

# Wonderful Wetlands

## Wetlands are essential for effective land management

Wetlands are increasingly being seen as useful additions to New Zealand farms.



- Fencing and planting wetland areas reduces erosion, run-off and stock loss.
- Wetlands reduce peak water levels during flooding
- Plantations can provide timber and firewood.
- Wetlands provide recreation opportunities
- Wetlands improve the aesthetic appeal of the land



## Wetland creation and protection

Wetlands have strong visual impact as well as conservation values. If they are well designed and planted they add vitality, colour and diversity to the landscape and become a valuable community and recreational asset.

It is easy for individuals and communities to get involved in wetland development and conservation projects. Organisations like Fish and Game New Zealand, the Department of Conservation, Forest and Bird, the New Zealand Landcare Trust and local authorities can offer advice on how to do this.

## Wetland promotion

World Wetlands Day, on February 2 each year, is an international celebration of the importance of wetlands. Many New Zealand organisations with an interest in wetland conservation organise promotional events and activities to mark the day and the week surrounding it.

The Department of Conservation makes awards each year to New Zealand's best wetland conservation projects.

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Most of us take wetlands for granted. They are sticky, slushy wet and muddy places where we used to chase eels and frogs. As adults we may go duck hunting or bird watching there.

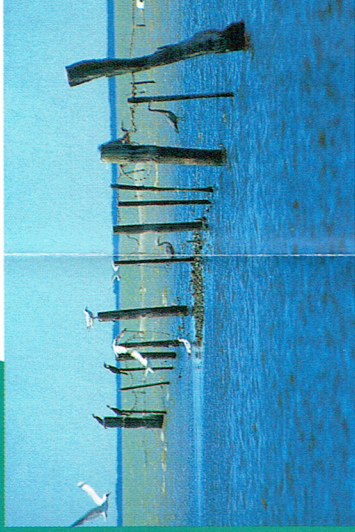
However deceptively ordinary they may appear, wetlands are very dynamic ecosystems. In fact, a mature wetland is one of the most biologically productive places you can find. Wetlands are home to more bird species than any other single habitat type.

Wetlands can be fresh, brackish or salty. They are areas of water and marshy bank side vegetation formed by natural and human processes including volcanic activity, landslides, changes in river flows or mechanical digging.

But from the moment of their birth, wetlands are doomed to die.

Regardless of how they are formed, they are always in the process of reverting back to dry land. Over time, sediment forms, becomes soil and the wetland is gradually replaced with grassland and forest. The animals that live there also change to reflect these changes.

This natural process has been vastly accelerated by humans. Wetlands used to be called swamps and there were thousands of hectares of them throughout New Zealand. However their natural fertility and high productivity made them desirable for various forms of development. Many were drained because their rich, peaty soils produced fertile farmland. They were also reclaimed for housing and commercial developments.



*Lake Ellesmere. Photo Shelley McMurtrie*

These days, wetlands are recognised world wide as being a very important component of fresh water eco-systems.

## Why are wetlands important?

New Zealand now has less than 10 per cent of the wetlands that were present in pre-European times. Wetlands provide important habitat for birds and fish and are home to rare or endangered animals and birds including Australasian bittern, brown teal and plants such as orchids, ferns and mosses. They also provide waterfowl habitat and hunting opportunities.

Loss of wetlands is now recognised as an international issue. New Zealand is one of more than 90 nations to have signed the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. They have pledged to reverse the loss of wetlands and to highlight the need for wetland conservation.

## Wetlands are vital for bird life

Fish and Game New Zealand is actively involved in purchasing, protecting and enhancing wetlands because they provide important habitat for game birds and protected birds. Wetlands offer secure nesting, brood rearing and feeding areas.

Wetland conservation work is undertaken with money from licence sales. Two dollars from every game bird licence goes to the Game Bird Habitat Trust Board, which makes grants to game bird habitat conservation projects around New Zealand.



*Top: Pied stilt*

*Bottom: White heron*

