



Travis Wetland

October 2006

A newsletter from Travis Wetland Trust and the Christchurch City Council

PARK NEWS

Dates to remember

Travis Wetland Trust Work Days

Everyone is welcome! Workdays are held on the third Saturday of every month from 9am until 12.30 pm. Meet at the Beach Road car park, bring gumboots or boots and a sunhat. The work days are an opportunity to become involved and learn about the restoration of Travis Wetland. Tasks range from planting to weed control, depending on the season

- 21 October 2006
- 18 November 2006
- 16 December 2006
- 20 January 2007
- 17 February 2007
- 17 March 2007
- 21 April 2007
- 19 May 2007

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Rare Bird Seen

By Andrew Crossland and Simon Shikongo

One of the most difficult of all New Zealand birds to spot (even more difficult than seeing a kiwi) has been found and photographed - at Travis Wetland.

The arrival of the Marsh Crake or Koitareke (*Porzana pusilla*), a member of the rail family is causing lots of excitement.

Best described as resembling a miniature Weka, the birds was first spotted on 29 September by restoration staff working at the wetland. When they noticed a strange small bird among the vegetation, they contacted Christchurch City Council Ranger/Ornithologist Andrew Crossland. He came out to investigate and confirmed that the bird was indeed a marsh crake. It was spotted again on 1 October.

These sightings are significant for several reasons. Firstly, Marsh Crake were once found in wetlands throughout Christchurch, but like many other native species, they have disappeared from most places, due to predation from introduced predators and habitat loss.

In 1996, an extensive survey of bird life at Travis recorded no Marsh Crakes, so its presence today shows the habitat development at the wetland is working well.

Marsh crakes are a highly secretive species and because they are nocturnal are usually heard rather than seen. The best evidence of their existence is foot prints in soft mud, so to have multiple sightings in daylight is something of a revelation.

Marsh Crake breed between October and January, so if this bird is not alone breeding could possibly occur at Travis this season. We ask that visitors to the wetland respect that this is the Marsh Crake's home, as it is for pukeko, scaup, paradise ducks, pied stilts and other native bird species. Please confine your bird watching pursuits to the marked pathways in the wetland.

Important Date

Travis Wetland Trust AGM
Tuesday 24 October, 2006
7pm to 9pm
Travis Wetland Education Centre

AGM discussion topic: A predator-proof fence at Travis Wetland



Windsor School Arbor Day 2006

200 children - 200 plants. Several classes from our neighbouring school continued the annual Arbor Day tradition by planting trees and shrubs at Travis Wetland in early June.

The children did a great job planting 200 plants along the embankment behind the houses at Clarevale Street and Chartwell Street. We are pleased this site will continue to be the focus of Arbor Day planting by Windsor School. It's one of the few dry places in the wetland, so it's accessible without gumboots!

A big thanks to the teachers and parents for making it happen and to the children for their great work.

We recently did some release weeding and mulching of the plants and they have survived the winter well.



Teachers, parents and children help plant 200 plants for Arbor Day

To fence or not to fence? A predator-proof fence at Travis Wetland?

By Simon Shikongo



Kotuku (White Heron)

In the 20th century, New Zealand started using its predator-free offshore islands as a tool in preserving our unique wildlife, ensuring the survival of species such as kakapo, little spotted kiwi and black robin. By the turn of the 21st century, we were expanding our pioneering island conservation vision back to the mainland. The idea was that large patches (islands) of habitat could be kept free of mammalian pests, allowing the return of full native ecosystems and the dawn chorus.

Suddenly, the idea of having saddlebacks and kaka in and around the urban areas of our country became a distinct possibility.

The mainland island has two main profiles. Firstly there are the large scale projects such as Rotoiti Mainland in the Nelson Lakes area where tens of thousands of hectares of established habitat have a high density of predator trapping. Then there are the smaller, yet potentially more predator-migration resilient, fenced sanctuaries of regenerating

habitat such as Karori Sanctuary in Wellington.

In its current management scheme, Travis operates as a mainland island. New areas of habitat are being developed with intensive predator management to keep mammalian predators at low levels.

But are wide moats and trapping enough for Travis? Other mainland island projects have shown ecosystem enhancement is greatly increased by the enthusiasm and support of the community.

With this in mind, the upcoming AGM for the Travis Wetland Trust will be exploring the possibility of a predator fence at the wetland. We warmly welcome all members and interested people to attend and discuss this topic in a forum setting.

The forum will feature people who have already had dealings with these fences such as contractors, park rangers and experts in the fields of wildlife reintroductions. It's a great opportunity to take part in brainstorming the future of one of Christchurch's greatest natural assets. See you there.

Park News

Restoration of Travis Wetland

By John Skilton, Park Ranger

The various projects outlined in the Travis Wetland Landscape Development Plan are steadily being completed or implemented. Many of the physical assets identified in the plan which allow people to enjoy the park such as the walkway, boardwalk, bird hide information centre and viewing tower have been completed. The main pond and waterways including Angela Stream and Travis stream have also been created.

Development and management of the park moves into a different phase. Over the next several years the emphasis will be on further habitat creation through continued planting, naturalising old farm drains and developing more ponding areas. Projects planned for the 2006-07 summer include: naturalising the box drain adjacent to the Chartwell Street boundary, enhancement of Kotuku basin at Clarevale to provide more open water, improving stock water, fencing old drains and naturalising former farm drains.

Restoration planting will continue in a variety of areas including the Totara-Matai Forest, Manuka area, old dunes on Mairehau Rd, Angela Stream, Travis Stream and Frosts Rd Boundary. More than 9500 trees, shrubs and sedges will be planted between July 2006 and June 2007.

These projects involve a variety of specialist City Council staff and require liaison with Travis Wetland Trust members. City Solutions landscape designers and hydrologists are developing a design for the Chartwell Street box drain and Kotuku Basin.

Some of the issues include avoiding established native plants, the impact of any changes to surface water levels, avoiding damage to adjoining boundary fences, avoiding soil sampling sites and the impact on the adjacent Manuka area.

A still, clear spring morning is an opportunity to reflect on the privilege of being the ranger at the wetland and to take in the changes that are now visible in the landscape. As you will read in other items, there are still plenty of challenges ahead.

Raupo

Raupo is spreading through the sedge-rush marsh in the northern part of the swamp. Although raupo is a native plant, some ongoing control will be required to ensure there is a mixture of habitat for wild life and plant communities throughout the wetland. A mixed raupo-carex plant community is valuable as habitat for Marsh Crakes, Australasian Bitterns and Fernbirds.

If left unchecked, large areas of raupo monoculture may develop and could over-run other rare plants. In the past this would have been part of the process of succession as parts of the swamp in-filled and carex and raupo gave way to trees and shrubs.

As Travis Wetland is now a tiny remnant of the earlier swamps, we will need to manage this process. Trevor Partridge, City Council Botanist, is going to investigate what happens to plant community composition as raupo invades. As part of his work, Trevor will identify containment zones and control methods.



Winter wetland, view of Travis Wetland from above QE11, 9 August 2006, (Photo: Phil Teague)

The Manuka Area

By Daphne Banks

The boundaries of the Manuka area begin at the Clarevale Park gate, extend along the south drain, right angle into the west drain as far as the Telecom land and along the north-east side of the boardwalk outside the willows, past the tower and back to the park gate.

It's not really known exactly how this area was used in the past. But from day one, we have waged war on gorse, blackberry, female grey willows and the female fern. Work generally consists of clearing away unwanted vegetation, weeding, planting, mulching with newspaper, clearing up and finding ways of thwarting vandals.

Weed removal amongst the manuka is not always easy and sometimes involves squatting down and using fingers and thumbs to get weeds out. Imagine if the whole of Travis (about 119ha) had to be weeded by this method!

This area of the wetland has the greatest number of native

genera and species, some rare in Christchurch.

Of greatest concern at the moment are *Drosera binata*, *Celmisia graminifolia* and *Corybas iredescens*, which are confined to a very small area. Every effort is



Celmisia graminifolia

being made to propagate these natives.

Ranaunculus glabrifoliosus, originally in the sedge-rush marsh section, was being overrun by larger more vigorous raupo, so four short stolens with two to three-nodes were carefully removed and potted into manuka swamp soil. They grew

rapidly, so some were put into an area previously cleared of *Carex flacca* and planted with seedling *Celmisia*, *Luzula* and tiny *Hypericum japonicum*.

All are thriving and will gradually be planted beside part of the boardwalk. Many other small plants growing in the area will be propagated and eventually added to this display area.

Many people have helped by collecting seeds of bigger plants such as flax and cordyline, which they have sown, potted up and planted near the Clarevale kissing gate. In previous years, locals have also planted trees, shrubs and sedges, and we have received hundreds of plants from Trees for Canterbury, Wai Ora and the Christchurch City Council nurseries.

Many people, some from overseas, have worked here from the initial early attempts to clear foreign plants through to the present day where we are still removing and planting. Each person has contributed muscle power, knowledge and enthusiasm which is uplifting to those who work permanently.

Sanctuary Villas

By Eric Banks, Chair of Travis Wetland Trust

Land formerly owned by Telecom immediately north-west of the wetland off Mairehau Rd and now owned by Sanctuary Villas is soon to be developed into a managed elderly persons' housing complex.

The Trust made a submission on the resource consent application to construct villas of greater floor area than that permitted for elderly person housing. It was concerned that viewed from an angle, the villas would appear as a continuous strip of development. However what was proposed was deemed to have less of an impact than what could be built as a permitted activity. The L1 zone also makes no allowance for the impacts of a wetland as a neighbour.

The Trust liaised with the developers who agreed to include several points raised

by the Trust as recommended subdivision consent conditions. These included plant types, unit and roof colours, fence type and easier access for residents to Travis. These were included in the formal consent decision mostly as suggested.



The Trust was concerned there were no restriction on cats, already a pest in the wetland. However, there is nothing in the zoning conditions about this. It is hoped that education and liaison with residents may minimise impacts. All units will be lower in height than the zoning allows and

lower than the existing house on Mairehau Road overlooking the wetland.

The Trust had previously signed a neighbours' approval agreement regarding stormwater run-off treatment via series of swales which will discharge into the western drain. What is proposed is quite a good example of residential stormwater run-off treatment and is over and above that required by the Council.

Overall the developers have tried to minimise impacts and are keen to co-operate. They have agreed to liaise with the Trust and the Council on start dates so we can ensure development does not interfere with existing planting. We will liaise with the residential management on any relevant issues that may arise and involve residents as much as possible in Travis.