

Where to Hunt in NZ



Understanding where to hunt is crucial for success in waterfowl hunting. This Fish & Game resource outlines the various hunting opportunities available across New Zealand, including both private and public land options. Learn about different hunting environments, access requirements, and how to locate legal hunting areas. This guide is part of our complete resource collection for waterfowl hunters - visit fishandgame.org.nz for more information.

Hunting opportunities on private land

Ponds/dams

The classic Kiwi 'duck pond' is a cornerstone of waterfowl hunting in New Zealand. These small wetlands, usually less than one hectare in size, are often created and maintained by landowners and hunters specifically for waterfowl hunting. They are a popular choice among hunters because they are generally easier to hunt than larger habitats like rivers, lakes, or estuaries and tend to attract waterfowl throughout the season. Most hunting on these ponds takes place in the morning when mallards arrive to loaf after their night-time feeding.

Paddocks

Waterfowl (especially Paradise shelducks) will often feed on paddocks, whether it's grass paddocks or stubble fields left after cropping. With some extra equipment and planning, hunters can target waterfowl using these areas. For example, stubble hunting can be particularly effective early in the season if crop is harvested late, while grass paddocks can be used by waterfowl throughout the season. To target waterfowl using these habitats, hunters generally use layout blinds or camouflage netting to conceal themselves. Paddocks can be effectively hunted in the morning or evening, with timing dependent on local waterfowl movement patterns.

Ephemeral water bodies (puddles)

Mallard ducks, are a 'puddle duck,' and get this name because they love feeding in puddles, where saturated soil brings worms and other bugs to the surface. The best time to hunt mallards on puddles is shortly after they form. The same techniques used for hunting in paddocks or stubble, such as using layout blinds or camo nets for concealment, are also effective for puddles. Puddle hunting is usually done in the evening when mallards move from loafing areas to puddles for feeding.

Small rivers, streams and drains

Mallards can make use of almost any waterbody, including small streams, rivers, and agricultural drains. Many hunters enjoy 'jump shooting' mallards in these areas. Unlike many of the country's larger rivers and streams, which often have public access via unformed legal roads (commonly known as Queen's Chain), marginal strips, or hydro-surveyed riverbeds, smaller watercourses often lack surveyed public access and are typically located on private land. Hunters must obtain permission from the landowner to access these areas.



Public Land

Department of Conservation (DOC) wetlands, lagoons, and lakes

Many DOC-managed wetlands, lagoons, and lakes offer excellent opportunities for waterfowl hunting. These areas can attract a variety of game bird species throughout the season. To hunt on these DOC-managed areas, hunters will need to obtain a hunting permit from the appropriate DOC or Fish & Game office. It is important to note that not all wetlands are open to hunting so it is important to check with your local Fish & Game office to confirm whether the area you plan to hunt is legally accessible.

Estuaries

Many estuaries across New Zealand offer waterfowl hunting opportunities, but they can be challenging to hunt due to their large size as well as the tidal movements which can influence waterfowl activity. Hunters should be aware that although hunting is permitted in many estuaries around the country, certain estuaries or areas within estuaries may be closed to hunting because of their proximity to developed areas or the presence of endangered wildlife. You also need to be extra aware of fishing boats and public. Additionally, there may be restrictions on building permanent or temporary maimai. Before hunting on an estuary, it's best to check with your local Fish & Game office so they can make you aware of any relevant regulations.

Major rivers and streams

Each season, hundreds of waterfowl hunters across the country target waterfowl on major rivers and streams, which can offer excellent hunting opportunities. Access to these rivers is often available via unformed legal roads (commonly known as the Queen's Chain), marginal strips, or hydro-surveyed riverbed parcels. However, as rivers often change course over time, it's important to confirm that the section you plan to hunt has not meandered outside the surveyed boundaries and onto private land. You can check for unformed roads and LINZ hydro parcel on the Outdoor Access Commission website

maps.herengaanuku.govt.nz/Gallery

Other important notes and access tips

In New Zealand, many waterbodies have legal public access, and permission from adjoining landowners is often not required. However, if you're unsure about access, here are some steps you can take

Check with Fish & Game contact your local Fish & Game office for guidance on legal public access to your intended hunting location. They can provide valuable advice.

Reach out to famers and landowners a few days before hunting consider speaking directly with landowners whose property borders the public access area. This can help clarify access, allow you to share your intentions, and provides an opportunity for you to introduce yourself to landowners as a responsible hunter. Building positive relationships through communication can promote goodwill and improve access opportunities in the future.