

The 2020 Game Bird Season Newsletter



NEW ZEALAND

Hawke's Bay Region



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Hawke's Bay Fish & Game PO BOX 7345

Taradale, Napier, 4141

Ph: (06) 844 2460

Fax: (06) 844 2461

Email: hawkesbay@fishandgame.org.nz

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0800 POACHING



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Season prospects

Your annual game newsletter comes to you a little differently this year, being electronic rather than printed. With Covid-19 disrupting most aspects of day to day to life, we are happy that we have been given the green light to get started with the Gamebird season on the 23rd May (See back page for season dates).

With such a long dry summer, some hunters will have to get a bit more creative this year. Many who normally hunt at places such as Whatuma, have pegged out spots on the rivers for Opening Morning instead. In saying this, river hunters and those who have dams that still have water can look forward to a good season with ducks concentrated in those areas.

Duck Hunting Under Level 2 Starts 23rd May

Getting ready

Buy your licence [online](#).

- Retail hunting stores will be open at Level 2, however there may be some restrictions in place so plan ahead, be patient, don't leave it 'til the last minute.
- You can travel to your maimai to make final preparations at Level 2.

Getting to and from your hunting sport

- Plan your trip carefully and safely. You can travel to your hunting spot using all forms of transport including boats.
- Your hunting trip may include overnight stays.
- Restrict your contact with others you don't know and keep a safe distance.
- Record details of everyone you come into contact with to allow full traceability.

Hunting safely

Do not share hunting gear or handle equipment touched by others outside your 'bubble'.

Hunting groups should be restricted to 10 people, but the smaller the better remains best practice.

Maintain appropriate social distancing before, during and after hunting.

Hunt in areas that are not physically challenging for you or any other members of your hunting group.

Only hunt in wetlands or water bodies in your region that you are familiar with and you know are safe.

Avoid hunting rivers or wetlands that are flooded or present other risks.

New monitoring techniques for Mallards



The mainstay of Hawkes Bay's mallard monitoring for more than a decade has been banding, which provides an array of data sets (and some bling for the hunter). After years of using the technique council are looking to see if we can make improvements or add to the way we are gathering data on our mallard populations. How will we attempt to do this? Drones!

WHAT CAN DRONE TECHNOLOGY OFFER US?

Whilst banding was completed this summer and will continue for the time being, the future use of drone technology is being investigated. We will test drone surveys for the first time this year to see how well this technique performs as a method for monitoring our mallard populations, both in combination with banding and independently.

Drone technology has the ability to help us:

- Monitor a wide area of the region for low cost
- Sample a higher percentage of the region's population than banding
- Provide data before and after the hunting/breeding seasons
- Provide information on habitat preferences
- Provide data on any changes in population dispersal across the region
- Provide demographic data such as the ratio of males to females.

HOW DO WE INTEND TO SET UP DRONE SURVEYS?

Using Google Earth, our staff have overlaid a grid system across the entire region. These grid intersections provide a random, general location in which a wetland should be located that meets the requirements for a sampling site. These requirements are mainly based

around access and size. The closest one or two wetlands found near this grid location are then marked. This process has helped us to locate approximately 90 potential wetlands that could be used for monitoring.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

The next step is to gather the landowner information for our selected locations and gain permission to fly a drone over their wetland. This permission will need to be long-term so these sites can be monitored over an extended period of time. Once we have completed some initial trials of the survey methods we will then adapt the number of sampling sites (by either increasing or decreasing survey intensity) to ensure that we get a true representation of the region's mallard population dynamics.

We are currently planning to do the first round of drone surveys in the late summer or early autumn (before the gamebird season starts). This specific choice of period ensures that all mallards will be flying; as young birds will be old enough to be flying out on their own and adult birds will have finished moulting. This will provide a more accurate dataset by considering the whole population after the breeding season and before the gamebird season.

The second and final stage of our annual surveys will occur shortly after the end of the gamebird season, well before the breeding season kicks in to full swing. This will provide data on the population after the hunting season and prior to the following breeding season.

In combination, we hope that the timing of these two

surveys will provide some valuable data on the population coming in and out of the breeding and hunting seasons. Something banding hasn't been able to provide with as much detail.

HOW HAVE THE TRIALS BEEN GOING?

Using drone flight planning software, a wetland area can be selected and the software will produce a flight path, within seconds, that ensures photos are taken at designated intervals to cover the entire site. This flight plan can be saved and automatically loaded to a phone App that communicates with the drone when staff arrive at each individual site. The photos from each site can then be analysed at the office after surveys have been completed to collate all of the bird data gathered.

So far our trials have suggested a flying altitude of no higher than 35 meters provides the best overall coverage. This height ensures the photos are of a quality where birds can be sufficiently identified, whilst also helping to reduce flight times and save battery. With the first full cycle of these surveys still to be done, we are yet to find out what the true quality of the data we gather will be. Whilst this will also inform us of the limitations of the technology, we are certainly excited about the prospects.

GREATER FUTURE POTENTIAL

We are excited about the diverse ways this type of drone technology can be used across numerous areas of our work. It is already showing potential in the fisheries department for use in spawn counts and has been very useful in documenting and planning wetland creation projects.

How can you help contribute?

If you have a wetland in Hawkes Bay that is one hectare or larger, has reasonable all season access and you are happy for our staff to enter the property twice a year, then please contact the Hawkes Bay Fish & Game office. We would be happy to add your pond to our drone surveys if it fits our sampling criteria.

Meet our new Field Officer - Nick Page

I am really pleased to be joining Hawke's Bay Fish and Game on a permanent basis after working as a temporary field officer for the region since May 2019. As part of this small dynamic team, I am excited to be a part of the diverse range of projects we have running to help improve the future of our game sports in Hawke's Bay.

Hailing from the bright lights of Palmerston North, I have always had a real passion for the outdoors and wildlife. After completing my degree in Botany and Ecology with a further diploma in Zoology at the University of Otago in Dunedin, I worked as a DOC ranger in Marlborough, before working across the Canterbury region on environmental restoration projects including riparian and wetland projects. Since then I have worked on invasive species and predator control projects to restore island ecosystems in the Seychelles and Mauritius. I then worked on green energy and environmental sustainability projects in the UK, before returning home to settle down in New Zealand.

I have always loved fishing (especially when it includes a day or two on a boat) and I have been hunting with family and friends since my school days. This time spent harvesting food sustainably from nature has given me a greater appreciation for environmental welfare and the rewards of providing your own foods instead of always relying on shop-bought produce. It has also fed into my enthusiasm for tramping and nature photography, where my partner and I take as many opportunities as we can to disappear off the grid to enjoy the beauty of the great outdoors.



A large driver for me in my professional career has been balanced ecosystems, with key focuses on predator control and revegetation/restoration. A large task since I joined Fish & Game last year was to revitalise the native plant nursery so that we could get more involved in the wetland restoration side of things. I look forward to being able to supply more of these locally sourced plants to our landowners and partners for wetland projects, to create better habitat for our regional waterfowl. We have already made some great progress in this area and I hope to meet more like-minded landowners within the Hawke's Bay that would like to work towards these goals. I also look forward to our future plans to expand the wetland area on our office grounds to create a better space for public and youth engagement in wildlife, and sport fishing as well as environmental education.

River hunting 101

Hawkes Bay waterfowl hunters may not have the luxury of large public wetlands and lakes to hunt on but we do have a great network of rivers that have great public access that hunters can utilise during the season. River hunting requires a bit of pre-hunt reconnaissance to be successful. Whilst not all hunts will be, with good planning and the will to walk to some areas, your successes will be greatly improved.

Here are some basic pointers to get you started in the right direction when planning a hunt on the river this coming season.

MORNING HUNTS

- Do scouting trips down the rivers you want to hunt and locate birds resting/loafing on the river margins/shallow edges/backwaters (Do NOT disturb them!). Remember EXACTLY where they are and how you will get to and set up on that location in the darkness of the early morning.
- Ideally hunt this spot the following morning to reduce chances of birds being put off this area from other hunters/river users.
- Set up a low key blind, try not to change the area too much. Laydown blinds are best.
- Set a small number of decoys replicating how you observed the birds the day prior.
- More often than not, for the first birds to return in the morning, no calling is required and probably best. They will usually come straight in if nothing looks out of place or scares them.



- When seeing birds on a different flight line and as the morning progresses, calling will definitely aid in getting more birds into gun range.
- High river flows, especially if they have occurred overnight, can displace birds from where they landed in the morning. This can result in a lot more birds seen flying the rivers in search of a new loafing area. If you have a spot that is protected from the rising river levels, it's a good time to be out hunting, just be very careful with the higher flows.

EVENING HUNTS

- During scouting missions, where you find backwaters that aren't holding birds during the day, take a closer look along the shoreline and on any silty areas for signs of ducks (feathers, poo, foot prints etc.).
- If there is a good amount of sign, but no birds were present when you observed the area, you could assume that ducks are using this location as a place to feed in the evening/night.

- Find the best place to set yourself up that will enable a good field of view for incoming/passing birds.
- Arrive an hour or more before the end of shooting time and wait for birds to return.
- During times of higher flow, a lot of plant matter, including seeds, are taken down the rivers. These can build up in swirling back eddies, providing a great food source for ducks. Keep an eye out for

Wetland restoration – Turning less productive land into productive waterfowl habitat



Hawke's Bay has lost a huge amount of its wetland habitat throughout the region; recent estimates have been as high as 98.5% lost. Many species found within our region are adapted to and rely on wetland habitats to survive and breed. Doing what we can to mitigate this loss is important work on many levels. Not only do wetlands supply important breeding habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife, they also create and provide recreational benefits, bank stabilization, nutrient and sediment filtering, all whilst creating an aesthetically pleasing outlook.

Fish & Game are looking for farmers and other landowners that are keen to get involved and want to restore or create wetlands in the Hawke's Bay region. Whether for hunting purposes or for property aesthet-

ics and increased biodiversity, we are keen to help.

Designing and planning a wetland is not always an easy job – there are lots of things to consider when creating a wetland such as:

- Suitable habitat types to provide waterfowl with what they need such as feeding, roosting and loafing areas etc.
- Water management.
- Fencing to keep out stock to protect the vegetation and area set aside for brood and resting habitat.
- Planting plans to plant appropriate species in correct areas that will not only provide food, but shelter as well.
- Predator control which is immensely important to keep the likes of rats, stoats and cats from preying on your birds.

This planning is where we can help. Fish & Game staff can offer a range of assistance and advice for those who want to start a wetland project on their property but are unsure of the first step, or those that know what they want, but would like some help with funding applications.

Over the years our staff have assisted many landowners in the region turn their plans into reality creating a host of wetland habitats throughout the region. Last year, staff at Hawke's Bay Fish & Game helped secure \$18,000 worth of funding through the NZ Gamebird Habitat Trust, this funding greatly assisted in the formation of new wetland habitat in Hawke's Bay for not only waterfowl, but for natives species as well.

Most of these wetlands were created or restored in unproductive areas that were often too wet to farm, or had previously been wetland sites but had degraded for various reasons. So, if you have any areas you think might be good for the creation of a wetland – please contact the office and one of our staff will be in touch to organise some information packs and a site visit to chat about what we can do



Staff have recently been in discussion with Hawke's Bay Regional Council about the development and implementation of an Upland Game Hunters group. They would be charged with the protection and enhancement of public river corridors designated as high value Upland Game habitat. This group would be involved with the likes of predator trapping and planting to improve hunting in the region. If you are interested in taking part in this, or learning more, then please do not hesitate to contact us at the office or keep an eye on our Facebook page.



Plants and traps to improve your wetland

TRAPS FOR PREDATOR CONTROL

Hawke's Bay Fish & Game have been working to produce high quality predator traps for licence holders and those undertaking habitat enhancement and wetland development projects. These traps are supplied at cost prices to help with the fight against Rats, Cats, Stoats and all other pests that are plaguing our region. The traps are built to last with both stainless and zinc plated trap mechanisms available, surrounded by a 19mm H3.2 Treated Plywood box all finished off with galvanised mesh.



The following products are available for purchase from our office:

- DOC 200 with zinc coated mechanism (\$66.50)
- DOC 200 with stainless mechanism (\$80.50)
- Chimney traps with Timms mechanism (\$161.00)

If you require more information or would like to place an order for any of the products we have available, then please do not hesitate to contact the office for more information.

WETLAND PLANTS AVAILABLE

All good wetlands need good suitable plant species growing in and around them. Our little nursery here at Hawke's Bay Fish & Game has begun producing cost effective and locally sourced plants to provide great habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife.

Locally sourced is important, as the plants are more likely to be adapted to the climate that we have here in the Bay.

At \$2.00 a PB3 sized bag we have a range of species available including:

- *Carex secta* and *C. virgata*
- Swamp flax - *Phormium tenax*
- Mountain flax – *Phormium cookianum*
- Karamu - *Coprosma robusta*
- Mangimingi - *Coprosma propinqua*
- Cabbage Tree – *Cordyline australis*
- Manuka – *Leptospermum scoparium*

Limited stocks available for the Autumn planting season - so for more information feel free to get in touch with us at the office and discuss what you need and how we can help!



2020 Gamebird license fees, important dates and information



OPENING MORNING

23rd May 2020

WATERFOWL SEASONS DATES

23rd May – 21st of June

Upland game season close remains the same at 25th August. All

other regulations remain the same as in your regula-

tion booklet.

Hunting hours have changed to between 6:15am and 6pm

WHOLE SEASON

- Adult: \$98.00 (over 18 years 2/05/2020)
- Junior: \$23.00 (12 to 17 years)
- Child: \$4.00 (under 12 years, covers Habitat stamp)

DAY LICENCES

Valid from Monday the 1st of June onwards.

- Adult: \$23.00
- Junior: \$8.00

Contact us

Hawke's Bay Fish & Game staff maintain a Facebook page to keep anglers and hunters up to date with our work and other items of interest. Staff hope to tap into the younger generation of anglers and hunters and help them get into the sport and to be successful. Search for "Hawke's Bay Fish & Game" and click "Like" to receive regular updates.

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