Travis Wetland Trust

Travis Wetland - Celebrating 21 Years

Travis Wetland

September 2016

Dates to remember

Travis Wetland Trust AGM

Tuesday 18th October, 7pm, Travis Education Centre, Beach Rd
Guest Speaker: Emma Williams. Australasian Bitterns

Help restore Travis Wetland

Travis Wetland Trust Work Days are an opportunity to help the Travis Wetland Trust and Christchurch City Council restore the wetland. Meet people interested in restoring the native biodiversity of our city, share ideas and do some light physical work. Tasks vary according to the seasons and range from planting, release weeding and invasive weed control. Morning tea provided.

When: Third Saturday of every month 9am to 12.30pm.

Where: Meet at the Beach Road car park.

What: Bring gumboots or boots, gardening gloves and clothing suitable for the weather and season e.g. Sunhat, Raincoat, Warm Hat.

Saturday Work day dates for 2016/17 are:

- 17 September in association with Trees for Canterbury
- 15 October
- 19 November
- 17 December
- 21 January
- 19 February

A mighty Totara has fallen

Tom Hay (16/07/1923 - 02/04/2016)

Tom was president of the Travis Wetland Trust from the late 1990s for the ensuing 10 years or so. He had, along with Anne Flannaghan and Arthur Adcock Snr, campaigned for the protection of the wetland, for their respective organisations (FOE in Tom's case), from the late 1980s onwards through to the successful purchase by CCC in 1997. Around 2000 he took part in a ceremonial planting of a kahikatea tree, next to the wetland, below the Mairehau Rd frontage, after the purchase.

The fact that it would have added massively to the earthquake disaster, if the developers had been allowed to fill the wetland and cover it with houses, speaks volumes for Tom's character – of being far-sighted and ahead of his time.

He was a great man and always displayed optimism, humour and philosophical acceptance, whatever disappointments he may have been privately wrestling with – ever-present when trying to protect the environment for future generations. We all loved him dearly. Tom Hay was a revered Aotearoa environmentalist. He started with the campaign to save the Waipoua Kauri Forest in late 1940s when he was a young seaman, and continued through his decades working on the wharves at Lyttelton and through his retirement. He campaigned against Nuclear Weapons, to Save Lake Manapouri, against the corporate power (with CAFCA), to save West Coast Native Forests), Canterbury wetlands and rivers and much much more. Even into old age Tom was writing submissions. In 2010 Tom Hay was awarded an Old Blue, Forest & Bird's highest award in recognition of his volunteer work throughout the years and "on behalf of nature", as he would say. He was the Chairman of the Canterbury Branch of Forest and Bird in the 1970's during the battle for the Beeches and first President of the Travis Wetland Trust. He deserved many more awards, but his heritage lives on in the natural world. (Denise Ford)

Christchurch City Council

Australasian Bittern, Mataku

— John Skilton

Australasian Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) are a rare native bird that require large areas of wetland to live in. They are classified as a nationally endangered. Their cryptic colour and behaviour mean they are not often seen. The booming call of the male bird at dawn or dusk during the breeding season may be the only clue they are around. Whilst they have been observed at Travis Wetland for many years this is the first record of nesting.

In early December 2015 two juvenile bittern were found in separate locations by neighbours adjacent to the park. It is thought to be common behaviour for juvenile bittern to roam from the nest. Luckily these two were taken care of by neighbours and passed to the care of our local bird rescue person, Jackie Stevenson who cared for them until they had gained some weight.

There was concern from DOC staff that if they were released into Travis Wetland they may again roam into the residential area. A decision was made to release them separately in two different locations, as they are solitary birds outside the breeding season. Both birds were fitted with transmitters so there movements can be tracked. They were released with a small ceremony, one at Te Rauakaaka near the Waimakariri River the other at Harts Creek Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere. The Harts Creek bird disappeared from tracking range almost immediately and has still not been located. The Te Rauakaaka bird stayed mostly in Waimakariri/Kaiapoi river mouth.

Sadly the Te Rauakaaka bittern was recently found dead in a garden at the mouth of the Opihi River in South Canterbury, nearly 100km from its release site. The body was sent up to Wildbase at Massey University and the cause of death is starvation. Anita Spencer, DOC, Biodiversity Ranger says,

> *"There were no other signs of trauma to the body. The bird had stayed around the Waimakariri/Kaiapoi river mouth area for several months so we don't know why it left, or why it flew over numerous suitable wetlands and ended up close to Temuka. This is further evidence showing that starvation is a key factor in bittern survival and unfortunately the state of our waterways is contributing to this. Bitterns are ambush predators so need cover to hunt from and many of our streams and drains are open along their banks, usually grazed. We have also dredged and deepened many of the channels making them too deep for bittern to feed along. We really need to develop a much better network of protected waterways".*

Lets hope the Bitterns nest again and they are successful in rearing their young this season!

Our Future Kaitiaki

— Eleanor Bissel

Waitakiri School Students have been helping us at plant at Travis Wetland for 20 years! Beginning as Burwood and Windsor Primary Schools and continuing as the newly formed Waitakiri School. The long tradition of planting there continued last month. The chosen days were unusually warm. In spite of the dry conditions some students managed to become involved with liberal amounts of soil!

The old dune area near Mairehau Road was the focus for revegetation. Introductions from Rangers John and Kenny were followed by a Trust member telling interesting historical snippets. Planting demonstrations reminded students of the protocol - drop in a fertiliser pellet after digging the suitably sized hole; then the plant at the correct depth; carefully fill the hole with soil then protect with guards and mats; old hat for those who had planted on previous years.

Equipped with spades, buckets of water and energy each student planted a special plant. *Linum monogynum* (rauhuia), *Plagianthus divaricatus* (makaka), *Kunzea ericiodes* (kanuka), *Griselinia littoralis* (kapuka), *Sophora microphylla* (kowhai), to name a few. These plants will provide a valuable ecosystem for the continuance of a vibrant bird and invertebrate community.

Further from the track we have added the fierce *Urtica ferox* (ongaonga) which is the host plant for one of our colourful native butterflies - the Red Admiral (*Vanessa gonerilla*). We hope that over the years the students will return to view the area and recognise the value of their efforts.

Exciting discoveries of underground critters were made too - worms and beetle larvae, and students also discovered caterpillars of flax moths on the established host plants close by.

We thank the school staff and students for their ongoing input.

Juvenile Bittern
photographer - Charlie Catt

Adult Bittern
photographer - Grahame Bell

Interview with Bruce Bunny, 28 April 2016

— Charlie Catt

Bruce lived in Ascot Ave, which was near to what was then the farm owned by the Floreance family, in particular Gus and Nan and Gus's brother Auburn. Gus and Nan lived in the main farm house, which is now the Education Centre, while Auburn lived in a house in what was called Racecourse Rd but which is now Bower Ave.

His first contact with the farm came about when his brother worked there for a few years after leaving school. Bruce also worked on the farm for three or four years, starting as a 10-year-old in the late 1930's, but this was only during school summer holidays. His tasks included helping with hay making, herding the cows in for milking, delivering milk by horse and cart to households in the area and digging up turnips and mangles (for fodder), which were grown near the farm buildings. He remembers the farm paddocks being to the west of the homestead (now the Education Centre) and grass for hay being grown to the east of the homestead.

Bruce enjoyed the work that he did, but an additional perk was that he was allowed to use the horses to go riding in the area at weekends, and he also noted that the Floreance brothers made some of the farm horses available for injured returned servicemen to ride.

Bruce said that the farm was divided into paddocks with much of what is now wetland, being drained for farm use although there were still some boggy areas. He noted that from his recent visits to the area that there have been major changes to the land use, for example he remembers lupins, gorse and broom growing on the sandy areas near Mairehau Rd and cows being grazed in that area. There were a few small areas of native vegetation but only a few cabbage trees and toi-toi.

He fondly remembered receiving homemade scones with fresh cream and drinks that were brought to the paddocks in milk cans while they were making hay and silage. Typically, four or five men were involved in the haymaking process; one man would get the hay raked into rows, another would feed the hay into the baler and the bales would be carted off in a sledge. All these machines were horse-drawn.

Although there was an element of danger in the work Bruce did, he thoroughly enjoyed what he did, and he also enjoyed a recent visit to Travis Wetland, especially looking out from the bird hide. He noted that the biggest changes had been the encroachment of houses around the periphery of the wetland and the changes in vegetation and land use, but the farm house and barns are much as he remembers them.

Harakeke, NZ flax

— Dave Evans

Harakeke, NZ flax (Phormium tenax) is one of the most successful and common plants at Travis Wetland. Like cabbage trees, just about every seedling we put in the ground will thrive. Before the swamp was cleared and drained for farming, harakeke was probably present in great swathes at Travis.

For the record, it is quite unlike the Northern Hemisphere flax, but has been called flax presumably because of the use of its fibres by Māori for clothing, containers and cordage etc. Harakeke is a very useful plant and for decades Europeans utilised its fibres for rope, twine, matting, carpet under felt, and wool packs. If synthetic fibres had not been developed we would probably still have a flax industry, but most flax mills closed in the 1930s and the last in 1985.

There are two species of Phormium in New Zealand, the other being *Phormium colensoi*, also known as *Phormium cookianum*. The Māori name for the second species is wharariki and it is found only in New Zealand, whereas harakeke is present on Norfolk Island as well.

Wharariki is a smaller plant with leaves that droop and it predominates on the coast or at higher altitudes than harakeke. Most of the flax cultivars we see in our gardens and street plantings are derived from wharariki because it doesn't grow as big. Harakeke has been spread around the world and it is a pest plant in places, including the remote island of St Helena!

The rigid flower stalks of harakeke can be up to 5 metres long and have bright red blooms with orange pollen holding significant quantities of nectar.

Tūi and bellbirds feast on the harakeke flower and have brush-like tongues specially adapted to extracting the nectar from the flowers. Somehow silvereyes also manage to get nectar from the flowers and every year I am pleased to see silvereyes with orange flax-pollen caps feeding from the wharariki outside my house. Birds are the natural pollinators of harakeke, but bees are also attracted to the flowers and starlings have also learned how to feed from them.

Harakeke, *Phormium tenax*

The Māori bound the dried flower stalks together to form river rafts called mōkihi.

Over the past twenty years, with plantings by the Trust and CCC, harakeke is being restored to its pre-European glory and the widespread wetter conditions due to earthquake-related raising of the water table have served to increase its prominence. No doubt this has contributed to the increasing incidence of bellbirds and one day we may see tūi at Travis again.

If you are interested in getting more involved with parks and other volunteer opportunities go to:

http://www.ccc.govt.nz/get-involved-with-parks

T-shirts

The Travis Wetland Trust has t-shirts for sale. Two great designs! Check the website for details and ordering: **www.traviswetland.org.nz**

A note from Treasurer Dave Evans

The Travis Wetland Trust financial year begins in July and those who have not paid a subscription in the past few months will have a subscription form posted to them. Please help the Trust continue its work at Travis Wetland by paying an annual subscription and/or making a tax-deductible donation. If you are sure you have paid your subscription, but receive a form all the same, then contact the Trust treasurer so he can correct his records:

Dave Evans
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366-0628 (H)

Travis Wetland Trust Meetings

The Travis Wetland Trust board meets monthly on the Tuesday following the work day, from 6.30pm — 8.30pm at the Travis Wetland Education Centre. The board extends a welcome to all who wish to attend.

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Twitter: If you are a Twitter user, follow our tweets! https://twitter.com/TravisWetland

Giant Willow Aphid

— Grahame Bell

The Giant Willow Aphid (*Tuberolachnus salignus*) was first seen in New Zealand in December 2013 at Western Springs Park, Auckland. Since then it has been found New Zealand wide to at least as far south as Clyde.

They were first seen at Travis Wetland this past summer (2015-2016) and are now established in the eastern, western and central Willows. While at Travis they seem to be primarily in Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*) they have also been seen in some Crack Willow (*Salix fragilis*) as well. They are known to feed from several species of Willow and occasionally Poplar.

The Giant Willow Aphid is one of the largest aphids, up to 6 mm in length and has a quite distinctive appearance. The wingless ones are shades of brown with rows of black spots on the body. They have a black tubercle in the centre of the back and a pair of dark cone shaped siphunculi to either side behind this. The legs are primarily black with orange bands. The winged ones look similar with transparent wings around twice the body length with a brown/orange coloured costa.

There are very few known predators. In Japan a braconid wasp, *Aphidius salignae* and hyperparasitoid *Pauesia salignae* are known. In England a fungus, *Neozygites turbinatus* is known to kill the aphid.
There are several problems associated with this aphid. They have been known to kill willows and to stunt the growth of saplings. Willow is an important plant for waterway bank stabilisation in NZ.

They are also an important plant for apiarists providing a much needed early spring pollen source for the bees. Unfortunately the honey that comes from the aphids honeydew is of little use, it crystallises in the comb and is hard to extract. What does get extracted blocks up the extractors leading to far more frequent cleaning being required.

The honeydew also attracts wasps; they don't appear to be feeding directly from the aphids but from the honeydew that falls to the leaves and vegetation below the colonies. There has been a small but noticeable increase in wasps at Travis during this last late summer period and at least two wasp nests have been found and destroyed.

Whether these wasps turn out to be a major pest at Travis and New Zealand wide is yet to be established. Another couple of seasons of research should tell.

Giant Willow Aphid
photographer - Grahame Bell