

FISH & GAME AUCKLAND/WAIKATO National World Wetlands Day 2006

Report for Fish & Game NZ



Themes

'Wetlands are Lifelines' – in sustainability

The Auckland/Waikato World Wetland Day 2006 Event had these objectives:

- Promoting Fish & Game NZ as a key advocate of wetlands and freshwater.
- Launching the annual Game Bird Habitat Stamp.
- Raising the profile of the National Wetlands Trust.
- Developing the WWD 2006 theme of 'Wetlands are Lifelines' by looking at how wetlands can be managed to create sustainable outcomes.

Above: David Lawrie launching the Scaup artwork for the Fish & Game NZ Gamebird Habitat Trust Stamp Programme

To do this we ran a field trip, which looked at:

- I. The conservation values of three Ramsar wetlands – the Firth of Thames, the Kopuatai Peat Dome on the Hauraki Plains, and northern Waikato's Whangamarino Wetland, as well as the role they play in sustainable land and recreational use;
- II. The DoC owned Flax Block, which Fish & Game has restored using Game Bird Habitat Trust funds and volunteer hunters' labour to show how it was a model example of wetland management as a legitimate land use;
- III. And finally visited Peter Buckley's farm on the fringes of the Whangamarino Wetland where he demonstrated how he achieved a "workable compromise" between productivity and conservation.

A team effort:

The event was planned and coordinated with Keith Thompson (Wetlands consultant & NWT), David Lawrie (Chairman Game Bird Habitat Trust & NWT), Rachel Kelleher (DOC Waikato Area Manager & NWT) Karen Denyer (Environment Waikato & NWT) and Don Scarlett

(Regional Affairs Manager for Mighty River Power & NWT) as well as with Shannon Fergie, Jack De Thierry, Jan Simmons, Chris Annandale and Dave Matthews at DOC; Peter Buckley, President Waikato Federated Farmers, with the assistance of another Whangamarino farmer - Tony O'Connell; Ian Sara (Environment Waikato Paeroa office) who authorized use of the stopbank access to the Kopuatai Peat Dome and Steve Silcock, a local farmer, who gave us permission to access his paddock on the Tahuna hill overlooking the Flax Block/Kopuatai.

Following this an invitation was sent to the following organizations to promote, either through their newsletters, web sites or email list groups:

- Franklin, Te Kauwhata, Huntly and EPCM Fish & Game clubs
- National Wetland Trust of NZ
- DOC Hamilton and Auckland Conservancies
- NIWA
- Mighty River Power
- Solid Energy
- Environment Centre (Hamilton)
- Northland, Waikato Landcare groups and the National Landcare Trust website
- Biodiversity Forum
- Environment Waikato Farm Advisory Groups
- ARC Waicare coordinators
- ARC Care Groups
- Forest & Bird Auckland, Sth Auckland and Waikato
- NZ Institute of Landscape Architects
- Waikato Junior Naturalists

Invitations were also printed on F&G letterhead and sent to the updated 2006 invitation list.

In addition articles were arranged for the Waikato Times, Hamilton Press, North Waikato Tatler, Te Kauwhata paper The Chatta, Franklin County Times, Matamata Chronicle and Hauraki Herald.

Email and fax releases were also sent to the NZ Herald, TVNZ and TV3, as well as Radio NZ.

A printed handout was put together for the day (a folder went to each participant along with brochures from the Gamebird Habitat Trust, the NWT's Whangamarino Trail Brochure and Wet & Wild newsletters as attached).

Contributions from other agencies this year are:

- Mighty River Power provided shade tents and printed the handout material
- DoC provided four staff, including a bus driver and two SUV vehicles, and will pay for the half the wetland ecologist's fee
- NWT provided assistance on the day

Attendance:

There were approximately 160 attendees from organizations such as:

- City and Regional Councils (Rodney, Hamilton, Waitakere, Manukau, ARC, Environment Waikato, etc)
- F&G and Anglers Club members
- Environmental educators and consultants
- Rural Women’s Associations
- Landcare Trust and Research
- Mighty River Power, NIWA and DOC
- Residents from Hamilton, Huntly, Thames, Ngaruawahia Te Kauwhata and Auckland.

This year there were at least 70% new attendees and a much higher number of professional land and resource managers as well as academics and wetland consultants.

The field trip was very varied – visiting four different wetland environments with five different speakers – and so required a lot of attendees in terms of stamina. It was a very hot day and people had to walk 1.3kms into the Kopuatai as well as be outside in the sun for several hours in the middle of the day.

We were also only able fit in one toilet stop, which came several hours after the trip began and so was insufficient for many, particularly older people. However, we had very positive feedback on the day and in subsequent emails.

TOTAL COST OF WWD 2006 _____ **\$3,619.00**

(BUDGETED COST was \$4,270.00)

EVALUATION

The event continues to be successful in raising public awareness about the value of wetlands and Fish & Game's role as the lead agency. This success is measured by:

- Media coverage – widespread in the Waikato;
- Well organized and presented example of collaboration between a large number of agencies - DOC, National Wetland Trust, Iwi, Regional Councils, Forest & Bird, and corporate organizations such as Mighty River Power– which is exactly what is required for the complexity of wetland management issues, and the need for integrated and inclusive approaches for managing wetlands;
- The high attendance as well as the significant number of new attendees as well as landowners and landcare/resource managers.

However, changes to be next year could include:

- Not providing lunch as this is probably an unnecessary expense
- Ensuring that a toilet stop is included earlier, even if this means arranging a Portaloo
- Charging a small fee to recoup some of the day's costs as many seem to expect it
- Producing the same number of branded caps but selling them for \$20.00 each as we simply covered our production costs at \$15.00 each (as with GST these went from \$12.00 each to \$14.96)

Follow-up entails:

- Enlarging the mail out list from all those who either went on the tour or contacted us about attending it.
- A debrief meeting at the next NWT meeting between all the participants who managed the day.
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Post-Media liaison includes

- A feature story and images sent to Waikato Times, Hamilton Press, North Waikato Tatler, Te Kauwhata paper The Chatta, Franklin County Times, Matamata Chronicle and Hauraki Herald;
- A column story arranged with Philippa Stevenson, columnist for the Farmers Weekly; Stories and images on both Fish & Game and NWT websites.

MEDIA STORIES

Prior to WWD:

Wetlands as Lifelines on World Wetlands Day 2006

World Wetlands Day 2006 will be celebrated with a Waikato-based field trip on Saturday 4 February demonstrating how essential wetlands are as lifelines – environmentally and economically.

Wetlands are disappearing worldwide, despite the fact that they are amongst the most important ecosystems on the planet. They store and purify water, replenish groundwater, store carbon and support biological diversity.

One of at least 30 nationwide events highlighting the importance of wetlands on World Wetlands Day each year, next year's national event is being held in the Waikato, home to three of New Zealand's six internationally recognized (Ramsar) wetlands - the Firth of Thames, the Kopuatai Peat Dome on the Hauraki Plains, and northern Waikato's Whangamarino Wetland.

Taking in all three, the field trip led by wetland ecologist Keith Thompson starts at Rangiriri, site of the planned National Wetlands Centre, and makes its first stop a spectacular overview of the Hauraki Plains, Kopuatai Peat Dome and the DoC reserve Flax Block from Tahuna Old Hill Road.

Ten years ago Fish & Game began a programme to improve the Flax Block's wetland habitat (once part of the North Island's early flax milling industry) using Gamebird Habitat Trust funding and local hunters' knowledge and labour.

The restoration involved incorporating micro maintenance of water level regimes, creating open areas within willow-choked sites, and advocating for wetland management as a legitimate land use.

Ten years on, the Flax Block project is a testament to the active conservation measures of hunters who volunteered their time as well as the dedication of Fish & Game staff to bring the project to fruition.

A total of 16 open areas are available for game bird hunting, while the concept of wetland management as a valued land-use has been reinforced, incorporating wetland values into flood management protocols for the river.

The next stop on the field trip is the Kopuatai Peat Dome, a natural stop-bank separating the Piako and Waihou Rivers as the bottom of the Dome is actually four meters below sea level, and without it a 50-year flooding event would spell local economic disaster.

The Kopuatai is also a lifeline for the endangered plant species *Sporadanthus ferrugineus*, for which it is the only secure place left in the world, along with home to several other rare species. At least 400sq km of this type of habitat – a low-nutrient, waterlogged, acid environment - has disappeared completely in the Waikato basin due to drainage for agriculture.

The trip's third stop are the amazing shell banks of the world-renowned Miranda chenier plain where participants will view thousands of shorebirds feeding in the rich mud of this Thames Estuary Ramsar wetland.

Keith Woodley, Manager of the Miranda Shorebird Centre, will talk on bird ecology, behaviour and migration, and why wetlands, such as Miranda, are lifelines for migrant wader species. At the end of a 10,000 mile non-stop journey from Alaska birds, such as the Bar-tailed Godwit, are very grateful to find themselves over the Miranda wetland. While there presence, in turn, brings tourists who fund the Shorebird Centre's ongoing education and research.

The day's final stop is to the peat fringes of the third Ramsar wetland, the Whangamarino, where Peter Buckley - local farmer and President of the Waikato Federated Farmers - will demonstrate how he has achieved a "workable compromise" between productivity and conservation on his farm, lying within the extensive Lower Waikato Waipa Flood Control Scheme.

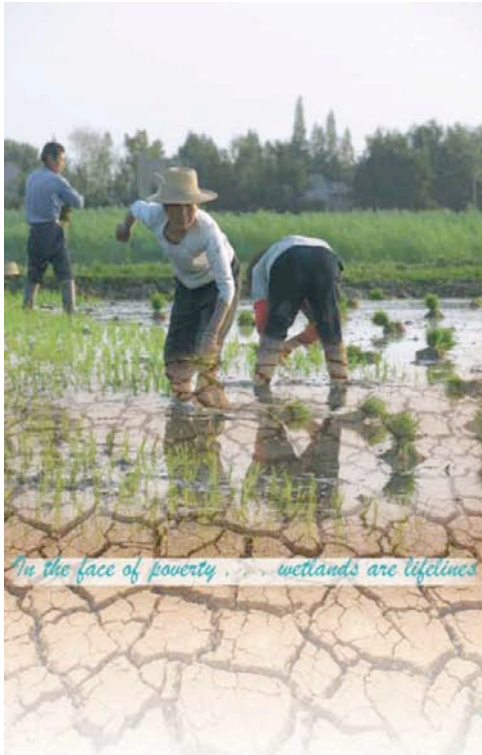
An estimated 17,200 ha in the Scheme has been drained and protected from flooding by stop-banks, drains and pumping stations with a further 16,500 ha partially drained through hydraulic efficiencies made to waterways and river channels. This also means continual and expensive rebuilding of stop-banks for local farmers such as Peter, a situation that makes him doubly aware of how important it is to reduce peat oxidization on his land as much as possible.

In charge of the drainage pumps for a group of farmers in the Island Block Drainage Scheme he has managed to keep the water table within 200 millimeters of the surface thus keeping peat shrinkage rates to a minimum and extending the life of the farm. It's also meant he hasn't had to re-sow grass in over 30 years. Peter has also developed a large pond for wildlife, accessible to visitors by boardwalk.

According to the United Nations, last century 50% of the world's remaining wetlands were destroyed, while other wetlands have been significantly modified to fragment and alter water flow in 60% of the world's largest rivers, compromising many valuable ecosystem functions.

Fish and Game New Zealand is the lead agency for World Wetlands Day, each year coordinating a large number of agencies to hold events that mark the day. Agencies participating this year include: The Department of Conservation, Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, Mighty River Power, Iwi, Regional and District Councils, and the National Wetlands Trust.

ENDS



In the face of poverty... wetlands are lifelines

Wetlands are Lifelines

National World Wetlands Day event on Saturday 4 February 2006

9.00am Meet at the Rangiriri Carpark to depart by 9.15am on the World Wetlands Day field trip taken by Keith Thompson, wetland ecologist. Bus transport provided from the carpark at Rangiriri (approx. midway between Auckland and Hamilton).

1st stop (10.25am) Spectacular overview of Hauraki Plains, Kopuatai Peat Dome and ABCD Flax Block from Tahuna Old Hill Road to commemorate the 10th anniversary of a major Fish & Game Council wetland rehabilitation project on the DoC reserve Flax Block. Talks from Keith Thompson and Phil Teal, Fish & Game officer, about why wetlands are lifelines.

2nd stop (11.45am) Kopuatai Peat Dome, one of the day's highlights, a rare opportunity to stand on the largest raised bog in NZ and see the only remaining pristine example of the unique *Sporadanthus ferrugineus* giant restiad rush bog type in the world. Kopuatai also plays an important role in flood control and protection for the Piako and Waitoa catchments. We walk 1.3km along a stopbank to reach the viewing area on the bog itself where we will also have a packed lunch (filled roll and fruit). Transport provided for those unable to do the walk.


3rd stop (1.20pm) Refreshment stop at Ngatea.

4th stop (2.20pm) The amazing shell banks of the world-renowned Miranda chenier plain. Here we view thousands of shorebirds, which feed in the rich mud of the Thames Estuary Ramsar wetland. Talk by Keith Woodley, Manager of the Miranda Shorebird Centre, on bird ecology, behaviour and migration, and why wetlands, such as Miranda, are so important for visitor recreation and education.

5th stop (4pm) Peter Buckley's farm where Peter will demonstrate how landowners can develop profitable wetland farming operations, while maintaining excellent wetland habitat for wildlife alongside them. Fish & Game will also launch the 2006 New Zealand Game Bird Habitat limited edition collectors' stamp at Peter's farm. Proceeds from the sale of this special stamp are used to fund further development and enhancement of New Zealand wetlands.

Returning to the Rangiriri carpark by bus by about 5.30pm. Although a packed lunch is provided, please bring food for morning and afternoon tea (or buy in Ngatea) as well as water or juice. And be prepared for hot as well as cooler weather.

Please RSVP by 23 January to Shonagh Lindsay, Public Relations Advisor, Fish & Game NZ
 PH 09 849 3994 EMAIL slindsay@fishandgame.org.nz



Media release after WWD

Wetlands are Lifelines

World Wetlands Day 2006 on Saturday 4 February in the Waikato.

The Waikato proved its environmental credentials last Saturday – World Wetlands Day 2006 – when around 160 people from children through to the elderly turned up to celebrate the day and learn as much as they could about the event's themes.

Wetlands are disappearing worldwide, despite the fact that they are amongst the most important ecosystems on the planet. They store and purify water, replenish groundwater, store carbon and support biological diversity.

One of at least 30 nationwide events highlighting the importance of wetlands on World Wetlands Day each year, this year's national event was held for the second year running in the Waikato, home to three of New Zealand's six internationally recognized (Ramsar) wetlands - the Firth of Thames, the Kopuatai Peat Dome on the Hauraki Plains, and northern Waikato's Whangamarino Wetland.

Taking in all three, the field trip led by wetland ecologist Keith Thompson began at Rangiriri, site of the planned National Wetlands Centre, and made its first stop a spectacular overview of the Hauraki Plains, Kopuatai Peat Dome and the DoC reserve Flax Block from Tahuna Old Hill Road.

From this vantage point Phil Teal, Auckland/Waikato Fish & Game Officer, explained how

Fish & Game improved the Flax Block's wetland habitat (once part of the North Island's early flax milling industry) by using Game Bird Habitat Trust funding and local hunters' knowledge and labour.

The restoration incorporated the micro maintenance of water level regimes to create open areas within willow-choked sites, at the same time advocating for wetland management as a legitimate land use.

Thompson also described the role that the Kopuatai Peat Dome played in the Hauraki District Flood Scheme.

“As a natural stop-bank, it separates the Piako and Waihou Rivers with the bottom of the Dome actually four meters below sea level, “ said Thompson. “Without it a 50-year flooding event would create local economic disaster.”

He said the Kopuatai is also a lifeline for the endangered plant species *Sporadanthus ferrugineus*, as it is the only secure place it has left in the world.

To see this and experience the Kopuatai Peat Dome participants walked 1.3 kms along its stop-bank with two groups – 80 or so people to each – taking turns either having lunch on the stop-bank or following Thompson into its unique low-nutrient, waterlogged, acid environment where the temperature had risen to 39 degrees Celsius.

“At least 400sq km of this type of habitat has disappeared completely in the Waikato basin due to drainage for agriculture,” said Keith while taking a peat borer core sample showing its gradual buildup over thousands of years.

Next stop was to the world-renowned Miranda chenier plains where telescopes had been set up to view thousands of shorebirds feeding in the rich mud of this Thames Estuary Ramsar wetland.

Keith Woodley, Manager of the Miranda Shorebird Centre, talked briefly on bird ecology, behaviour and migration, and why wetlands, such as Miranda, are lifelines for migrant wader species.

“At the end of a 10,000 mile non-stop journey from Alaska birds, such as the Bar-tailed Godwit, are very grateful to find themselves over the Miranda wetland,” said Woodley.

“And as a tourist attraction they bring us the money we need to fund the Shorebird Centre's ongoing education and research.”

The day's last stop was to Peter Buckley's dairy farm on the peat fringes of the third Ramsar wetland, the Whangamarino, where David Lawrie, chairman of the Game Bird Habitat Trust launched the 13th in the NZ Game Bird Habitat Collection, a series of original paintings which are used to create the New Zealand Game Bird Habitat Stamp Programme.

The Game Bird Habitat Trust distributes funds raised by the Programme through the collection of game bird habitat stamp fees - \$2 of every hunting licence sale - as well as the sale of game bird habitat stamps and associated products.

This year's stamp features the New Zealand Scaup, otherwise known as the papango, a diving duck endemic to New Zealand.

Following this Peter Buckley described how he achieved a "workable compromise" between productivity and conservation on his farm.

Elected president of the Waikato Federated Farmers last year - following three years as Vice President and 12 years as Chairman of North Waikato Federated Farmers and the Chairman of the Waerenga District Federated Farmers – Buckley is well versed in both the practicalities and the politics of farming.

"It's essential that we learn to work with Fish & Game, DoC and other organisations to get the outcome required," said Buckley. "We all want to see a clean, green New Zealand but we have to be able to make the money to look after our environment."

His farm - which has been in the family since 1929 - is within the extensive Lower Waikato Waipa Flood Control Scheme. The original area of low lying land within the Scheme was around 36,000 ha, comprising flood plains, mineralized swamp and peat bog, excluding open water.

Following the Scheme's completion in the 1960s, an estimated 17,200 ha was drained and protected from flooding by stop-banks, drains and pumping stations with a further 16,500 ha partially drained through hydraulic efficiencies made to waterways and river channels.

Buckley's attitude to the drainage scheme is one of accepting its contribution to his dairy farm's success, as well as questioning its long-term viability.

"I don't want to see any more wetlands drained as we get enormous pleasure from the birdlife on our farm. My wife Judi feeds cornflakes to 40 to 50 pukeko every morning, and we have at least four Australasian bittern, fern birds and pied stilts nesting in the Glyceria."

Buckley developed a large pond and built an extensive boardwalk to it many years ago, he took everyone present along this to view the Canada Geese and other waterfowl resident there saying, "My philosophy is that wildlife has as much right to be here as I have."

Fish & Game NZ is the lead agency for World Wetlands Day, but as in previous years the national event in the Waikato was a collaborative effort between DOC, the National Wetland Trust, Environment Waikato and Mighty River Power.

"We have become a tight team at this time each year focused on raising awareness about these often forgotten yet vital areas of water," said Shonagh Lindsay, Public Awareness Advisor, Fish & Game NZ.

"This year it was rewarding to see how many land management and conservation professionals as well as the general public we had come along, it tells us that World Wetlands Day is reaching a very necessary audience."

ENDS

IMAGES FROM WDD 2006 SENT TO MEDIA (as high resolution images)



Lineup of people at the Tahuna Hill stop to view Flax Block & Kopuatai



Phil Teal, Fish & Game officer, and Keith Thompson speaking with Flax Block & Kopuatai in the background



First group of attendees listening to Keith Thompson in the Kopuatai & Keith showing peat sample below





Carrying telescopes to Thames chenier plains



Lineup of people looking at shorebirds feeding in Thames estuary



The two Keiths, Woodley and Thompson, speaking at the Thames estuary



Peter Buckley and Keith Thompson



Listening to Phil Teal and Keith Thompson speaking at Peter Buckley's wetland pond