

MANAWATU ESTUARY TRUST

Newsletter

November 2009



Lots of things have been happening since our last newsletter. Read here to find out more about the goings on at Foxton Beach, and about our upcoming Annual General Meeting on 28 November.

Trusty activities

Board changes: In July our chair, Ross Campbell, tendered his resignation, as did Vice-Chair, Tom Bailey. Both are now devoting their efforts to furthering the Te Awahou complex and the Foxton Loop restoration project. In September, Jill Rapson and Colleen Kindell were elected Chair and Vice-Chair respectively, and are trying hard to carry on the proud traditions of MET and all the aims of the trust.

Signage galore: The black and white (and therefore very cheap!) estuary flyers continue to fly away, and it is a pleasure to see none blowing about on the estuary. But that is not the end of our communication efforts. MET is working closely with HDC through Doug Tate to develop a range of signs for around the estuary and coast. Watch for these over the next few months - they will be a lovely sage green (tastefully and appropriately imitating sand covered with a nutritious algal film!).

Motor camp extension: HDC is working on plans to extend the existing motor camp, with spaces for camper vans near the old sailing club building, which is expecting a new lease of life, and lots of tenting sites further into the dunes (in low value areas). MET is espousing the "freedom camping" approach, working on sustainability issues, and low environmental impacts. Some MET board members went out to inspect the site with HDC staff, and were treated to the spectacle of a local truckie dumping a load of fill just in front of the sign which says "Dump no fill"! Not a good look, but watch this development!

Annual New Year fair: Since the Foxton Beach Improvement Soc. has offered us the use of their hall, we at MET felt that we should help out a bit with the annual fair. Consequently Christina Paton and Colleen Kindell have kindly decided to run it this year, and have already advertised for activities and events. If you wish to have a display at the fair, then please let one of them know! It will be held on Saturday 2 January 2010, in the open area next to the Dawick Street Hall, behind the Fire Station.

Welcome to the Birds: This annual event was held on 31 October this year, and was well attended by a large crowd of godwits, who sat about on the sandspit doing their birdie thing. A goodly number of humans turned up to pay homage and enjoy their lack of activity in a refreshing breeze. Many thanks to Forest and Bird for organising and bringing a bus-load of keen acolytes, and to Joan Leckie for organising the event. It was a pleasure to have a visit from Horizon's Green Rig, which provided some welcome shelter from the wind (and entertainment for many).

Effluential waterways: Christina has been stirring the muddy waters as usual together with a network of environmental care groups and individuals. They have been successful in getting the Horowhenua District Council's Shannon effluent discharge resource consent overturned by the Environment Court with advice from Judge Dwyer to seek costs from both Councils - Horowhenua District Council (HDC) and Horizons Regional Council (HRC). HDC had not filed sufficient information to the Hearing, HRC had ignored their own legal counsel's advice that there was a flaw in the process and the Commissioners conducting the Hearing similarly ignored that advice, took a risk and ran the Hearing.

The Foxton consent appeal has been through positive mediation and we await the Judge's decision.

Pre-Hearing consultation for the Feilding effluent discharge consent has occurred with Manawatu District Council (MDC), who has been unequivocally informed that no further discharge to the Oroua River (a tributary of the Manawatu River) will be tolerated. Given that the MDC's first application to Horizons was rejected for public notification and the proposed second application doesn't appear to have altered significantly apart from them wanting to re-route the Oroua River because it has tendency to do that anyway when it floods, then their learning curve is still to commence, probably at great expense to their ratepayers. Their Waste Engineer agreed that 1 cow generates as much effluent as 15 humans, and since many dairy farmers have milking herds of 1,000 cows while not one drop of their effluent enters a waterway, then MDC was not "doing all that well" considering their population is only 12,000 humans (equivalent to 800 cows).

Tui Breweries at Mangatainoka are currently seeking to continue to discharge ultimately to the Manawatu River and in spite of them having all the equipment to bottle, tanker and transport their product (sales are falling so they said) to further inebriate society they are strangely reluctant to also use their infrastructure to create another income stream by selling their nutrient-rich discharge as pot plant fertilizer. They are in the queue with MDC, re-vamping their application as they turned down our recommendation that they use their original application as a marketing tool.

It is expected that these applications will be notified a fortnight before Christmas as that is a well known technique to avoid scrutiny and attempts to keep submitter numbers low. What they haven't woken up to is that the opposition is very wide - awake in spite of Christmas carols and all the ho ho stuff and keeps a keen eye on Public Notices.

Written by Christina Paton

Bits and bobs: Keep an eye on developments along the waterfront, now the new stopbank has been completed, and is grassing over nicely. There is a **new footpath** under the pines from the stopbank to the road, which goes in front of the old sailing club and on to the river mouth. That should cut down on wear and tear on the edge of the sandspit mudflats. And over on the coastal carpark, there are **new viewing platforms and new plantings**, which we all hope will do well, and enjoy this wet spring while they settle in. This makes the coastal edge here look a lot tidier, and provides nice facilities for visitors.

The **white heron** is still hanging round, and may even adopt us as a regular port of call. It seems very easy around people, and happy to pose for photos, while making the acquaintance of our resident white-faced heron. If this is a romance, it's not going to get very far.

The **bollards** continue to persuade most off-roaders that they are there for a purpose and are not merely a decoration, and are looking much the better for a recent straighten by HDC. The river is a dangerous place to try to stick up something permanent!

Newsletters are pretty expensive to produce (including this one!). If you are happy to receive yours electronically in future, please let Christina know at the email at the end of this newsletter.

School visits: MET has hosted several school groups over the year, and is pleased to see these visits growing in number, as they are greatly enjoyed by both the visitors and MET folk. Suzanne Tamblyn and Ann Cameron have been our most frequent helpers here, but others are welcome. No special training is needed, as the kids are happy to learn anything at all! Feel free to volunteer for this fun in the sun hosting.



Linton Country School making a driftwood barrier to vehicles to protect the new dune planting - August 2009



Bainesse School planting up a developing dune near the river mouth as part of their estuary visit - September 2009

Annual General Meeting: The next AGM of the Manawatu Estuary Trust is scheduled for Saturday 28 November, at 2pm, in the Holben Pavilion. Please come if you can, because we have a busy agenda, with lots of big decisions needing to be made, and the constitutional reform to be ratified. We will spend some of your hard-earned donations on sandwiches and nibbles to sustain you through your labours, probably for the last time, as we need to be more economy-conscious in future! Make sure you are a paid-up member at the time, or come prepared to pay on the day. Remember you have to be a member to vote!

At this meeting we will be taking nominations for the Board from the floor, so if you are keen to help MET then please consider participating. We need folk with lots of knowledge and energy and enthusiasm. Let us know at the meeting if you need a mover and seconder!!!!

Constitutional reform: Our current Chair, Jill Rapson has been promoting the need for constitutional reform for MET, as there seemed to be plenty of opportunity for the constitution to mislead both the members and the board as to their duties and responsibilities.

The changes will bring the MET constitution more into line with other charitable trusts with similar educational and conservational objectives, and to clarify the lines of management within the organisation, as well as removing a number of apparently redundant clauses associated with business management. (As a charity, MET is not able to run a business.). Additionally the membership will have more clear responsibilities for both the selection and management of its board, as well as the power to call special meetings, and to guide the general direction of the society.

The Board recently approved the changes, and now the support of the membership will be sought at the AGM. Copies of both the old and new constitutions are being sent round. Please study these in careful detail before the next AGM, so you know what the vote is about. This is a very serious decision, as our new constitution will have to be submitted to the Charities Commission for their approval. If you wish to know in detail about the 65 motions proposed / deleted / modified / passed at the Board meeting, then please ask either Christina (see below) or Jill (on G.Rapson@massey.ac.nz) for the gory details. Send us a postal address if you want a hard copy!

Research activities

MET is keen to see more research at the estuary, and is slowly making progress in that direction. To date most of the activity is coming from Dr Phil Battley of Massey University, who continues his godwit work at the estuary. He is also working with two students, Jesse Conklin and Michelle Powell, who are undertaking other estuarine research. Michelle Powell has just begun her masterate research, and Jesse is completing his PhD. Michelle has included a report for us on her research proposals.

MET is keen to set up a fund to support research on the estuary. If you are keen to contribute, then please let Christina know what your donation should be tagged for. We will send out a tax-deductible receipt, and when we have enough money to generate a little income, we can start allocating to projects such as those below.

Nicon aestuariensis

My topic is "The life history characteristics and population dynamics of *Nicon aestuariensis* at the Manawatu River Estuary, New Zealand". This study involves investigating benthic invertebrates at the Manawatu River Estuary, in particular the dominant polychaete worm, *Nicon aestuariensis*. This belongs to the Nereididae family (rag worms), and individuals can reach lengths of up to 200 mm. Their long, slender body is quite colourless apart from pale green pigmentation around the head region and red blood vessels running down the length of the body, giving them a slightly pink appearance. It forms permanent burrows in the sediment to depths of 400 mm and is found throughout the mudflats. This species of polychaete is the main food source for the bar-tailed godwits and other migratory birds that visit the Manawatu River Estuary.



If you see a godwit head down in the water or mud, it probably has *Nicon aestuariensis* on its mind. Image: Phil Battley



Nicon aestuariensis, the intended victim - yum, yum. Image: Miranda Naturalists Centre.

This study is being carried out from September 2009 to June 2011. Sampling of worms will occur monthly to assess the seasonal variation in density, size and condition of *Nicon aestuariensis*. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) will be used to map the main town-end mudflat of the estuary. This will involve gathering data on many environmental variables such as sediment type, salinity, organic matter, temperature and water retention, to assess how they affect *Nicon aestuariensis*. Despite being one of the most widespread and common worms in New Zealand estuaries, almost nothing is known about their behaviour and natural history. I will study the surface activity of *Nicon aestuariensis* at day and at night. This is important to assess, as it may be an important factor in their availability as prey to migratory birds. An experiment will be set up to manipulate the tidal cycle on the mudflats. Small arenas will be used to either trap water within or exclude water from the areas. Changes in densities and activity of worms will be studied to assess how inundation time and period affect *Nicon aestuariensis*. Finally, I plan to use stable isotopes to determine what *Nicon* feeds on, and whether there is a change in diet as it matures and gets larger.

This work will provide some fundamental insights into the biology of one of the main invertebrates present at the estuary. Given their role as food for species such as godwits fuelling for a 10,000 km flight, understanding how *Nicon* varies around the estuary and through the year will inform other studies underway on the biology of migratory shorebirds.

Michelle Powell

Building programme

MET Board is still trying to make progress on the visitor centre issue, and since the situation is so muddy, no clarification can be given here. But we hope that more details can be given at the AGM. The Foxton Beach Improvement Society Inc has offered to give the Dawick St Hall to MET – for nothing, as you were advised in our last newsletter. We are still considering this offer, and how it might fit into our development plans. Again this topic will come up for discussion at the AGM. Another good reason for coming!!

Your Comments

Your Trustees welcome your comments and feedback on any item in this newsletter. Let's keep the conversation going, tell us what you think, and take advantage of the Internet to share members' opinions. This newsletter is also being posted - no one misses out.

New members are always welcome so if you know of anyone who has an interest in caring for the Manawatu Estuary get in touch and we can send them a membership form. The subscription still remains at \$20.00.

Very kind regards to all from:
Christina Paton
Sec. Manawatu Estuary Trust.
PO Box 11
Foxton Beach 4815
Email: malimidwe@paradise.net.nz



Desmoschoenus spiralis (pingao) inflorescences, with yellow stamens visible against the brown of the spike.