



- Protect plants and animals
- Bury toilet waste when tramping
- Keep our coast, streams and lakes clean
- Leave gates as you find them and respect any access restrictions
- Camp carefully
- Keep to the track
- Respect cultural heritage
- Enjoy your visit and *toitu te whenua* / leave the land undisturbed



NEW ZEALAND  
environmental  
CARE CODE

# Magical places 40 wetlands to visit in New Zealand



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On the boardwalk, Otukaikino.  
Photo: Sarah Mankelov.

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*Arawai Kākāriki*  
wetland restoration programme  
Whangamarino • Ō Tu Wharekai • Awarua Wetland

Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



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This publication has been produced under the Arawai Kākāriki Wetland Restoration Programme as a way of raising public awareness about the value of wetlands. Wetlands are often perceived in a negative light as muddy, inhospitable places, whereas in reality, they can be very beautiful and well used for recreation. They are definitely deserving of our care and protection to keep them in a healthy state.

The Arawai Kākāriki Wetland Restoration Programme (which began in 2007) is co-ordinated by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and has focused on three wetland sites in New Zealand: Whangamarino, Ō Tū Wharekai and Awarua-Waituna. The programme aims to protect, restore and gain a better understanding of the ecosystems of the wetlands. The knowledge gained from these three sites will then be applied in the management of other wetlands.

A broad range of initiatives have been undertaken in collaboration with local communities, iwi and other agencies, including wetland mapping, ecological inventories, weed control, fencing, and new recreational facilities for public enjoyment. Promoting sustainable land use and raising awareness of wetland values are key objectives of the programme.

## Wetlands—places of magic and wonder

**Wetlands are magical places.** Often their full beauty is not revealed until you explore along the boardwalks and paths or, in some cases, by boat or kayak into bays and inlets. Beautiful reflections of mountains and trees can be captured in the open water of a lake. Bubbling pools are a feature of natural springs and geothermal wetlands, while in other places, specialised plants like mosses, ferns, orchids, sundews and rushes form intricate carpets.

Did you know that wetlands support the greatest concentration of wildlife—more than any other habitat in New Zealand? There is a good chance you will see a variety of birds when you visit a wetland—waterbirds, waders, shorebirds and forest birds depending on the situation. Often it is possible to get closer to wildlife than in the bush—and a good pair of binoculars can make a difference to what you see. Bird watching is enhanced by specially created hides or viewing places.

Where there is water there are usually fish. Native fish, many endangered, are often small in size or hiding under banks, so you need to look carefully to find them.

This publication identifies 40 of the best wetlands in New Zealand to visit and enjoy, whether walking, cycling, boating, fishing, bird watching or taking photos. It covers sites from Te Pahi in the north to Awarua in the south and across to Stewart Island/Rakiura. It includes pristine wetlands, as well as some being restored or reconstructed by the community, and a range of wetland types.

It is hoped by exploring some of the wetlands in this publication, you will appreciate just how special wetlands are and discover for yourself that they are magical places that can enthral, amaze and delight when you take the time to visit.

Learning about wetlands.  
Photo: Sarah Bond.



## Wetland types

Wetlands vary in terms of their water regime—the volume of water; whether that water is fresh or saline, permanent or temporary, static or flowing; the diversity of landforms; and the range of plants and animals they support.

There are a number of different types of wetland referred to in this publication, and with examples of each to visit, you have the opportunity to experience a wide spectrum of wetland types across the country. Each wetland is unique and even within a type, no two wetlands look exactly the same.

### *Wetlands include:*

- swamps, bogs and fens
- estuaries, lagoons and dune lakes
- lowland lakes, rivers and streams
- alpine lakes and kettleholes
- geothermal and natural springs.

Wetlands can be fed by water from rainfall, over-ground streams, flood waters, groundwater springs or seepages, ice melt or from the incoming tide.

### *All wetlands typically have:*

- an abundance of water above or near the ground surface for all or part of the year
- unique soil conditions
- plants and animals that are adapted to living in wet conditions.

Some wetlands are referred to as ephemeral: periodically wet areas that may be wet or dry when you visit. This is often the case where surface depressions become ponded with water during wet seasons or wet years, yet are partially or wholly dry at other times.



Pauatahanui Inlet with bird hide.  
Photo: Matt Barnett.

## Ramsar sites



The wetlands listed here are a selection of wetlands from around the country and include five of the six sites in New Zealand designated as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. These are the Firth of Thames, Whangamarino Wetland, Manawatu Estuary, Farewell Spit and Awarua Wetland. The sixth site, Kopuatai Peat Dome, has limited public access. Ramsar sites are considered to be internationally important—comparable to World Heritage sites.

The Ramsar Convention was the first modern intergovernmental treaty on conservation and wise use of natural resources. It was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 on 2 February—the date on which we now celebrate World Wetlands Day each year. New Zealand became a party to the Ramsar Convention in December 1976.

This booklet on 40 wetlands to visit was initiated in 2011 to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Ramsar Convention. It was published in 2012 to coincide with the World Wetlands Day theme of Wetlands and Tourism—to highlight those sites in New Zealand that provide great tourism and recreation experiences. They are by no means the only wetlands to visit and you will note that for most sites, other local wetlands have been identified.

## National Wetland Trust

Special thanks go to the National Wetland Trust for their assistance in preparing this publication. The Trust is a non-profit organisation that seeks to encourage people to safely visit wetlands as a way of increasing appreciation of wetlands and their values.

The Trust is building an online directory of wetlands to visit in New Zealand on their website: [www.wetlandtrust.org.nz](http://www.wetlandtrust.org.nz). A number of the sites featured in this publication can also be found there.

The Trust and its membership has extensive knowledge about wetlands and has worked collaboratively with DOC in compiling information on these 40 wetlands.





## Recreation information

The majority of the wetlands listed in this publication can be accessed by foot, but some are better appreciated from a high point providing an overview, or by kayak or rowboat on the water to give a true sense of the magic of the place.

Tracks can vary from easy walks to more strenuous exercise—the ones listed here should be achievable by most people of average fitness. The majority of walking tracks are developed and maintained by DOC but a number managed by other agencies are included.

## Track classification



**Easy access short walk:** Suitable for people of all abilities, wheelchairs, and pushchairs.



**Short walk:** Track is well formed. Easy walking for up to an hour. There may be steps or slopes. Walking shoes required.



**Walking track:** Easy to moderate walking from a few minutes to a day. Track is mostly well formed, some sections may be steep, rough or muddy. Walking shoes required.



**Tramping track:** Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking. May have steep grades. Suitable for fit, experienced and adequately equipped people. Tramping boots required.



**Dual-use track:** Walking and off-road biking are both available on dual-use tracks. Bikers: please stay in control of your bikes at all times and give way to walkers.

## Please note

Tracks on conservation land are marked by orange triangles. Other coloured markers or tape are used for land management purposes and should not be followed.

## Enjoying the outdoors safely

Choose the type of walk that most suits the skills, fitness and abilities of your group. Be well prepared, with food and water as necessary, and wear appropriate clothing. Check the weather forecast before you head out—remember, safety is your responsibility. See [www.adventuresmart.org.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.org.nz) for further information.

## Other recreation opportunities



### Fishing

A number of freshwater wetlands not only provide habitat for native fish, but also contain introduced sports fish such as rainbow or brown trout, or coarse fish such as rudd. Fishing licences and information are available from most fishing shops. For further information, see [www.fishandgame.org.nz](http://www.fishandgame.org.nz).



### Boating

Canoeing or kayaking can be a great way to explore a wetland, especially for moving silently along waterways to increase your chances of seeing some of the more secretive wetland birds. Some lakes and estuaries are also open to motor boats.



### Gamebird hunting

Hunting of waterfowl—which includes ducks, geese and swans—occurs during a restricted season, starting on the first Saturday in May each year. Only certain species may be shot and a licence is required—see [www.fishandgame.org.nz](http://www.fishandgame.org.nz) for detailed information. If you're not a hunter, it is best not to visit sites with the gamebird hunting symbol during May and June.



### Bird watching

Wetlands provide habitat for a variety of protected native birds as well as long-distance flyers that visit on a seasonal basis. A pair of binoculars may increase your chances of seeing something special and can help to identify birds. See page 6 for a description of some key species.



### Dogs

Unless specifically indicated by this symbol, no dogs other than guide dogs or permitted hunting dogs should be taken into any of the wetlands featured in this publication.

## Other symbols



Toilets



Information centre



Information panels



Suitable for pushchairs



Lookout/viewpoint



Camping



Historic place



DOC-managed site

## Wetland birds

Look out for these birds when visiting wetlands.



Brown teal/pāteke



Spotless crake/pūweto



Pied stilt/poaka



NZ dotterel/tūturiwhatu



Black stilt/kakī



NZ shoveler/kuruwhengi



Bar-tailed godwit/kuaka



Paradise shelduck/pūtangitangi



NZ scaup/pāpango



Australasian bittern/matuku

Photos: DOC.