



- 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



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environmental
CARE CODE**

Magical places 40 wetlands to visit in New Zealand



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Cover image:
On the boardwalk, Otukaikino.
Photo: Sarah Mankelov.

Back Cover image:
Pūkeko. Photo: Karen Denyer.

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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. 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 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.



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 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 crane/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.

Wetlands to visit in the North Island



1. Te Werahi, Northland

You can start your journey of magical wetlands near the northern tip of New Zealand in a remote but highly natural and scenic landscape. Te Werahi is a good stopping place on your way to or back from Cape Reinga. From the road, you will see a large freshwater wetland system, which has three raupō swamps linked by narrow sandy streams. It is an important site for wetland birds such as Australasian bitterns/matuku, grey ducks, grey teals/tētē, NZ shovelers/kuruwhengi, pied stilts/poaka, pied shags and little shags.

Places to explore

The wetland can be accessed via boardwalks down the Twilight-Te Werahi Loop track. The full 16 km loop takes 4-5 hr and passes through farmland, dunes, shrubland and coastal wetlands, as well as the raupō swamp.

Highlights: Wetland birds, spectacular views of dunes, headlands and beaches.

Getting there

Follow State Highway 1 north from Kaitiaki and then the Cape Reinga Road from Te Pahi. Look for the signposted Te Werahi gate about 4.5 km south of Cape Reinga.

Further information

Cape Reinga Coastal Walkway at www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Parengarenga Harbour—a large, relatively unmodified harbour visited by migratory shorebirds.

Waitahora Lagoon—a coastal lagoon at Spirits Bay.



Te Werahi wetland.
Photo: DOC.

2. Lake Ohia, Northland

Lake Ohia is an other-worldly place of charred stumps and gumland scrub that casts a strange sort of magic over you. The area was once an ancient kauri forest, then a lake that was subsequently drained in the 1900s for gum digging, exposing a maze of 30,000-year-old kauri stumps. It is now an important habitat for rare ferns, mosses and orchids. Lake Ohia is an ephemeral lake that usually dries out in summer and is wet in winter.



Places to explore

The Gumhole Reserve Walk is a 10 min loop through mānuka scrub and passes a series of holes excavated by gum diggers. Many of the holes are deep so keep to the track. Throughout the walk you'll find information about the history of the site and areas of significance. It's an ideal place for the family with plenty of tables and shady areas—perfect for a picnic.

Highlights: Gum-digger holes and their history, kauri stumps.

Getting there

From Kaitiaki, head north to Awanui, onto State Highway 10 and then onto Inland Road to the Gumhole Reserve parking area, 21.5 km from Kaitiaki.

Further information

See www.doc.govt.nz for more information.

Other places to visit

Kaimaumu Swamp—a complex and extensive infertile freshwater wetland between Houhora and Rangaunu Harbours. Good views from the road.

Lake Ngatu—a gem of a dune lake in the Sweetwater lakes system, popular for recreation and with a 4 km walking track.



Lake Ohia.
Photo: Bev Clarkson.

3. Kai Iwi Lakes, Northland

Three clear, blue, rain-fed dune lakes, with no rivers or streams flowing in or out, and white sand beaches surrounded by gumland and wetland. Extensive native revegetation is under way following the removal of pine trees. These are amongst the deepest dunelands in the country, supporting rare native fish as well as kōura/freshwater crayfish, crabs, mussels, eel/tuna and introduced rainbow trout. Popular for watersports, fishing, swimming and camping.

Places to explore



There is a walking track around Lake Taharoa, the largest of the three lakes, as well as a 2.5 km walking track from the lake to the coast. Or just spend time camping or picnicking by the lakeshore, maybe doing some fishing or boating. No motorised craft are allowed on the smallest lake so it is a pleasant place to enjoy a 30 min walk around its shore.

Highlights: Clear, blue waters contrasting with white sand beaches, many recreational opportunities.

Getting there

Located 35 km north of Dargaville off State Highway 12 via Omamari Road then Kai Iwi Lakes Road, leading to the Taharoa Domain.

Further information

The Taharoa Domain is managed by a Governance Committee of the Kaipara District Council and Te Kuihi and Te Roaroa iwi. See www.kaipara.govt.nz or www.kai-iwi-lakes.co.nz.

Note: *These lakes can be combined with a visit to see Tāne Mahuta, the giant kauri tree in Waipoua Forest.*



Kai Iwi Lakes.
Photo: Darren Jones.

4. Limeburners Creek, Whangarei

This is a large estuary in Whangarei Harbour with mangroves, saltmarshes and mud flats of lush eel grass. Freshwater areas have also been 'constructed' here to act as a filter for part of the city's sewage treatment system. Native rushes and sedges planted to filter nutrients also add to the wildlife values and beauty of the area. The entrance is well marked by a covered gateway and information panels.

Places to explore



Two flat, all-weather tracks traverse the wetland. One goes alongside Limeburners Creek with boardwalks and information panels; the other is a longer walk of 2 hr along an old railway formation and through mangroves. The mangrove section is easily accessed from the car park along a boardwalk that zig zags through the trees (20 min return).

Highlights: Tall mangroves, views over the estuary.

Getting there

Access via Kioreroa Road off State Highway 1 at the southern entrance to Whangarei (signposted to Port Whangarei).

Other places to visit

Waitangi mangroves—a walk through mangroves and coastal forest near the Treaty House at Waitangi in Bay of Islands.



Limeburners Creek.
Photo: Jan Simmons.

5. Tawharanui Regional Park, Auckland

A special feature of this site is the pest-proof fence that has allowed native species to flourish. Brown teal/pāteke have been reintroduced and can be seen enjoying the wetlands. The mix of coastal lagoon, saline wetlands and freshwater habitat also support Australasian bitterns/matuku, spotless crakes/pūweto, banded rails/moho pererū, blue reef herons and variable oystercatchers/tōrea, with numerous pūkeko. These wetlands are all within Tawharanui Regional Park, a great place for walking, mountain biking, camping and swimming in a stunning coastal location north of Auckland.



Places to explore

From the lagoon car park, a boardwalk crosses the edge of the coastal lagoon with abundant *Plagianthus divaricatus* and other saltmarsh vegetation, and a wide variety of birdlife. There is a good view of the Mangatawhiri wetland on the opposite side of the road. Mangatawhiri Track (25 min) can be accessed via the kissing gate and across the paddock. This is a grass track with boardwalks that includes Thompson Loop around a wetland reconstructed in 2007 from a wet paddock. It has involved countless volunteer hours from the community.

Highlights: *Pest-proof fence, brown teals/pāteke and pūkeko, stunning location.*

Getting there:

From State Highway 1 at Warkworth, follow the signs to Matakana. Just past Matakana turn right at the Omaha turn off and drive along Takatu Road to Tawharanui Regional Park.

Further information

The park is managed by the Auckland Council with the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Society actively involved in restoration. See www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz or www.tossi.org.nz.

Other places to visit

Whangateau Harbour and estuary—an important resting and feeding area for migratory birds.

Tomarata Lake—access is available for boating, waterskiing, kayaking, swimming and fishing (by permit).

Okorormai Wetland at Shakespear Regional Park.



6. Whatipu Dunes, Auckland

A spectacular and remote wilderness area, Whatipu is an extensive sandflat on Auckland's rugged west coast. Water impounded by dunes supports white-faced herons, little shags, bitterns, spotless crane/pūweto, fernbirds/mātātā and pied stilts/poaka. The dunes are also breeding grounds for NZ dotterel/tūturiwhatu. In the dune hollows and damp sandflats, saltmeadows with a range of herbs, including the rare sand spike sedge (*Eleocharis neozelandica*), are found. There are campgrounds and walking tracks in the area.



Places to explore

From the car park at the end of Whatipu Road, the coast walk leads out to the beach. Follow the high tide mark north as far as you want to go past coastal dunes and wetlands in an inspiring landscape. For a longer day tramp, cross the wetland and connect up with the Pararaha Valley Track and other inland tracks to return to the car park. Swimming is not recommended at Whatipu beach as the surf and tidal conditions are extremely dangerous.

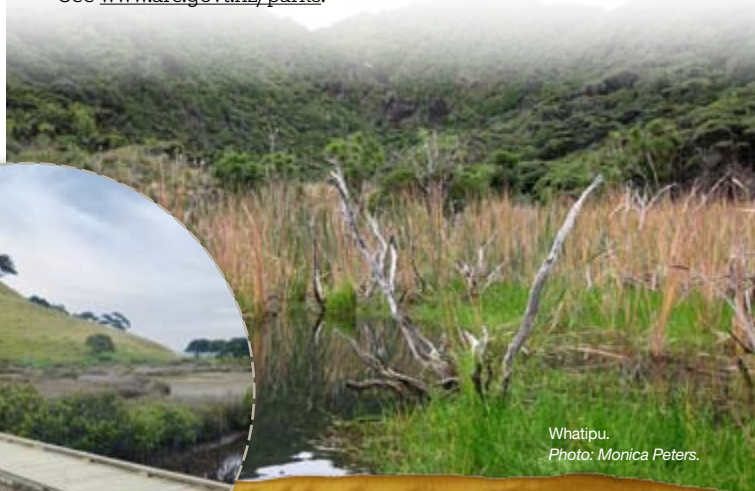
Highlights: *Stunning coastal wetlands and scenery.*

Getting there

Take Huia Road from Titirangi to Huia then continue onto Whatipu Road, which is mostly unsealed and winds over the hills to the coast.

Further information

Tracks and facilities are managed by Auckland Council. See www.arc.govt.nz/parks.



7. Firth of Thames, Auckland/Waikato



If shorebirds are your interest, this is definitely the place to be, especially around October when Arctic migrants like the eastern bar-tailed godwit/kuaka, the turnstone and the red-necked stint arrive after an arduous 10,000 km journey. At the same time, birds from the South Island like the wrybill/ngutu pare, pied oystercatcher/tōrea and the white heron/kōtuku, which have over-wintered in the Firth of Thames, fly back to their southern breeding grounds. The shallow tidal flats, globally rare shell banks known as a 'Chenier plain', mangrove forest and saltmarsh make the Firth of Thames/Tikapa Moana a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.



Places to explore

It is worth starting your visit at the Miranda Shorebird Centre where there is a wealth of information about the site and its occupants. You can then walk out to two specially built hides that enable viewing of the birds at close quarters. Binoculars or a telescope are definitely worthwhile.

Highlights: *Number and variety of shorebirds.*

Getting there:

Located on the East Coast Road, between Kaiaua and Miranda.

Further information

See www.doc.govt.nz or www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz.

Birds at Miranda.
Photo: DOC.



8. Whangamarino Wetland, Waikato



This 7000 ha mosaic of floodplains and peat domes around the Whangamarino and Maramarua Rivers makes up the internationally recognised Whangamarino Wetland. It is home to fernbirds/mātātā, black mudfish/waikaka, rare orchids, bladderworts and a range of native fish species. It is also the national stronghold for Australasian bittern/matuku with 20% of New Zealand's bittern population estimated to be living here. Whangamarino is part of a substantial and effective flood control scheme on the lower Waikato River. Recreational pursuits include gamebird hunting and coarse fishing for introduced species such as rudd, catfish and koi carp.

Places to explore



For one of the best views over the wetland, park at the Whangamarino flood control gates just off State Highway 1 and walk up to the Whangamarino Redoubt and Te Teoteo's Pā (which are of historical significance). There are also good views along the Waikato River. Another option is to take a scenic drive around the wetland via Island Block and Falls Roads—from high points on these roads you have a panoramic landscape of the wetland. There are boat ramps on both these roads for those wishing to get a little closer to the water and explore the wetland by boat or kayak.

Highlights: *Scenic views, historic sites.*

Getting there

Access Whangamarino Redoubt off State Highway 1 south of Mercer via Oram Road; Island Block Road at Meremere; or Falls Road from Te Kauwhata.

Further information

National Wetland Trust Trail Guide:
www.wetlandtrust.org.nz.

Other places to visit

Lake Hakanoa in Huntly—a circular walk around the lake with themed gardens and wetland vegetation.



Arawai Kākāriki
wetland restoration programme
Whangamarino

Kopuatai Peat Dome

Huge, but essentially hidden from sight, the Kopuatai Peat Dome, at 10,201 ha, is the largest unaltered restiad peat bog in New Zealand and is also unique globally. Restiads are peat-forming rushes. At Kopuatai, the smaller wire rush *Empodisma minus* and the endemic giant cane rush *Sporodanthus ferrugineus* dominate the peatland vegetation. The vegetation of the dome is fragile and easily damaged so entry is by permit only.

The wetland is an important habitat for the Australasian bittern/matuku, banded rail/moho pererū, marsh crane/koitareke and the fernbird/mātātā, with fish species including black mudfish/waikaka and longfin eel/tuna.

Peat lakes

A distinctive feature of the landscape south of Hamilton is the number of small lakes visible from State Highway 3—just some of the 16 or so peat lakes remaining in an otherwise intensively farmed area. One of these, Lake Serpentine, is being considered as the future site for a National Wetland Centre—a state-of-the-art centre with research and educational facilities, wetland gardens and heritage trails. The National Wetland Trust is developing plans and raising funds for this ambitious project—see www.wetlandtrust.org.nz.

The most accessible of the peat lakes is Lake Ngaroto with a boat ramp, picnic area and 1 hr 30 min loop walk through wetland and shrubland. See www.teawamutu.co.nz.

Lake Serpentine in mist.
Photo: Karen Denyer.



9. Te Waihou Springs, South Waikato

Experience the magic of Te Waihou where the clear blue waters bubble out of the ground at a rate of 42 cubic metres (9240 gallons) per minute. This is some of the purest water you will find, with the springs supplying 60% of New Zealand's bottled water. Small waterfalls set amongst native bush add to the scenic beauty of the area, and introduced trout are plentiful.

Places to explore



Te Waihou Walkway follows alongside the Waihou River, and it takes only 15 min from Whites Road to arrive at the Blue Spring where the clear blue of the water contrasts sharply with the bright green of the waterweed. Boardwalks cross wet ground and there are stiles and steps in places as well as viewing platforms. The full walkway takes 1 hr 30 min from one car park to the other, or go as far as you like before returning the way you came.

Highlights: *Clear, blue water, scenic vistas.*

Getting there

Access is from Whites Road off State Highway 1 north of Putaruru or State Highway 5 between Tirau and Rotorua.

Further information

This reserve is managed by the South Waikato District Council. See www.southwaikato.govt.nz for more information.



Te Waihou Walkway.
Photo: Adrienne Grant.

10. Sulphur Bay, Rotorua

At the southern end of Lake Rotorua lies Sulphur Bay, a mystifying geothermal wetland that the Rotorua region is famous for. This is an active and constantly changing landscape with sinter terraces, sulphur and silica flats, and active mud pools and steam vents. The milky colour of the water is the result of suspended sulphur particles. Although not a good source of food, the warmth and proximity to other feeding grounds and its wildlife refuge status makes this a safe haven for over 60 different bird species including banded dotterel/pohowera, NZ dabchick/weweia, scaup/pāpango, three gull species and pied stilt/poaka.

Places to explore



A walkway starts at Motutara Point on the Rotorua lakefront following along the lake edge behind the Government Gardens, past the Polynesian Pools and through the geothermal area. You can access this walkway from many points, walking as little or as much of it as you like. The section from the Lake Plaza Hotel to Puarenga Stream is known as Te Arikioa and is a dual-use walk and cycleway. You must keep to the tracks—this is a dangerous and fragile environment. Information panels explain some of the rich history and features of the area.

Highlights: Active geothermal area, specialised plants suited to the harsh conditions.

Getting there

The wetland is easily accessible from the central city area in Rotorua.

Further information

Rotorua Walkways brochure available from www.rdc.govt.nz/recreation/walkways.

Other places to visit

Waimangu and Waiotapu Geothermal Reserves featuring walkways, guided tours, and gift shops (entry fee applies).

Lake Okaro—a small lake with a 1.8 km walkway.

Lake Okareka—a walk through a restored wetland filtering farm runoff that takes you to a bird hide on the lake shore.



11. Kaituna Wetland, Bay of Plenty

With vision and determination, wetlands can be restored and recreated, and the Kaituna Wetland is a good example of what can be achieved with agencies and community conservation groups working together. This lowland swamp now has an abundance of cabbage trees/tī kōuka, flax/harakeke and raupō along with kahikatea and swamp maire. The threatened fernbird/mātātā, spotless crane/pūweto and Australasian bittern/matuku are present along with pūkeko, ducks, shags and pied stilts/poaka. The area is popular for gamebird hunting (so if you are not a hunter, it is best not to visit during May and June).

Places to explore



Several walking tracks, a kayak trail and a viewing hide enable you to fully experience the wetland. The Kaituna Wetland Loop Track starts at the car park off Pah Road and meanders through flax/harakeke and fescue, tussockland, cabbage tree/tī kōuka forest and raupō reedland alongside sections of open water (45 min to 1 hr 15 min). Information signs are in place to explain some of Kaituna's special places and features.

Highlights: Kayak trail—provided water level is high at 760 mm. (Check with Bay of Plenty Regional Council before you go.)

Getting there

Access the wetland at the corner of Pah and Kaituna Roads off State Highway 2 near Te Puke. There is a small car park at the entrance to the wetland.

Further information

Kaituna Wetland brochure available from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Matata Lagoon—a coastal freshwater lagoon that is gradually being restored.

Ohiwa Harbour—a large harbour with estuarine wetlands. The Nukuhou Saltmarsh and walkway are worth visiting.



12. Ruapani Tarns, Te Urewera

A stunning complex of seven unmodified high-altitude mires and bogs close to the pristine Lake Waikareiti in Te Urewera National Park. Local past geological events have created a landscape of humps and hollows in which the Ruapani Tarns sit. Each wetland is different from the others and include open water, sedgeland, sphagnum moss and wire-rush-dominated bogs, herbfields and shrublands. Most are ephemeral with constantly fluctuating water levels. Scaups/pāpango, grey ducks/pārera, Australian coots and little black shags may be seen.

Places to explore



Ruapani Circuit is a tramping track taking about 6 hr and can be traversed in either direction. It is accessed from the Waikareiti Track, which follows in part the shoreline of Lake Waikareiti, one of only two major North Island lakes with no exotic macrophytes (aquatic plants) present. The track passes through red/silver beech forest with occasional podocarps and a profusion of neinei. Interesting plants found in the wetlands include insect-eating sundews, native orchids and a rare native grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*).

Highlights: *High altitude pristine wetlands in a tall beech forest setting.*

Getting there

Waikareiti track begins 200 m from the Aniwanuiwa Visitor Centre, Lake Waikaremoana, on State Highway 38.

Other places to visit

Kaipo Lagoon—a wire rush/sphagnum moss bog, 2–3 hr walk from Ruapani Tarns on the Manuoha Track.

Arohaki Lagoon—a 3–4 hr return walk to an ephemeral lagoon surrounded by towering kahikatea forest.

Ruapani Tarns.
Photo: Paul Cashmore.

13. Ahuriri Estuary, Hawke's Bay

This long, narrow estuary with its wide range of fresh to salty, shallow to deep, and sandy to muddy habitats supports an extremely diverse range of birds, fish, invertebrates and plant life. Over 70 species of resident and migratory waterbirds use the estuary as a feeding and resting area. Bar-tailed godwits/kuaka, knots and golden plovers migrate here each year from their arctic breeding grounds. Wrybills/ngutu pare, oystercatchers/tōrea, pied stilts/poaka and royal spoonbills/kōtuku-ngutupapa over-winter from their South Island homes.

Places to explore



This wetland is clearly visible on the drive in to Napier but it is worth going to the car park in Humber Street and doing the 2.7 km loop track, which takes around 1 hr to walk. It is mostly flat with boardwalk sections and a bridge over the main channel, and has great views of the estuary. Seating is provided along with information panels. There is also an 8 km section of cycleway passing close to the middle estuary with wildlife viewing points.

Highlights: *Estuarine features and views.*

Getting there:

Access is via Humber Street, off State Highway 2 or from Pandora Road north of Napier.

Other places to visit

Lake Opouahi—a 30 min lake loop walk through regenerating native bush skirting a picturesque lake with a predator-proof fence protecting native birds.

Pekapeka wetland—a wonderful restored wetland with a number of walking trails. www.hbrc.govt.nz.

Wrybill/ngutu pare.
Photo: Andrew Walmsley.

14. Waihora lagoon, Waikato

'Magical' is the only word to describe the Waihora Lagoon when you see the tall trees reflected in the water. This is a shallow ephemeral wetland in a completely natural setting surrounded by swamp forest—from sedges and herbs through to tall kahikatea and rimu trees. Even when there is no water in the lagoon, it still has a special beauty.

Places to explore

It is a short 10 min walk from the car park to the lagoon. There is a well-formed track with a boardwalk (the timber was specially selected to cope with the rise and fall of the wetland) snaking through the trees to a platform beside the lagoon.

Highlights: Tall trees, reflections, tranquil setting.

Getting there

From State Highway 32 west of Taupo, turn into Waihora Road and travel 7 km on a gravel road (rough in places) then left into the car park.

Further information

Pureora Forest Park tracks brochure available from DOC.



Waihora Lagoon.
Photo: Karen Denyer.

Swamp forest

Swamp forests are periodically inundated with fresh water (rain water in the case of Waihora Lagoon). Kahikatea is the dominant tree of swamp forest growing densely on matted roots and silt, along with swamp maire, pukatea, cabbage tree/tī kōuka, pōkākā and occasionally rimu. Both kahikatea and pukatea have developed buttress roots to cope with long periods of standing in water.



Kōwhai. Photo: John Barkie.

15. Tongariro River delta, Lake Taupo

Pushing its way into the southern end of Lake Taupo, the Tongariro River is continually depositing alluvial material to create a wonderland of wet and swampy areas. These areas are utilised by at least 48 species of birds and a wide variety of plants such as kānuka, mānuka, kōwhai, kōhūhū and lancewood. Further from the river, the area is less well drained with predominantly flax/harakeke, toetoe, raupō, oioi, rushes and sedges. Tokaanu Bay and the Tongariro River delta is a wonderful area for kayaking, boating, fishing and bird watching.



Places to explore

Launch your boat or kayak at the Tokaanu tailrace boat ramp and head into the bay towards the Tongariro River delta, where hundreds of swans and other waterfowl gather. A kayak will allow you to explore the quieter waters of the river channels and lagoons, with a good chance of seeing dabchicks/weweia, pied stilts/poaka, shags and, on occasion, bittern/matuku. From a boat or from the shoreline, the Tongariro River delta is a good place to fish for trout (a Taupo fishing licence is required). Kayaks can also be launched at the Tongariro River bridge (access is from State Highway 1).

Highlights: Recreation opportunities.

Getting there

From Turangi off State Highway 1 at the southern end of Lake Taupo.

Other places to visit

Tongariro National Trout Centre—learn about the Taupo Fishery and see rainbow trout through an underwater viewing chamber. Also view native fish in the Genesis Freshwater Aquarium.

Tongariro River walking tracks—take in views of the river's calm pools and rippling rapids as you walk along the high banks.

Tokaanu Thermal Walk—geothermal wetland with steaming hot mineral pools and spluttering mud amidst native bush.



Trout.
Photo: DOC.

16. Potaema Bog, Mt Taranaki

You don't have to be a trumper to enjoy Egmont National Park! There are many short walks and easy walking tracks on the lower slopes of Mt Taranaki that weave their way through lush lowland semi-swamp forest of rimu, rātā, kāmahī, kahikatea and swamp mairie. Tucked into a frost-hollow, the Potaema Bog is a little touch of magic amongst the tall forest.

Places to explore



The Potaema Track is wheelchair friendly and starts at the Potaema Picnic Area. Raised boardwalks take you through rimu and kahikatea forest dripping with mosses and lichens to a viewing area overlooking the wetland, with Mt Taranaki as a stunning backdrop (15-30 min return). The boardwalk provides close-up views of sedges, orchids and insect-eating sundews.

Highlights: Easy access to pristine wetland.

Getting there

The Potaema Picnic area is about 3 km in from the park boundary on Pembroke Road (which starts at the northern end of Stratford township).

Other places to visit

Ahukawakawa Swamp on the Pouakai Circuit in Egmont National Park (for the more adventurous).

17. Lake Rotokare, Taranaki

Stop a while at Lake Rotokare and you'll understand why there is a local group passionate about looking after this magical place! The lake and extensive wetlands are surrounded by forested hills and totally enclosed within a predator-proof fence. This has allowed wetland birds such as fernbirds/mātātā and spotless crakes/pūweto a safe home amongst the raupō, flax/harakeke and purei, whilst in the bush, tūi, bellbirds/korimako, kererū, grey warblers/riroriro, and North Island robins/tououwai are all thriving. Eels/tuna and banded kōkopu are found in the streams and lake, plus there is the usual range of waterfowl on the lake. The lake is also popular for boating and is open to power boats over the summer.

Places to explore



A 4 km walkway begins at the picnic area and follows along the southern edge of the lake. It passes through a number of wetlands (where there is a good chance of seeing or hearing fernbirds/mātātā) as well as though native bush dominated by tawa, rewarewa and māhoe. Allow 1 to 2 hr to enjoy this walk.

Highlights: Abundant wildlife.

Getting there

Situated just 12 km from the township of Eltham, South Taranaki, via Rawhitiroa and Sangster Roads.

Further information

The reserve is jointly administered by the South Taranaki District Council and the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust. See: www.rotokare.org.nz.



Mt Taranaki.
Photo: Ross Henderson.



Lake Rotokare.
Photo: Jo Ritchie.

18. Manawatu Estuary, Foxton



Further south is the Manawatu Estuary, an internationally important wetland for its number and diversity of wading birds. The saltmarsh ribbonwood and rushes provide habitat, and extensive tidal flats offer feeding grounds for birds such as the migratory bar-tailed godwit/kuaka, wrybill/ngutu pare and Caspian tern/taranui. In all, 95 bird species have been recorded at the site.

As a rich source of food and transportation highway, this has always been an important place for Māori. Many recreational activities also occur here including boating, fishing, windsurfing, kayaking and bird watching.

Places to explore



Walking access to the estuary is off Holben Parade where there is a car park and small picnic shelter. It is a 10 min walk to the estuary and the sandspit through a gap in the dunes and then left through the bollards. Turning right will take you to the river mouth and ocean beach (15 min). You can loop back along the beach to the surf club and Holben Parade.

Another option is to take the path upstream along the edge of the estuary to the Boating Club, which will give you good views of feeding birds along a very scenic route. There is also a viewing platform and bird identification sign at the end of Dawick Street part way along.

Highlights: *Special events in March and October to welcome and farewell migratory birds, chance of seeing white royal spoonbills/kōtuku-ngutupapa, especially in winter.*

Getting there

Turn off State Highway 1 at Foxton for a 10 min drive to the settlement of Foxton Beach via Seabury Ave and then turn left into Holben Parade.

Further information

Horizons Regional Council, Horowhenua District Council and DOC work together with the Manawatu Estuary Trust to manage this area as a Ramsar site. See www.wetlandtrust.org.nz/Manawatu for further information.

Other places to visit

Pukepuke Lagoon—a dune lake and wetland near Tangimoana, on the Manawatu coast. Requires a permit to visit. See www.doc.govt.nz for more information.

19. Lake Papaitonga, Levin

Papaitonga (also known as Waiwiri) is a 61 ha dune lake within a scenic reserve comprising lush coastal forest and wetland, and supporting a wide range of endemic freshwater fish and bird species. The area is rich in Māori history. Two constructed islands, Papaitonga and Papawhaerangi together with the lake are regarded as tapu (sacred) to local iwi.

The reserve has an intact progression of rare coastal forest to wetland, with pukatea and swamp maire forest and excellent stands of mature kahikatea; while lower wetter areas contain flax, raupō and sedges.



Places to explore

An easy 10 min forest track and boardwalk takes you to a picnic and lake viewing area. A loop track (20 min) continues on to a second lookout at the southern edge of the lake, which adjoins farmland.

Highlights: *Abundance of forest and wetland birds, watch shags perched on specially constructed roosts, chance of seeing giant Powelliphanta snails in undergrowth.*

Getting there

The reserve entrance is at the end of Buller Road. Turn west off State Highway 1 approximately 5 km south of Levin.

Further information

Papaitonga Scenic Reserve factsheet from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Waikanae Estuary—walk along the sandspit and riverbanks to see wading birds.



Lake Papaitonga.
Photo: Sue Galbraith.

20. Pauatahanui Inlet, Wellington

This is surely a magical place with its extensive, relatively unmodified estuarine area containing a mosaic of tidal mud flats and native vegetation such as marsh ribbonwood, searush, eel grass and some raupō. The Pauatahanui inlet is home to waterfowl, both local and migratory waders, the most likely to be spotted being pied stilts/poaka, white herons/kōtuku, NZ shovelers/kuruwhengi, paradise shelducks/pūtangitangi and black shags/kawau. The area around the inlet has been inhabited for at least 600 years and is rich with wāhi tapu (sacred sites), archaeological features, and historic places.

Places to explore



A number of walking tracks lead from two car parks, with information boards to guide visitors. These provide options for walking along rush-lined streams (with a possible glimpse of the native fish, banded kōkopu), through marshy areas and even a stretch of coastal forest. Many tracks include a bird hide for quietly watching for birds—or in some cases, mud snails and crabs.

Highlights: *Estuarine features, coastal birds.*

Getting there

Pauatahanui Inlet is an east-west running arm of Porirua Harbour, 30 km north of Wellington. Public access is from Pauatahanui Village off State Highway 58 and Motukaraka Point on Grays Road.

Further information

Pauatahanui Reserve is managed by DOC, with Forest and Bird and a local community group, Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet (www.gopi.org.nz), who are actively involved in restoration of the inlet.

Other places to visit

Taupo Swamp—a lowland freshwater mire with a walkway/cycleway connecting the seaside settlements of Plimmerton and Pukerua Bay along State Highway 1.

Waitangi Park, Wellington City

This 1 ha constructed wetland on the Wellington waterfront is a great example of a coastal wetland ecosystem in an inner-city setting. It also illustrates how wetlands can be used in low-impact urban design to mitigate the effects of storm water run off.



Mud crab. Photo: Lindsey MacFarlane

21. Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park

This is a wetland and lake on a large scale and although it lacks the intimacy of some of the other sites, Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park is an awesome place, with the Rimutaka Ranges providing a scenic backdrop to the area. From Lake Domain at the north end of Lake Wairarapa to Onoke Spit, 30 km away at Palliser Bay, the park covers over 9000 ha, offering a rich diversity of mudflats, lagoons, sandflats, marshlands, saltmarshes and back waters, which are regularly flooded or exposed, depending on the season. It is home to more than 100 birds species, rare plants and native fish and is revered by Māori as a source of well-being for the region.

Places to explore



The park has many access points and a variety of recreation activities including boating, yachting, fishing, duck hunting and walking. There is a large open recreation area at the Lake Domain, but for seeing birds, the best place is Matthews and Boggy Pond Wildlife Reserve, where there is a viewing hide accessed via an 800 m walking/cycling track or a longer 2.6 km loop track. Alternatively, walk along the Onoke Spit at Palliser Bay.

Highlights: *Open vistas, recreational opportunities.*

Getting there

Lake Domain is around 8 km from Featherston via South Featherston Road. Matthews and Boggy Pond is accessed via Paera Road off Kahutara Road. Onoke Spit is at the end of Western Lake Road.

Further information

Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park factsheet from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Carter Scenic Reserve—an easy walk through a flooded kahikatea forest and along the Ruamahanga River.



Lake Wairarapa. Photo: Greater Wellington Regional Council.

Wetland plants

These are some of the plants you might see in the wetlands depending on the location.



Eel grass



Mangroves



Wire rush



Raupō



Marsh ribbonwood



Sphagnum moss



Sundew



Cabbage tree/tī kōuka



Kahikatea

You will find eel grass, mangroves, wire rush and marsh ribbonwood in salt water environments and the other plants in freshwater wetlands.

Photos: DOC.

Wetlands to visit in the South Island and Stewart Island/Rakiura



22. Farewell Spit (Onetahua), Golden Bay



New Zealand's longest sandspit system, extending eastward into the Tasman Sea for approximately 30 km, shelters tidal mudflats exposed at low tide for up to 6 km seaward. These mudflats and the dunes provide a haven for over 90 bird species including black swan, Australasian gannet, Caspian tern/tarānui, southern black-backed gull/karoro, bar-tailed godwit/kuaka, red knot and variable oystercatcher/tōrea. Many of these birds migrate thousands of kilometres each year from the northern hemisphere.

The spit forms a Ramsar wetland of international importance and it is also an East Asian-Australasian Flyway Network site for migratory birds. The area has been a flora and fauna reserve and wildlife sanctuary since 1938.

Places to explore



Public entry to Farewell Spit is controlled to protect wildlife, but you can walk along the inner beach from the car park and cross over to the ocean beach via two signposted tracks. For a great view of the spit and intertidal zone, consider climbing up to one of the viewing points on the adjoining Puponga Farm Park. There are a number of tracks to choose from. Taking an eco-tour to the lighthouse is also an option (fee applies).

Highlights: Shorebirds, stunning views, many estuarine wetlands along the drive to the spit.

Getting there

From Takaka, follow State Highway 60 north to Farewell Spit.

Further information

Farewell Spit and Puponga Farm Park brochure available from www.doc.govt.nz.



Farewell Spit.
Photo: Karen Denyer.

Information sign,
Farewell Spit.
Photo: Annette Hamblett.

23. Mangarakau Swamp, Westhaven (Whanganui Inlet)

A large, relatively pristine freshwater swamp at the southern end of the Whanganui Inlet, south of Farewell Spit, on the west coast. This is a magical location—to the west are tidal bays and inlets and towering limestone bluffs, and to the east the forested ranges of Kahurangi National Park. Westhaven (Whanganui Inlet) is one of the largest and least modified estuaries in New Zealand and was formally protected in 1994 with the creation of the Westhaven (Te Tai Tapu) Marine Reserve and the Westhaven (Whanganui Inlet) Wildlife Management Reserve.



Places to explore

It is worth starting your visit at the Friends of Mangarakau Visitor Centre and doing the short walks to the lookouts and the hidden jewel that is Lake Mangarakau. If you are really energetic, the 1 hr 30 min tramp up Knuckle Hill (15 min drive from the visitor centre) is worth the effort for the breathtaking views over the inlet and swamp. Kayak up Muddy Creek or the Wairoa River at high tide for an enchanting experience.

Highlights: Limestone bluffs, mudflats with eel grass, special plants, chance to hear and see Australasian bitterns/matuku and fernbirds/mātā.

Getting there

Take the road from Collingwood towards Farewell Spit. Turn left at Pakawau Inlet across to the Whanganui Inlet and then follow the road south around the eastern shoreline.

Further information

Westhaven Inlet Marine Reserve and Wildlife Management Reserve brochure available at www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Lake Otuhie—a 30 min walk across farmland to a small lake backed by towering limestone bluffs.

Kaihoka Lakes—a 10 min walk around two small lakes.



Mangarakau. Photo: Karen Denyer.

24. Te Waikoropupū Springs, Takaka

With stunning clear water and unique flora and fauna, Te Waikoropupū (or Pupū) Springs are the largest cold water springs in the Southern Hemisphere, discharging 14,000 litres of water per second. To local Māori, the springs are a taonga (treasure) and wāhi tapu, a place held in high cultural and spiritual regard.

The waters of Te Waikoropupū Springs, including Fish Creek and Springs River, are closed to all forms of contact (including fishing, swimming, diving, wading, boating and drinking the water) to safeguard water quality and to respect cultural values.

Places to explore



A short 30 min loop walk from the Te Waikoropupū Springs car park leads to a platform that sits partly over the water, with a viewing chamber for underwater views of the springs. Signs tell the full story of this fascinating and beautiful place. Return via the longer (15 min extra) Fish Creek track for an amazing waterscape of mosses, ferns and liverworts beneath a native forest canopy.

Highlights: Bubbling springs, clear blue waters.

Getting there

Te Waikoropupū Springs is located 7 km west of Takaka. Follow State Highway 60 north from Takaka and take the signposted turn off on the left over the Takaka River.

Te Waikoropupū Springs.
Photo: Annette Hamblett.

25. Lake Mahināpua, West Coast

Lake Mahināpua is one of the best spots around Hokitika to spend a day by the water and is a popular place for picnics and water sports. Once a coastal lagoon, the build up of sand has turned it into a shallow inland lake surrounded by forest.

Flax/harakeke and rushes on the lake edge provide sheltered sites for swans and ducks. The shy fernbird/mātā can be heard (and sometimes seen) flitting amongst these swampy areas, with Australasian bitterns/matuku and seasonal white herons/kōtuku also present.



Places to explore

There are a number of short walks close to the lake—a bush walk from the end of the access road passes through typical wetland forest dominated by kahikatea, while the Bellbird Walk at the southern end of the lake takes 10 min to loop around a pond. The Mahināpua Walkway is considerably longer (2 – 2 hr 30 min one way) but incorporates a variety of scenery and terrain and includes access to a pebbly beach at the edge of the lake as well as boardwalks across swampy areas. Cycling is permitted on the walkway. Water-based activities include swimming, yachting and kayaking (kayaks available for hire). A paddle cruiser operates on the Mahināpua Creek leading down to the lake.

Highlights: Variety of recreational activities.

Getting there

10 km south of Hokitika on State Highway 6, turn left onto the Lake Mahināpua access road opposite the Lake Mahināpua Hotel. The lake is 300 m along this road.

Further information

Central West Coast-Hokitika, Kumara to Ross brochure available from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Lake Kaniere—another beautiful lake with a variety of walks and water-based activities.

Lake Brunner—the largest lake on the West Coast popular for swimming, boating and fishing, and featuring a number of walks.



Lake Mahināpua. Photo: Darin Sutherland.

26. Harihari, West Coast

This area has one of the most scenic walkways on the West Coast, taking in spectacular views of forest, rivers, mountains and coastline while walking through estuaries, bogs and also a swamp forest. Both the Wanganui and Poerua Rivers have gravel bars with lagoons, and the river mouths are roosts for waders and seabirds. The Wanganui River mouth is popular for whitebaiting, angling and eeling and is bordered by lowland coastal forest and flax swamp.



Places to explore

Harihari Coastal Walkway (2 hr 45 min) follows in part an historic pack track route and an old logging tramway, crossing through a variety of vegetation. From the car park, walk out to the Wanganui Heads where the top of Mt Oneone provides a panoramic view. (It is also a sooty shearwater/tītī breeding site).

Note: *The section of track around the estuary and down the beach to the Poerua River mouth should not be attempted within 2 hr either side of high tide. From the Poerua River, return on the inland track.*

Highlights: *Great views and wilderness experience.*

Getting there

Turn off State Highway 6 at Harihari and follow Wanganui Flat Road before turning left into La Fontaine Road to the road end car park (20 min drive).

Further information

Glacier Region Walks booklet available at www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Shearers Swamp—large coastal swampland including a fen, swamp, bog, pakihi, and coastal lagoon, home to many wetland birds. Good place to kayak.

Harihari.
Photo: Darin Sutherland.

27. Ōkārīto Lagoon, West Coast

Stunning and diverse scenery dominates the small coastal settlement of Ōkārīto—windswept coastline, tidal estuary, lagoon, sea cliffs, lush rainforest and unsurpassed views of the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana. Shallow open water covers over 3000 ha to form the Ōkārīto lagoon—a bird watcher's paradise. Thousands of native birds (more than 76 different species) visit the Ōkārīto Lagoon and many make their home in the vicinity, including the famous white heron/kōtuku and royal spoonbill/kōtuku-ngutupapa.



Places to explore

The Ōkārīto Wetland Walk (25 min, 1 km return) winds through bush before crossing the estuary on a curving boardwalk to a gentle climb to a viewpoint overlooking the estuary. Return to the car park or continue along the Three Mile Pack Track for a longer walk of 3 hr/9 km. The track passes through coastal forest before climbing over the Kohuamarua Bluff and meandering through wind-shorn rimu, rātā and silver pine forest and then dropping down to Three Mile Lagoon—a sheltered estuary fringed with rimu forest. Return the same way or, if the tide allows, follow the coastline back along the beach. There is also an option of taking a wildlife tour to view nesting white herons/kōtuku from late October until February (fee applies).

Highlights: *Variety of wetland types, stunning views, wildlife tours of white herons/kōtuku.*

Further information

Glacier Region Walks booklet available at www.doc.govt.nz.

Getting there

Drive 15 km north from Franz Josef Township on State Highway 6 to the Ōkārīto Forks turn off signposted on the left. It is 13 km along a sealed road to Ōkārīto.

Other places to visit

Whataroa Wetland—large wetland with a boardwalk.

White herons/kōtuku.
Photo: J. H. Johns.



28. Lake Matheson, West Coast

Famous for mirror views of Aoraki/Mt Cook and the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, Lake Matheson is nestled in ancient forest, 5 km west of Fox Glacier township in the Westland Tai Poutini National Park and the Te Wāhipounamu South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. The dark waters are the result of organic matter leached from the humus of the forest floor and are a favourite habitat of the longfin eel/tuna.



Places to explore

The walk circuit around the lakes takes 1 hr 30 min, or take a shorter section (40 min return) to the jetty viewpoint (suitable for assisted wheelchairs). The jetty provides a superb mountain view reflected in the dark waters.

At the top end of the lake, and again at Reflection Island, you will find similarly magnificent mountain reflections. Dawn and dusk are often the best viewing times as the lake is generally calm.

Highlights: Reflections, reflections, reflections.

Getting there

Take Cook Flat Road in the middle of Fox Glacier township signposted to Lake Matheson.

Other places to visit

Peters Pool—easy walk to a small kettle lake.

Lake Wombat—fern-lined walk through rimu forest to the lake.

Lake Matheson.
Photo: Darin Sutherland.

29. Ship Creek, Haast, West Coast

This ancient kahikatea swamp forest provides a glimpse back in time to what much of the West Coast may have looked like prior to human settlement. It is one of the best examples of swamp forest that you will come across and well worth stopping for on your journey along the West Coast.



Places to explore

The Swamp Forest walk (20 min) follows the slow-flowing Tauparikaka Creek, the dark inky colour caused by tannin in the water. There is a boardwalk through the kahikatea swamp forest allowing easy observation of the forest plants.

A second walk to a dune lake (30 min) winds through dense wind-shorn coastal forest stunted by wind. It opens out to provide magnificent photo opportunities from platforms overlooking Lake Mataketake to the sweep of coastline southwest to Jackson Head.

Highlights: Scenic views, ancient forest of tall kahikatea.

Getting there

These walks are signposted off State Highway 6 as you head south between Lake Paringa and Haast.

Other places to visit

Hapuka Estuary—a walk through coastal forest to an estuary and boardwalk.



Ship Creek.
Photo: Darin Sutherland.

30. Amoeboid Mire, Te Anau, Southland

Worth visiting just for its name, this multi-lobed mire (bog), is easily accessed from the spectacular Kepler Track within Fiordland National Park near Te Anau. Located on a terrace that formed as the Manapouri glacier melted, the vegetation is dominated by sphagnum moss, other mosses and wire rush with a range of herbs, shrubs and other plants. A feature is the large tarn in the central part of the mire system. The wetter south-east portion along the Kepler Track is dominated by sedges. Plants of interest are the yellow-silver pine and pygmy pine—both uncommon at low altitudes.

Places to explore

The Amoeboid Mire is accessed along the high-quality gravelled Kepler Track from the Rainbow Reach car park. It is a 45–60 min walk one way following the Waiau River terrace and through beech forest to this fragile peatland mire. Here, a 200 m boardwalk has information panels and a lookout over the tarn and mire. You can continue on for another hour to Moturau Hut with access to a beach on Lake Manapouri. Return by the same track to the car park.

Highlights: Tarn and surrounding bog communities, interesting plants including insect-eating sundew, views over Waiau River to a location from Lord of the Rings.

Getting there

Rainbow Reach car park is a 15 min (12 km) drive south of Te Anau township off State Highway 95 between Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri. Signposted to Kepler Track.

Further information

Fiordland National Park Day Walks publication available at www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Kepler Mire—this is largest peat bog in Te Anau area and can be viewed from Mt York Road.

Lake Mistletoe—can be viewed from a loop track at Te Anau Downs.



31. Rakatu Wetlands, Southland

Spring-fed remnant wetlands in old channels of the Waiau River have been complemented with 50 ha of open water, created for the benefit of fish (both native and introduced trout) and waterfowl as well as protected birds species, to mitigate and remedy the adverse effects of the Manapouri Hydroelectric Power Scheme. The Takatimu Mountains and Fiordland National Park provide an impressive backdrop to the high terraces of the Waiau Valley with its wetlands nestled on the valley floor.

Places to explore

From the car park, 10 km of walking track offer four different walk options. For a good overview of the wetland, take the 10 min uphill track to a lookout. An alternative 10 min track leads to the Waiau River. There are two loop tracks to choose from—the Speight Wetland Loop of 1 hr or the Rakatu Wetland Loop of 2–3 hr. Along the way you should see a great variety of waterfowl such as scaups/pāpango, grey teals/tētē and paradise shelducks/pūtangitangi. Stiles, bridges, shelters and information panels are provided.

Highlights: Abundance of waterfowl.

Getting there

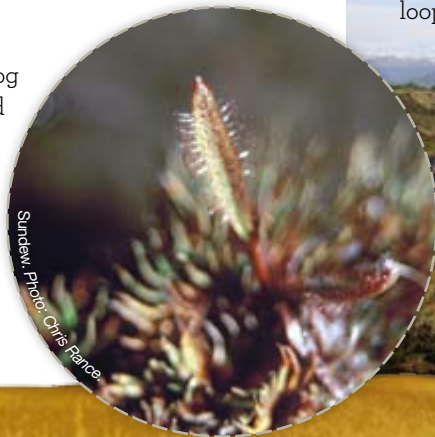
Located on the Blackmount-Redcliff Road (Southern Scenic Route) 15 min south of Manapouri.

Further information

The wetland is managed by the Waiau Fisheries and Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Trust—see www.waiautrust.org.nz.

Other places to visit

Home Creek Wetland—meandering creek and wetlands with loop walk.



Rakatu.
Photo: Mark Sutton.

32. Freshwater River, Stewart Island/ Rakiura

This is the most remote of the wetland sites featured in this publication and is one for the more adventurous traveller with a reasonable level of fitness. It is also one of the most intact and pristine wetlands you'll come across, with a mosaic of acid bog, pools, mānuka/wire rush peatlands, mānuka shrubland, red tussock areas and patches of podocarp forest that extend for some 23 km along the Freshwater Valley to the inter-tidal mudflats at the river mouth. The valley contains a diversity of plant communities and wildlife species. Of particular note is the absence of any introduced fish species. Birdlife includes Stewart Island robins/toutouwai and Stewart Island fernbirds/mātā, and there is a good possibility of even seeing kiwi in daylight.



Places to explore



To really experience the wetlands of Freshwater River, a 4 hr tramp is required from Mason Bay to Freshwater Landing. After flying in to Masons Bay (tide dependent), it is mostly all flat going through tussock and mānuka, with boardwalks over extensive wetlands. You will need to pre-arrange a water taxi from Freshwater Landing back to Oban. Tramping huts are located at both Masons Bay and Freshwater Landing (hut fee applies).

Highlights: *Remote experience, chance of seeing or hearing kiwi.*

Getting there

Stewart Island/Rakiura is a 20 min flight from Invercargill or an hour by ferry from Bluff to Oban.

Further information

See www.stewartisland.co.nz for information on tours and activities.



33. Awarua Wetlands, Invercargill



'Big is beautiful' when it comes to the Awarua Wetlands, New Zealand's largest wetland complex protected under the Ramsar Convention. The 20,000 ha include four major wetland types—extensive peatlands, coastal lagoons, freshwater swamps, and estuaries. The zonation between these major wetland types is a significant feature.

It is a bird lover's paradise with more than 80 different species. The estuarine mudflats, teeming with food, are a draw card for thousands of wading birds including international migrants like the Eastern bar-tailed godwit/kuaka and rare locals—the southern NZ dotterel/tūturiwhatu, marsh crake/koitareke, fernbird/mātā and Australasian bittern/matuku.

There is a great diversity of vegetation, although much of the area is dominated by mānuka shrublands and wire rush. Native orchids and insect-eating sundews and bladderworts are locally common. The wetlands are well used for whitebaiting, fishing, gamebird hunting and kayaking.

Places to explore



There are many great places to explore in the Awarua Wetlands but a good starting point is the Boardwalk Track at the end of Waghorn Road. This winds through low-growing mānuka and shrubs to a viewing shelter overlooking Waituna Lagoon (10 min return). Information panels provide a wealth of information about the wetland. From the shelter, a 2 hr loop takes you out into the peat bog community with a chance of seeing or hearing fernbirds/mātā. You can explore the eastern end of the wetland from Tiwai Road or continue to explore from Awarua Bay Road.

Highlights: *Unique moor-like vegetation featuring herbs, shrubs and insects normally found in subalpine areas.*

Getting there

Access to Waituna Lagoon is from Kapuka or Gorge Road on the Invercargill to Fortrose Road (Southern Scenic Highway).

Other places to visit

New River Estuary—a walkway along the shoreline of the estuary and around Sutton lagoon.



Awarua Kākāriki
wetland restoration programme
Awarua Wetland

34. Pounaweia Estuary, Otago

It is not often that you get virgin podocarp forest rich in birdlife (including bellbirds/korimako, kererū and fantails/pīwakawaka), meeting saltmarsh and estuary and home to wading birds such as royal spoonbills/kōtuku-ngutupapa and bar-tailed godwits/kauka who return to the sandspit near the mouth of the estuary each year. Pounaweia is a special place in this regard.

The Estuary is fed by the Owaka and Catlins Rivers and is popular for fishing, boating, kayaking and swimming.

Places to explore



Park your vehicle outside the camping ground and take the walk of 45 min (there is also a shorter bush walk of 15 min) through native bush and out to the saltmarsh and estuary. There is a good chance of seeing wading birds. Please note that the saltmarsh section of the track is only accessible at low tide.

Highlights: *Vegetation sequence from saltmarsh to forest, chance to see NZ sea lions.*

Getting there

Turn on to Pounaweia Road at Owaka from State Highway 92, the Southern Scenic Route.

Further information

Southern Scenic Route—a traveller's guide available at www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Tautuku—estuary boardwalk with abundant fernbirds/mātā.

Lake Wilkie—bush walk with lake views.

Royal Spoonbill/
kōtuku-ngutupapa.
Photo: Kim
Alexander-Turua.



35. Waihola/Waipori Wetlands, Otago

Thanks to significant community effort, this 2000 ha wetland complex has become an important wildlife haven with 80 species recorded—21 of these dependent on the habitat for their survival. The area regularly hosts more than 10,000 waterfowl and supports regionally significant whitebait and commercial eel fisheries as well as recreational fishing for introduced brown trout and perch. In addition to Lakes Waihola and Waipori, there are vegetated islands, lagoons, shallow pools, meandering channels and backswamps. The Sinclair wetlands between the two lakes is used for educational study with a visitor centre, displays and resources available to schools and visitors. Although water quality has been compromised by drainage and flood control from the lower Taieri Plain, a major willow control programme led by the Lake Waihola Waipori Wetlands Society is helping to restore habitat values.

Places to explore

There is a 30 min loop walk from the Education Centre or a 2 hr walk to Lonely and Ram Islands. Alternatively, take a 10 min walk from the car park on Titri Rd, over Titri Creek into the Titri wetlands to see hundreds of wading birds including marsh crakes/koitareke, fernbirds/mātā, scaups/pāpango, and grey teals/tētē. The track is surrounded by native vegetation, including the threatened wetland nettle. An observation platform offers a good view of one of the largest sections of open water in the wetlands.

Highlights: *Abundant wildlife, educational resources.*

Getting there

Signposted turn off 33 km south of Dunedin on State Highway 1.

Further information

See www.qe2.org.nz or www.southernscenicroute.co.nz or waihola-waipori-wetlands.org.nz.

Other places to visit

Lake Tuakitoto wetlands—there is a 3 hr loop track around this lake, 40 min drive from Waihola/Waipori.

Waipori Wetland.
Photo: DOC.



36. Sutton Salt Lake, Otago

It is most unusual for a salt lake to form in a cool to temperate climate, but New Zealand's only inland salt lake occupies an enclosed shallow basin in the schist rock landscape inland from Dunedin. With no outlet, Sutton Salt Lake has concentrated salts from surrounding soils as it has repeatedly filled, evaporated and refilled, giving the lake a salinity of about half that of seawater.

A few salt-tolerant herbs and grasses occupy the lake margins with other plants like the golden Spaniard typifying the rocky environment. A range of waterbirds and waders use the lake, feeding on the tiny salt-adapted aquatic animals.

Places to explore

A self-guided loop walk of 40 min to 1 hr to the lake and back is an easy way to enjoy the tranquillity and natural history of this stunning landscape. But be aware that in a hot dry summer, the water can disappear, only to refill again during the winter.

Highlights: Salt lake, backdrop of the Rock and Pillar Range.

Getting there

Sutton Salt Lake is approximately a 1 hr drive inland from Dunedin. Drive south of Dunedin to Outram and take State Highway 87, heading towards Middlemarch. Turn left onto Kidds Road before you cross the railway line at Sutton. The reserve entrance is about 2.5 km along Kidds Road.



Sutton Salt Lake.
Photo: Bev Clarkson.

37. Ahuriri Valley, North Otago

This valley has some diverse wetlands, with large shallow pools, oxbow ponds and river backwaters to fertile swamps and infertile bogs. Oxbow ponds were formed from horseshoe bends left behind when the Ahuriri River changed course. The variety and number of habitats make the Ahuriri valley wetlands extremely valuable to wildlife for feeding and breeding—both native fish and birds.

Places to explore

The easiest wetland to visit is Ben Avon, which is right beside Birchwood Road. You can get a good overview of the wetland and wildlife just from your car. A further 4 km up the road are information panels and seating with a stunning view of the river valley and mountains beyond.

Highlights: Possibility of seeing kakī/black stilts, fabulous scenery, ideal for people with limited mobility.

Getting there

Ahuriri Valley is signposted off State Highway 8 approximately 20 km south of Omarama township. Travel 18 km up the no-exit Birchwood Road to the Ben Avon wetland.

Further information

See *Ahuriri Conservation Park* brochure available from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Ohau Moraines wetland complex—vast area of red tussocklands, wetlands, rolling moraines and an outwash flat with views of surrounding mountains.

Spring Creek—tussockland and carex wetland.



Ben Avon wetland.
Photo: Chris Woolmore.

38. Wairepo kettleholes, North Otago

Gently rolling hummocks of glacial moraine and a series of depressions known as kettleholes provide an enthralling landscape extending over approximately 400 ha. The kettleholes (ponds) gradually dry out over summer, to reveal a rich plant life of ground-hugging herbs in a dense, intertwined carpet.

When the kettleholes have water in them, birds such as black stilts/kakī, black-fronted terns/tarapirohe, NZ shovelers/kuruwhengi and a host of other wading and wetland birds may visit.



Places to explore

The track into the Wairepo Kettleholes Conservation Area can be walked or mountain biked for around 3 km until you reach a stile. Over the stile, it is a short walk to the kettleholes. Within the conservation area are fragmented patches of red tussock, sedges and rushes along the margins of Wairepo Creek, which contains a number of freshwater fish and invertebrates.

Highlights: Rare habitat type of ephemeral turfs, the possibility of seeing black stilts/kakī.

Getting there

Entry to the Wairepo kettleholes is 14 km along Quailburn Road, (4 km north of Omarama township off State Highway 8) and is well signposted.

Further information

Day walks in Mackenzie/Waitaki brochure available from www.doc.govt.nz.

Other places to visit

Black stilt/kakī Visitor Hide, Twizel—guided tours from late October to April. www.doc.govt.nz.



Wairepo kettleholes.
Photo: Joy Corrie.



Ō Tū Wharekai.
Photo: DOC.

39. Ō Tū Wharekai, Ashburton Lakes

Ō Tū Wharekai, nestled amongst high-country tussocklands and set against the towering Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o Te Moana, is one of the best examples of an inter-montane wetland system in New Zealand. It is a mosaic of diverse wetland habitats including the braided upper Rangitata River and the 12 Ashburton lakes. It is nationally important for wildlife and is home to wrybills/ngutu pare, Australasian crested grebes/kāmana and black-fronted terns/tarapirohe. There are a number of threatened plants, as well as some of the best examples of red tussock and *Carex secta* wetlands in Canterbury.

The lakes and surrounding area provide opportunities for wind surfing, sailing, bird watching, kayaking, fishing and swimming as well as hunting, mountain biking and walking.

Places to explore



For amazing vistas of the braided upper Rangitata River and headwaters, it's worth the climb up Mt Sunday (which featured as the fortress of Edoras in the *Lord of the Rings* film). It is a short but steep walk (45 min one way) taking you across Deep Creek, an important site for the threatened upland longjaw galaxiid (native fish) and spawning site for introduced salmon.

Continued on next page



Arawai Kākāriki
wetland restoration programme
Ō Tū Wharekai

Lake Emma is a paradise for bird watchers, duck shooters and fishing enthusiasts. From the car park, head around the lake, drop into the historic homestead on the way, and then head past raupō and *Carex secta* wetlands to Lake Camp (9 km, 2 hr 30 min).

Highlights: *Landscape vistas, high country experience, abundant waterfowl and a regionally significant sports fishery.*

Getting there

At Mt Somers village, turn off the Arundel-Rakaia Gorge Road (Scenic Highway 72) and follow Ashburton Gorge Road towards Hakatere Corner. Here you can head towards lakes Clearwater and Emma or turn right to lakes Emily and Heron. Signs indicate public access to the marked tracks.

Further information

Check out www.doc.govt.nz/otuwharekai, or pick up Hakatere Conservation Park and Ō Tū Wharekai brochures from DOC offices/visitor centres.

Other places to visit

There are numerous other wetlands in Ō Tū Wharekai. Check out Lakes Heron and Clearwater from your vehicle or tramp to the secluded Mystery Lake (9.2 km/5 hr 45 min).



Black-fronted tern. Photo: Andrew Walmsley.



Ō Tū Wharekai restoration project. Photo: George Iles.

40. Travis Wetland, Canterbury

With only 2% of wetlands remaining in the Christchurch area, the Travis Wetland Nature Heritage Park is a special place to view wildlife, with over 50 species of birds, indigenous skinks, native shortfin eels/tuna and the Canterbury mudfish/kowaro. White herons/kōtuku, Australasian bitterns/matuku and black stilts/kakī have been seen in this lowland freshwater wetland, and there is a large population of the quizzical pūkeko.

Places to explore



The main loop track of 3.5 km is wheelchair and pushchair accessible and takes 1 hr 25 min. There is an information kiosk and education centre (used for school programmes), and along the way, a bird hide to watch the activity on the water, a viewing tower and seating. A combined walkway/cycleway goes along the edge of the wetland.

Highlights: *Wildlife identification panels in bird hide.*

Further information

This site is managed by the Christchurch City Council with support from the Travis Wetland Trust. See www.ccc.govt.nz.

Getting there

The main car park and access is at the end of Beach Road, between Burwood and North New Brighton. There is also a car park on Mairehau Road.

Other places to visit

Ōtukaikino—a track/boardwalk through a small wetland being restored as a ‘living memorial’ with the planting of trees to commemorate the passing of a loved one; Mau Mahara—remembering you.



Travis Visitor Centre.
Photo: Sarah Mankelov.



The community at work
in Awarua Wetland.
Photo: DOC.

Wetland restoration and community conservation

Every wetland—no matter how pristine—requires management in some form to maintain and enhance wetland values and their hydrological and biological functioning. This is because wetlands are vulnerable to changes in the environment, reflected in both the quality and quantity of the water entering and leaving a wetland. Many of the wetlands listed in this publication would not be as appealing without active steps to restore, reconstruct and improve the site, and to create opportunities and facilities for public use and enjoyment.

So often it is the community that has been the driving force behind restoration, contributing numerous volunteer hours to achieving a vision. Having seen what's possible, perhaps you may be inspired to do something about protecting and restoring a wetland near you.

Further information

Descriptions given in this publication are, of necessity, brief. To find out more, go to the websites identified for specific wetlands; the DOC website www.doc.govt.nz for contact details of local DOC offices for each site; or the National Wetland Trust website www.wetlandtrust.org.nz.

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