, noting some of the background to wetland classification, and then describing the classification tiers. Section 3 demonstrates patterns in wetlands and shows how the classification system can be applied to them. Section 4 describes how wetlands function, especially in relation to the variables of hydrology, nutrients, and substrates, and discusses how wetlands change over time. Section 5 provides some direction on wetland survey methods, use of the classification system, and a guide to further information. A glossary of terms is provided at the end.

The book is available in pdf format and can be found in the following link page: http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/page.aspx?id=39172.

The link also contains a reference to another report of potential interest to Ramsar News readers, on the identification of rivers of national importance, another Ministry for the Environment's project.
WETLANDS are diverse for many reasons, and New Zealand has many sorts. They include bogs and marshes, swamps and seepages, and the edges of lakes, rivers and estuaries. Wetlands are important for biodiversity, birds, fish, plants and people. This book describes a recently devised system for classifying and naming New Zealand wetland types, and provides an understanding of how wetlands work.

PETER JOHNSON is a botanist and plant ecologist with Landcare Research in Dunedin. He has a particular interest in wetland ecology, and is the author with Pat Broke, of Wetland Plants in New Zealand.

PHILIPPE GERBEAUX is Technical Support Officer with the Department of Conservation based in Hokitika (West Coast Conservancy), and is an expert in freshwater and wetland ecology.