



Travis Wetland

October 2007

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 to 12.30pm. Meet at the Beach Road car park; bring gumboots or boots and outdoor clothing suitable for the weather. The work days are an opportunity to become involved with the Travis Wetland Trust and learn about the restoration of Travis Wetland. Tasks vary according to the seasons and range from planting, releasing, weeding and invasive weed control.

- 20 October 2007
- 17 November 2007
- 15 December 2007
- 19 January 2008
- 16 February 2008
- 15 March 2008
- 19 April 2008
- 17 May 2008

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Pint-sized arctic wader beats the Godwits back to Christchurch

By Andrew Crossland

Christchurch City Council park rangers were astonished to find that a single pint-sized relative of the Godwits, a Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) somehow arrived ahead of the migrating flocks of Godwits.

The lone bird was found by ranger John Skilton and regular visitor to the wetland Kevin Drew, on a freshwater marsh at Travis Wetland in suburban Christchurch on Thursday 30 August, a full three weeks before the godwits usually arrive. The bird has stayed for the last week, feeding alone, or occasionally in the company of native Banded Dotterels and Pied Stilts.

At 23 cm in length and weighing just 80 grams, the Pectoral Sandpiper is a little smaller than a Blackbird. In plumage, they are brownish above, pale below, with yellow legs and a dark bill. They have very dense streaking on their breasts, which is sharply cut off from the white feathering of the belly and underparts. This "pectoral" band gives the species its name.

The Pectoral Sandpiper is occasionally found on estuarine mudflats like the godwit, but tends to prefer brackish or freshwater habitats.

While this is the first ever migratory wader recorded at Travis Wetland, its eventual occurrence has been anticipated for some time and habitat features at Travis and other restored wetlands in Christchurch have been designed to attract rare bird species such as this. The Pectoral Sandpiper joins a growing list of rare species sighted at Travis Wetland including Glossy Ibis, Whiskered Tern, Bittern,

Marsh Crake, Black Stilt, White Heron, Cattle Egret and Barn Owl. As well as increase the overall avian biodiversity of Christchurch, the regular occurrence of rare and interesting species adds another dimension to the visitor experience for the growing numbers of

people visiting local wetlands and regional parks.

Pectoral Sandpipers breed from June to August on the tundra coastlines of Siberia, Alaska and Canada. Following breeding, the bulk of the population migrates down the full length of the Americas to wintering areas in Argentina and Chile, while small numbers journey down the western side of the Pacific, ending up in New Zealand. Less than 20 Pectoral Sandpipers reach New Zealand annually and up to half of these occur on Canterbury wetlands, principally at Lake Ellesmere and Lake Ki-Wainono.



A pair of Pectoral Sandpipers



Willow control at Travis Wetland

By Dave Evans

Along the boardwalk near the viewing tower you may have noticed several dead willow trees. If you look closely you will see that 15mm holes have been drilled in their trunks not far from the ground. These holes are where

poison has been injected into the trees in order to kill them.

These trees were female grey willows (*Salix cinerea*).

Willows are dioecious, meaning that a willow tree bears either male or female

flowers. It sounds sexist, but the fastest way to rid an environment of a dioecious species is to preferentially kill the females. By doing this the seed supply will decrease in proportion to the number of trees killed, whereas if males were killed the seed supply would not fall nearly so fast, because a single remaining male could fertilise many females. Grey willow is a serious weed at Travis Wetland, but the willow canopy in the south-western corner has its good points.

It is an excellent nursery for native forest species and suppresses introduced grasses and gorse by shading. Therefore by killing the females we minimise

the spread of grey willow, and by not killing the males we maintain a forest canopy to aid in the restoration of native vegetation.

At this time of the year when the willows are in flower it is possible to distinguish between the male and female trees because as the photos

show, the male and female flowers are quite different. The male flowers are yellow and fluffy, while the female flowers are green and spiky. While flowering, female trees are marked with a splotch of spray paint. Later in

the season ranger staff, volunteers and contractors go around, drill the marked trees, inject them with poison and give them another splotch of paint to show that they have been "done". Many

of the females poisoned in recent years are now beginning to fall down. It would have been nicer if they had remained leafy and standing a bit longer, but we can't have everything our own way. Anecdotally, the amount of grey willow seed seen at Travis Wetland is vastly less than it was 10 years ago, before willow control began to have an effect. Clouds of fluffy grey willow seed blowing about the swamp are a thing of the past.

The other common willow species at Travis is crack willow (*Salix fragilis*), but almost all the trees in NZ are from one male clone so we are not plagued by crack willow seeds each

spring. Crack willow is named after the sharp noise made when a twig is broken off. It is very easily fractured and this coupled with all willows' ability to grow from fallen twigs and branches means that crack willow spreads along waterways quite well enough without seeding.

Female Grey Willow



Male Grey Willow



Annual General Meeting

**Tuesday 23
October 2007
7pm, Beach Road
Education Centre.**

Nominations open for Board membership, including position of Minutes Secretary.

Topic: **"The Waters of Travis"**

Speakers:

- **John Walter**,
Senior Environmental
Engineer, Christchurch
City Council
**Basic Hydrology of
Travis**
- **Brian Sorrell**,
NIWA
Aquatic Life
- **Trevor Partridge**,
Christchurch City Council
Botanist
**Wetland Types and
Basic Ecology**
- **Eliot Sinclair & Partners**
**The Tumara Park
Treatment and Discharge
to Travis**

The objective is to give an overview of the hydrology and its interaction with the land as a means of describing the wetland.

Refreshments to follow.



Pateke - the rarest duck in New Zealand

By John Skilton

On 16 May 20 captive-reared pateke were released with high expectations. Since May it has been a tale of hope and heart break. Currently nine pateke are still on site and a male is at large somewhere in the City.

Losses were expected in this experimental release into a predator-reduced but not predator-free environment. Initial losses came in quick succession within the first two weeks of release. Thanks to the transmitters each bird has been recovered. The first four birds were found in an almost intact state. These were sent to the veterinary science department at Massey University. It was determined that two of the pateke had been killed by cats and two by harriers. Since then only a very small parts of the carcasses have been recovered as they have been moved and cleaned up by harriers.

Within the first 24 hours after release a male and female pateke had paired up and had left the release site for an area in the south east corner of the park. They seemed to be surviving well and were roosting in a thick mound of blackberry. Sadly in early September the male bird was found dead. A female bird was recovered

from Tennyson Street, Beckenham after being found dead by a resident. This bird had been hit by a car.

of survival but two pateke have been killed this month and the number of remaining females is now critically low. Establishing New Zealand's



Searching for pateke transmitters at Travis Wetland

We have to keep in mind that these release birds were captive-reared. This means they have to learn all their survival skills on their own: how to react to harriers, what to eat, how to survive the winter frosts. Everyday they survived I hoped would improve their chances



Male and female pateke at Travis wetland

rarest duck is not turning out to be easy. Let's hope at least two of the remaining pateke pair up and breed.

Cats hunting wild birds

By John Skilton

Over the winter I have observed an increase in the number of cats camping out and moving into the central wetland. Recently three of us watched a pet cat hunting two grey teal on the edge of the main pond near the information centre. The cat was seen to travel in a circuitous route around the edge of the pond which took some time, then

leap over a 1.5m water gap to reach the grey teal on a little islet. This is the first time I have seen a cat do this and this clearly demonstrates cats are capable of moving through all types of wetland habitat including water.

If you are a neighbour of Travis Wetland please make every effort to be responsible pet owners. One way you can make a difference is

to ensure your cat stays inside at night. This is when cats prefer to hunt and is the time when adult birds are sitting on nests brooding chicks or eggs and are particularly vulnerable to being attacked and killed. Alternatively a bell on a collar makes hunting more difficult for the cat and also helps us tell the difference between wild and domestic cats.

Photo Competition

Name the person in the photograph and the year the photo was taken and win a copy of the Travis Wetland Walking Guide book, "Travis Wetland Walk".



Send your answer by postcard or letter with your name and contact address to:

**The Secretary,
Travis Wetland Trust
PO Box 2750,
Christchurch.**

Competition closes
30 October 2007.

Clues:

*Subject is a regular
Travis volunteer.*

*Photo was taken in
January.*

*Competition open to
financial members only.*

One entry per member.

*First correct entry drawn is
the winner.*

The Southern Woods

By John Skilton

Establishing a forest from scratch takes a lot of work but thanks to community volunteers, the Travis Wetland Trust and sponsors, the Totara-Matai Hardwood Forest continues to receive great support. Perhaps it's the BBQ!

On 19th May the public planting day was well supported with 60 people turning up to help plant nearly 2500 plants. On 15th September the annual Trees For Canterbury sponsorship of 1000 plants attracted 54 people.

The Christchurch City Council Regional Park Rangers and the Travis Wetland Trust are very grateful for

the ongoing support of Trees for Canterbury in helping restore Travis Wetland. These events are attracting a number of family groups and this kind of support is very valuable in securing public support for Travis Wetland into the future.

This year is the second year of planting. In May 2006, 2500 plants were put in the ground. However, a wet winter in 2006 and frosty winter this year contributed to about a 30% loss rate. In a couple of years time these early plantings will be large enough to provide shelter and shade for the subsequent year's plants and survival should improve.



Louis and his Kahikatea tree at Trees for Canterbury planting day



Trees for Canterbury planting day, September 2007