

# International support for estuary reserve

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Twice a day, a satellite passes over the Waikanae Scientific Estuary Reserve measuring how much carbon it is producing.

The reserve, which includes the Waikanae River estuary, has 46 resident bird species and lately a number of rare tern species have dropped in to check out the lay of the land.

The Waikanae Estuary Care Group (WECG) last year signed an agreement with global conservation platform Lemu to help raise funds, share scientific information and make people around the world aware of what is happening.

Lemu also provides satellite information, which includes measuring how much carbon is being produced by the reserve. Its stated goal is to finance conservation on 1% of the planet within 10 years.

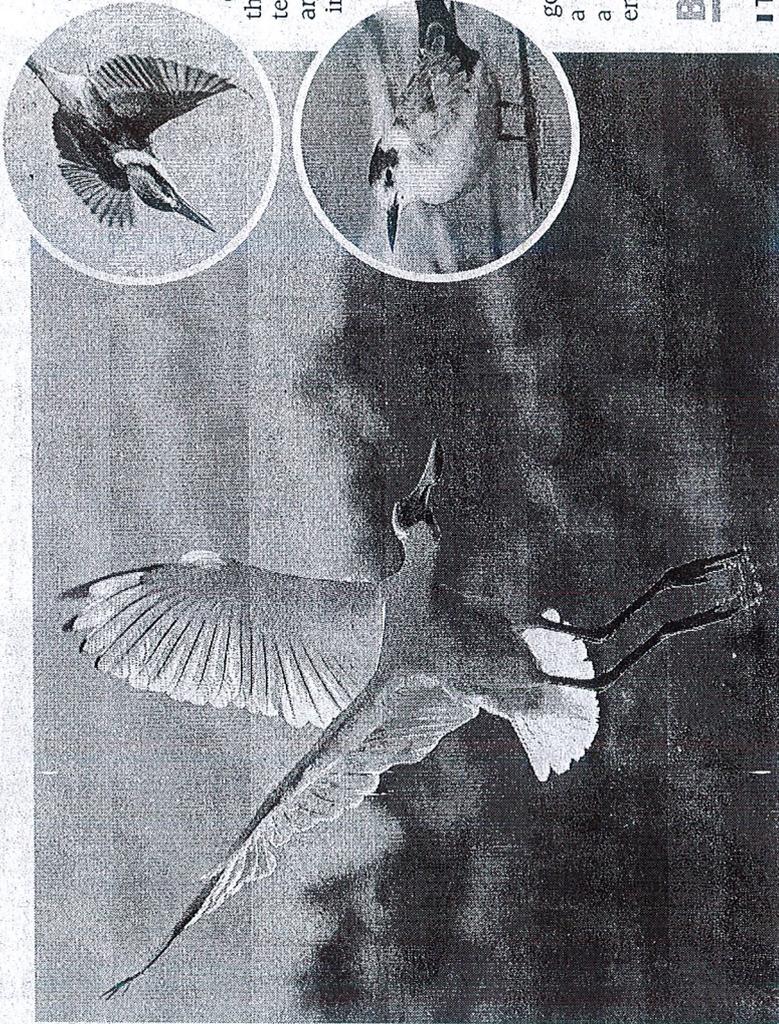
The Waikanae group is one of dozens of community groups working with The Coastal Restoration Trust of New Zealand to restore local coastal areas. Since 2006, it has planted and nurtured close to 70,000 native plants on the rare coastal estuarine habitat.

Such areas are crucial for biodiversity and Robin Gunston, who chairs the care group, says it has a 30-year plan to fully restore the area.

More than 60 species of seabirds, swans, ducks and geese use it, with 46 considered fulltime residents. "Last year, we had four different types of terns, we have never had before."

With so many species, including terns and dotterels, it is a popular destination for bird photographers.

Stuff recently highlighted the risk posed



Roger Smith captured these bird photos at the Waikanae Scientific Estuary Reserve. The reserve has the backing of an international technology platform that can help it raise funds and monitor carbon emissions. Main image: A spoonbill comes in to land. Inset: Kingfishers use the Waimanu Lagoon to dive for small fish, crabs and shrimps. Bottom inset: A black tern, never before recorded in New Zealand, was spotted in 2022.

by vehicles on the delicate ecosystem. Despite plenty of signage, Gunston said there were about 60 instances a year of vehicles driving on the beach and disturbing the birds, including those nesting.

"It is particularly bad during the white-bait season. People seem to think they can do whatever they want."

Having an international platform like Lemu helps raise awareness but also provides tools to raise funds. Funders increasingly want hard data and outcomes, and the information gleaned from the satellites on carbon, creates valuable data.

Lemu chief executive Leo Prieto said the Waikanae project was impressive.

"I hope others will be inspired by their stewardship, both in working on local restoration projects and helping to fund them through Lemu."

Lemu would "democratise conservation" by allowing people to learn, explore and support evidence-based conservation projects globally. Through their app, users can view global ecosystems and feel connected with the planet and invest in their favourite conservation initiatives.

As well as restoring the ecosystem, the group aims to build an information centre and work with universities and other researchers on scientific projects.

Wellington photographer Simon Woolf said the area was popular with wildlife photographers. There was a good range of bird species and locals did a good job keeping dogs away. As well as a number of shag species, he particularly enjoyed snapping spoonbills.

## Birdhotspot

- There are about 60 species of birds, including banded dotterel, pukeko, dabchick, and variable oyster catcher.
- Domestic visitors – including wrybills and black-fronted terns from Canterbury – stop over, as do international species such as godwits and knots from Alaska. Godwits travel more than 11,000km, nonstop, to visit Waikanae.
- Royal spoonbills regularly nest on Kāpiti Island.
- There are six species of whitebait, as well as eels, in the river.
- With most of the surrounding land taken for housing, conservationists helped establish the reserve in 1987.