

# River Estuary Watch

River-Estuary Care: Waikouaiti – Karitane

JUNE 2012

River - Estuary Care



R E C W K



Waikouaiti - Karitane

## Fine Field Day



We had a great day out on the South Branch of the Waikouaiti River on the Lawson Farm in February. More than 40 people spent 4 hours experiencing the beautiful steep hills and deep valleys of the farm. Thanks to some very well experienced 4WD drivers we crossed the river many times in our quest for seeing and learning as much as we could in a day. Along the way we stopped at various sites for field talks and a picnic.





Jim Lawson welcomed us to the family farm, Moana, and explained a bit about the history and management of the farm.

Peter Oliver of City Forests informed the group about plantation forestry practices.

Rob Campbell of the Queen Elizabeth II Trust described how covenants are used to protect and enhance stands of native bush.

Matt Dale of Otago Regional Council showed us all about electric fishing (see his article in this issue).

Nicola McGrouther, also of ORC, talked about the current work progressing on water quality and quantity standards.

Kevin Allan, ORC, gave us an understanding of the challenges of pest control.

Finally, Greg Kerr, of Kati Huirapa Runaka, explained the history and current status of the Maori fishing reserve on the Waikouaiti River.



We had a wonderful day out. Learning in the field is always the best way when it comes to our natural environment. We all have experience and knowledge to share – and all have challenges to meet in the future.

Patti Vanderburg  
Information/Education/Advocacy Project Leader

## Electric Fishing



The electrofishing demonstration at the Waikouaiti field day found plenty of critters hanging out in the South Branch, including longfin eels, upland bully and brown trout.

Electrofishing works by passing an electric current through the water and stunning any fish that may be close by, allowing the operator to catch fish that are normally hiding under rocks or under the bank. Electrofishing can reveal dozens (sometimes hundreds) of fish in an area that at first glance only has a few rocks!

Using electrofishing the ORC undertakes annual monitoring of the fish species in the Waikouaiti River. This monitoring has shown that the

Waikouaiti supports one of the most diverse freshwater fish communities in Otago, with 11 native and one introduced fish species (brown trout). Five of the 11 native fish species in the Waikouaiti catchment are of conservation importance: the longfin eel, koaro, inanga, lamprey and the bluegill bully, which are listed as being “*in decline*”.

Water quality monitoring results for the catchment are “very good”, which is the highest possible category, while the Waikouaiti estuary is also listed as being a “significant wetland” in the Regional Plan: Water.

### How can landowners help?

Landowners in the catchment can support this amazing fishery by looking after stream-banks and minimising nutrient and sediment runoff from paddocks. Fence the riverbank where intensive stock grazing is occurring or stock are causing erosion. Keep a large grass buffer between ploughed paddocks and the waterways. Put in culverts where stock regularly cross to minimise streambed disturbance. Put in water reticulation schemes for stock water where practical.



During the field day on Jim Lawson’s property we saw good riverbank management (long grass, no trampling or erosion) and careful paddock management and as a result we found lots of fish in-stream.

Matt Dale, Water Resource Scientist, and Nicola McGrouther, Land Resource Officer, Otago Regional Council.

Matt Dale  
Otago Regional Council

## Re-vegetation Report (plus a few other things)

RECWK has taken a bit of a breather with respect to revegetation activities these last few months. It has been a time of some ‘reflection’ and planning. Reflection on the efforts of the last year when 6,000 plants were put in around the estuary along highway one across from Cherry Farm behind the electrical station, and planning for perhaps some coordination of such future efforts with other community groups. More on this at a future date.

To more immediate activities/observations I have this last week watched a pair of Takapu (Australin Gannets or *Sula serrator*) coursing up and down the river. The occasional skimming of the water suggested they were finding some ‘fin’ food. This is a good sign indicating the movement of schools of fish moving in



from the ocean. Yellow-eyed mullet are definitely moving through these waters as are likely other fish. Gannets being more often found over open expanses of water, i.e. the ocean, it is wonderful seeing these birds wander over the estuary.

And one final note. Have any of you seen pheasants wandering the area these last few weeks? A pair was seen in early May south of Cherry Farm in the vicinity of the estuary. Singles have also been seen recently near Waikouaiti and just south of Karitane near the first railway crossing on Coast Road.



Joel A. Vanderburg

## Black Backed Gulls

Being a Rivercare bird counter is generally a pleasant and far from onerous task, though over the seven or so years of counts there are a few assignments that are greeted with less enthusiasm than others. The hundreds of distant brown ducks that over winter in the Waikouaiti Estuary or the Merton arm are not popular – you not only have to be able to keep track of the hundreds as you count but also have to be able to distinguish between grey teal and a host of mallard/grey duck hybrids that come in a wide variety of plumages. Often as not they will be asleep, heads tucked under their wings, wings neatly folded, carefully concealing all the features that you might use to identify them, and if that was not inconvenient enough, they will be facing away from you, tucked under bankside vegetation and silhouetted against the sun. The best way to avoid this task is to entrust the telescope to someone else or if you really are desperate you could arrange for your friends to kayak up the river ten minutes or so before counting starts and scare them all away. In late summer and early autumn it pays to check out the sandbank down by the wharf. If the bank is covered with seagulls then you could do a quick bit of cockle collecting out by the main channel, or if you really don't like disturbing them you can avoid the issue by volunteering to "go round the back" i.e start up by the railway bridge and head out along the road seaward of the Merton Arm; a pretty safe bet from March to the beginning of August.

But, from August to February, you will have to count the black-backed gulls for there is a nesting colony of several hundred pairs in the marshy paddocks at the head of the inlet. Gulls start returning to the colony in August, though serious nesting may not start until October. During the pre-nesting phase they hang out with last year's or prospective mates, testing for flakiness and finding out what they might get up to when their backs are turned - re-establishing the pair bond in ornithological language. They also do a bit of house/nest refurbishment and bicker with their neighbours over the boundary between their sections. 2-3 eggs are laid in early November and take about a month to hatch. Chicks stay for a while in the nest, all fluff and legs, but after a week or so they wander off into crèches. Black backed gull chicks are awkward, sooty brown and smelly. They don't mind who feeds them and will have a go begging at whoever comes near. Adults have to go and find their own chicks, and there's the odd bit of playground bullying in the midst of it all. The chicks fledge by about January. Young black backed gulls look a bit like spotty brown chooks. In their second year they start to look like scruffy versions of adult gulls with teenage spots and a black end to their tail. By the third year they are just like an adult, sleek and white with a black back, yellow beak and evil eye.

Not all black-back gulls nest in colonies like the Merton ones. Just like people, some prefer the urban throngs; others, solitude. A couple of pairs nest on the rocks at the end of Huriawa most years and a few nest at Hawksbury Lagoon but they also breed far inland. In Central Otago they nest on the braided rivers, up mountains, and feed on the paddocks. There is a colony on top of Slopedown, the high hill that overlooks the Southland plain to the west and the Catlins to the east (the site of a soon-to-be-built wind farm owned by Meridian Energy).

Black-backed gulls are one of the birds you will see following fishing boats into Karitane but they are also capable of fishing for themselves catching fish, squid and shrimp like euphausids. Unlike albatrosses, which feed entirely at sea on squid and fish, black-backed gulls are far from fussy. Some pick around in marshes at low tide. There are those who roam the beaches and pick up and drop clams, and others who feed in paddocks on worms and dead lambs or whatever else is going. The real urban dwellers go for the rubbish tips. Similar to human nutritional studies, it has been shown that the chicks of these rubbish tip fast foodies are thinner and more poorly feathered than their rural cousins. They are generalists and opportunists as we saw when they quickly discovered the oily burger patties spread along Mt Maunganui beach after the wreck of the Rena. They are predators, eating the eggs of terns and smaller red-billed gulls and attacking oystercatcher chicks. Once, round the back of the Gardens New World I watched in horror as a gull gulped down a live sparrow chick. Dangerous business, this dumpster diving.

Our black-backed gulls are very similar to large seagulls worldwide. This particular species occurs in Australia, South Africa, and South America (circum Antarctica) as well as quite a few Islands in between like the Falklands. Elsewhere they are called Kelp gulls.

They may be opportunists and their behaviour doesn't always endear them to us, but black-backed gulls are a fascinating success story in a world in which survival is becoming harder and harder.

Back in the colony at Merton you will have to be prepared to count about 300 to 600 birds during spring or summer and unlike the ducks or the seagulls down by the wharf you will not be able to organise to scare them away beforehand. If you go down there in the nesting season they will yell and scream and swoop low over your head in their hundreds. It's you who will be scared away.

by Derek Onley



## Taiapure Report

As most locals and visitors to Karitane will know, a rahui (temporary closure ) has been in place on Huriawa for a few years now. The restriction on the taking of paua began as a voluntary measure and became a fisheries regulation.

A rahui is effective only when people respect the philosophy behind the restoration of the fishery and a big thank-you goes out to our vigilant locals who have had occasion to confront or report poachers in the act of stealing from the community.

While there are still some greedy individuals who believe they have rights greater than the rest, this sort of attitude is becoming less tolerable in communities like ours that have worked so hard to enhance the beauty of its coastal treasures.

We are starting to see the results of our policy of giving an area a rest from harvesting and the philosophy of returning something back to the ocean. Children are now able to see small paua coming back into the inter-tidal zones where they have been absent for a long time. Good on ya East Otago!

On a less inspiring note however, the Taiapure committee is heading to the environment court in November. This is because we are concerned Port Otago Ltd's 'Next Generation' project may have irreversible effects upon the health of our coastline. Questions have been raised about the affects of the dumping of 7.2 million cubic metres of spoil, from their dredging programme, in an area just a few kilometres from Taiaroa Heads.

This committee has an obligation to protect the communities fishery from the potential smothering of its reefs by fine sediments released into the ocean. This is a very costly exercise, not only in money, but in time spent in preparing evidence for a court case that we may or may not win.

The system is set up in a way that disadvantages community's from taking litigation through the Resource Management Act, as government has better access to funds than voluntary organisations do.

Brendan Flack  
Chairperson East Otago Taiapure Committee

## Memories of the River



Our father, Lawrie Snook, was a fisherman for Seacliff hospital and the house went with the job. We lived in that house for 8 years – from 1926-1934. Before that, we were on Durville Island, where Dad farmed and fished but, when he got the Seacliff job, he moved the whole family down to Karitane. The boat he fished from was called “Renown”, another was “Chatham”, which also belonged to Seacliff Hospital. The river was right on our doorstep and we could see the fishing boats from our house as they came round the bar. Our father brought “Renown” up to the old wharf near our house – it was a picturesque sort of a place with a smoking room, a store room and another room where they landed the fish. Later, when the river got shallow, the boat couldn't always get up there. We didn't have a boat ourselves but there was a punt that went with Dad's job , and we played on that (and Nancy

pushed our young brother off it!)

Karitane was lovely – a lovely place for kids and, with our family being such a big one, there were always other kids round to play - there seemed to be crowds of them. We went whitebaiting up the river, dragging a net and sometimes we got some and sometimes we didn't. There were some Maori ladies who went and they used to get a lot and they would say “Have you got a cup? – we'll give you some” They were good! We tried a bit of floundering with a nail stuck in a Manuka stick but the little fellers we caught weren't much good

We all went to Karitane School - at one stage there were 5 of us from our family. The teacher used to take us down to the shallow beach by the Fishing Club for swimming lessons. Our brother Laurie was only about 3 years old but he used to be sent to Murphy's shop, just above the old fishing wharf, to get the mail and the paper. One day he and another boy of about 4 wandered out onto the peninsula. Dad was coming back in from fishing and he could see these kids running around right out on the point but he didn't realise that one of them was his! He couldn't do anything about it until he got in, so then Mother turned up at school with the baby in the pram and we had to look after him while she went looking for Laurie. Verna couldn't go on to high school because she was the oldest and was needed at home to look after the little ones but, of course, the 2 older boys had to get an education, so they were sent to Palmerston.

We weren't supposed to go in the water but mother had 7 children so she couldn't keep an eye on us all the time! We all swam. The water was clean –it never occurred to us that it wouldn't be. However, the Karitane fishermen had a habit of cleaning and scaling their fish on the river's edge, sometimes right by our house, so the water looked rather scaley. It wasn't smelly, although there was no such thing as a sewage system then. Dad emptied the tin can into the river and it all went out with the tide.



Eric Stammers & Lawrie Snook

There used to be regattas in Karitane about once a year and they were great affairs, run by a big committee. Crowds of visitors used to turn up by bus and train, there were races for the kids and everyone got a prize.

There were no big floods that we can remember, other than on the flats behind Karitane.

The main river birds that we remember were the gulls. We didn't see spoonbills then, but there were gannets and it was a great event to see a gannet and watch it dive for fish.

By Verna and Nancy

## Ki uta ki tai / From the mountains to the sea 2012

**Volunteer opportunities with coastal community groups of Karitane and Waikouaiti working in conservation, habitat restoration and fisheries management.**

**Dates:** 25-29 June (4 nites)

9-16 September (7 nites)

### Daily Activities

Work with local projects of River-Estuary Care: Waikouaiti-Karitane, East Otago Taiapure, Hawksbury Lagoon Group, Kati Huirapa Runaka (including opportunities to help planting and maintenance of native habitat restoration areas, participate in current research work, organise and develop educational materials, etc).

Learn how community-based organizations work.

Explore the lower Waikouaiti River Catchment area (hikes, waka ama paddling, kayak, etc)

### Registration

Limited space available.

Registration Deadline for June Volunteer Week: May 30

Registration Deadline for September Volunteer Week: August 9

**To register:** Contact Patti Vanderburg, [vburch@es.co.nz](mailto:vburch@es.co.nz), +64-3-465-8113

Additional Information on Local Projects:

**River-Estuary Care:Waikouaiti-Karitane** – community conservation group, winner of Coastal Conservation Award, Waikouaiti River Catchment and Estuary habitat restoration projects, education and advocacy, bird monitoring.

**East Otago Taiapure** – iwi and local fisheries management – focal point for maintaining and improving health of fisheries.

**Hawksbury Lagoon Group** – local conservation group – works to enhance and protect the lagoon – focus on revegetation.

**Kati Huirapa Runaka** - centre for iwi-based projects including habitat restoration reflecting cultural and conservation values.

### Accommodation

No cost simple accommodation (usually marae-style at Kati Huirapa Runaka compound or billeted with locals – or arrange your own accommodation)

Self cater your breakfasts and lunches

Dinners provided by community groups



## DONATIONS

Should any friends or supporters wish to make a donation, this can now be done directly into our bank account. Details available from Brad – 03 4658334, [brad126@xtra.co.nz](mailto:brad126@xtra.co.nz) or post donation to 126 Coast Rd karitane

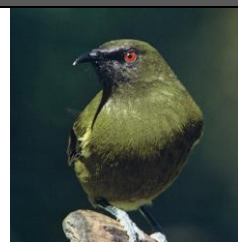


## Garden Bird Survey 2012: 30 June—8 July

By spending just one hour sometime between 30 June and 8 July recording the birds that visit your garden, you can contribute to Landcare's picture of how both our native birds and other winged residents are faring. Details will be available shortly on

[www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/](http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/)

Jean & Allan



### River-Estuary Care Waikouaiti - Karitane

Active since 1999 – Incorporated in 2001

Coastal Otago Conservation Award for 2005

#### Objectives

- To restore balance to Papatuanuku (Mother Earth).
- To have a well informed community about our river and estuary.
- To have our community participating in sustainable resource practices.
- To have a healthy, productive river and estuary eco-system (fishing, biodiversity, general health).
- To promote an understanding of the interrelatedness of our river and estuary ecosystem with adjacent ecosystems.

**Anyone interested in supporting the above objectives may join!**

#### Would you like to help with a project this year?

- Newsletter – Hilary Yeoman ph 465 7687.
- Revegetation Project – contact Andy Barratt ph 021 890 048.
- Education, Information and Advocacy Project – contact Patti Vanderburg ph 465 8113.
- Birdwatching – contact current convener Brad, phone 465 8334.



I would like to support River-Estuary Care: Waikouaiti-Karitane through the purchase of note cards:

Type	No. of Packets	Cost (\$8.00/pkt)
Black Oystercatchers		
Banded Dotterel		
Godwit		
Total		

Please send notecards to: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_

(Address) \_\_\_\_\_

Send payment and order to: H Bradbury (Brad), 126 Coast Road, Karitane

**Many people receive their newsletter by email – contact Brad [brad126@xtra.co.nz](mailto:brad126@xtra.co.nz) if this would be convenient for you also.**

*To become a*

**Friend of the River and Estuary Care: Waikouaiti—Karitane.** Please post your contribution to H Bradbury (Brad), 126 Coast Road, Karitane or leave it at the Karitane Store.

Produced with assistance from the Otago Regional Council





