

Kaiapoi regeneration evokes centuries-old wetland complex

An extended family is restoring the waterways on lands where they have lived for centuries. **Will Harvie reports.**

Arnold Pohio reckons his ancestors lived north of the Waimakariri River for 300 years, perhaps longer.

The North Canterbury area was once a large wetland complex that stretched between the Waimakariri and Ashley-Raka-huri River at Waikuku. It was protected from the sea by high dunes along the coast, and drained north and south into both rivers.

Ngāi Tūahuriri lived among these wetlands, creating temporary villages and pā, moving frequently to where eels (tuna) were easiest to catch, Pohio said.

European arrival changed this landscape entirely. The sinuous waterways were thinned, straightened and squared off into well-behaved drains, the water flushed out.

Remnants survived, including Tūtaepatu Lagoon in Tūhaitara Coastal Park.

Even smaller fragments survived on private property, including on the Auld-Wakeman family farms and lands just north of Kaiapoi.

Viewed from above, their wetlands' shape suggests they were an oxbow (U-shaped) lake, but it's also possible that shifting sand dunes left the looping shape, said Anna Veltman, a land management adviser at Environment Canterbury (ECan).

About five years ago, Nicky Auld and her brother John Wakeman decided to restore their watery places. They grew up there and their mum had always wanted to do more for the swamp. Decades later, they are fulfilling that wish.

Job one was cutting out the invasive willow trees that blocked the light and prevented natural regeneration. Then came fencing out stock and planting natives such as carex secta, a water lover, as well as



Left: Arnold Pohio is helping restore the wetlands north of Kaiapoi, where his family has lived for centuries. Above: John Wakeman says farmers like him need a helping hand. Below: Pohio wetland, not squared up or narrow.

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Nicky Auld says ecological restoration is addictive.
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kahikatea, which will hopefully grow for centuries.

It was a huge job, done in small chunks, and still far from complete. But it was "addictive", Auld said. "Once you get going, you want to go back and do more."

They also won financial support from ECan and the Waimakariri District Council. Both saw ecological value in

the sort-of original state of the family's wetlands, even if some of them had been grazed by stock.

Adult inanga lived and spawned in them. Eels were almost certainly present. In theory, Canterbury mudfish (kōwaro) might be here and, if not, it was potential habitat for the nationally critical species, said Sophie Allen, a water environment adviser for the district council.

An Australasian bittern (matuku-hūrepo) frequented the area and was seen as recently as a few weeks ago. These birds were nationally critical, the worst possible conservation status.

The agencies saw value in the scale of the family's ambitions. In places, the new fences would have been set back an 8m from the water's edge, for example.

Some farmers, when fencing waterways, had been known to carve out the narrowest possible space for restoration because they wanted the land for crops and brows-

ing. The Auld-Wakeman family bought and grew its own native plants. Wakeman discovered that carex divided nicely and thrived after replanting.

They have attracted the likes of Arnold Pohio to help out. The bushman and freezing works hand had collected firewood from the area for 50 years and was good at felling exotic trees. Auld named Pohio Wetland in his honour.

Like all the wetlands in this project, it did not show up by name on internet maps, including the detailed Topo Map NZ. The family came up with their own names.

The grander ambition for ECan and the



district council was to recreate some of the former wetland complex from before European arrival. There were little wetlands on private land, restoration work under way in Tūhaitara Coastal Park, the Kaiapoi Lakes, flooded quarries and plenty of drains that could be linked.

None of this is cheap. The extended family got grants of \$41,700 from ECan's Waimakariri Water Zone Committee and top-up funding of \$25,000 from the Waimakariri District Council.

Loads of farmers wanted to contribute more to biodiversity and restoration, John Wakeman said, but they "needed a hand".

One of most invasive birds settling in at New Brighton?



Recent research suggests climate change could lead to a wider distribution of the myna in New Zealand, and the eventual colonisation of the South Island by the highly invasive pest birds.

Conservation Keiller MacDuff

A Christchurch conservationist is raising the alarm over a feathered pest, and crowd sourcing sightings of the highly invasive bird he says poses a serious threat.

The Indian myna, also called the common myna, is one of just three bird species to make it onto the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)'s list of the world's 100 worst invasive species.

While there have been sporadic sightings in Christchurch for some time, ornithologist Peter Langlands is concerned authorities are too relaxed due to a belief there's only one bird in the area, while he's convinced there's a pair.

Langlands' Facebook group, Christchurch Myna Watch, has close to 200 members keeping an eye out for the noisy import.

The myna is an agricultural pest that can

seriously damage crops, carry disease, compete with native fauna, and raid the nests of native birds, destroy eggs and tip out fledglings. Mynas also eat native skinks, geckos and insects such as wētā.

The "quirky" birds were occasionally kept as pets, and it was possible those spotted in the wild had been deliberately released, Langlands said.

Environment Canterbury (ECan) principal biosecurity adviser Laurence Smith said the council had contracted a pest-control company to "investigate the bird's behaviours and patterns" to establish "the best time of the year to control them".

He confirmed one bird was shot late last month. However, the contractor reported it fell into a residential section, and was unable to retrieve it for autopsy or to determine its sex or age.

Langlands said it was disappointing no details were able to be gathered.

Smith said the council has received a

recent report of two more birds at New Brighton in addition to the one at South New Brighton.

The myna is not in the ECan regional pest-management plan, and does not appear on ECan's pest database. The only pest bird on it is the rook. The Canadian goose and sulphur-crested cockatoo are not officially listed as pests, but are described as of possible "interest to the public".

Mynas were being assessed, either for inclusion or through programmes "led by the community, industry or government organisations", Smith said.

The pest management plan is reviewed every 10 years, with the next review not due until 2028.

Langlands said there should be more urgency, especially given the risk the birds could start breeding in August or September.

If people see a myna they should take a photo and alert ECan, either at biosecurity@ecan.govt.nz or through its website.