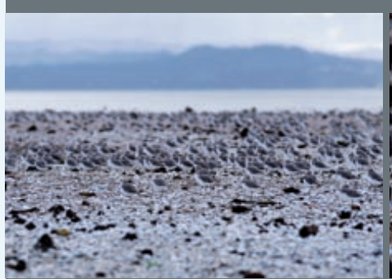
# Mangere's native bird population

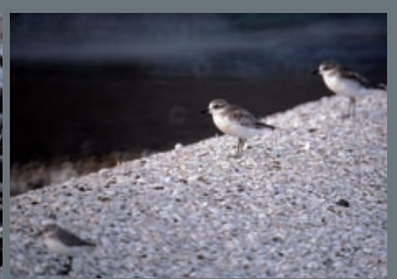
Poster 18W

MANGERE BIRD ENTHUSIAST RAY CLOUGH SURVEYS THE INCREASING POPULATION OF WRYBILLS WHICH HAVE RETURNED TO THE COASTLINE AS A RESULT OF WATERCARE'S ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS.

## Native bird population is TAKING OFF

A CENSUS OF SHOREBIRD NUMBERS CLOSE TO THE MANGERE WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT HAS CONFIRMED WHAT OBSERVERS HAVE LONG SUSPECTED – WATERCARE-LED INITIATIVES ARE MAKING A HUGE IMPROVEMENT TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT





New Zealand native shorebirds are flocking back to Watercare land following the restoration of the Mangere oxidation ponds.

Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ) census figures show significant increases in bird numbers on Watercare land in recent years, most notably Wrybill, Pied Stilt and Bar-tailed Godwit species. Rare New Zealand Dotterel have also managed to successfully fledge chicks in the last three years.

The ponds were drained, excavated and opened out to the sea in New Zealand's largest ever coastal restoration project, led by Watercare as part of the Mangere Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade.

Almost six years have passed since the first breach was made in the oxidation pond walls and the $450 million upgrade project, which started in 1998, is now largely complete.

With 13 kilometres of coastline to restore, Watercare planted around 300,000 native trees, built several bird roosts and created seven new beaches. Tracks and boardwalks were constructed to connect Mangere Mountain, Ambury Regional Park, the Otuataua Stone Fields and a boat ramp.

For Ray Clough, Mangere bird enthusiast and self-appointed advocate of the natural environment, the project means hundreds of birds that were once forced to roost elsewhere can now make the area home again.

"Slowly, bit by bit, it's been getting better," he says.

New Zealand Dotterel had previously tried to nest along the coast before it was restored, he says. "Five nests – all failed, two re-nests – failed again," he recalls.

But recent stoat trapping and habitat restoration has changed all that. "It's been a huge help to our cause here, and this year we have fledged four Dotterel chicks. There was one last year – possibly even two – so all of a sudden we've got some success."

With the world population of the New Zealand Dotterel estimated at around 1,700, the birth of five successfully fledged chicks is a significant contribution to the continued survival of the species.

A second endemic species thriving at Mangere is the Wrybill, named for its distinctive beak which curves to one side.

"Wrybill – now that's a vast increase," Ray says. His own counts show marked increases in numbers. "Before the maximum number would have been 900, with normally around 300 birds. Now normally there are 600 to 700, and at its peak 3,800 were counted."

Figures from the Ornithological Society winter census counts show a 20-fold increase in Wrybill numbers since 1997, from 107 recorded birds to 2000 in 2006.

OSNZ member Tony Habraken says this number could be even higher, as census figures offer only a snapshot of numbers on one day.

"Our counts capture only those birds present at one moment in time. Their ability to use alternate roosts with higher or lower than expected tides, often coupled with inclement weather patterns, allows birds to change their regular habits," he says.

"This means the counts on that day may be higher or lower than normal. However the data shows increases for some species in the restored area, and this appears to show that the improved habitat may have been beneficial to Wrybills in particular."

The total population of Wrybills in New Zealand is 5,000 birds, with around 40 per cent believed to live on Watercare land.

Increasing the attractiveness of Watercare land to the birds keeps them away from the airport where they can cause significant disruption.

Ray Clough says the construction of new bird habitat sites by Watercare has created more nesting and roosting space, and the removal of the oxidation ponds and the return of the tidal flows over the now exposed mud flats gives longer periods for birds to forage.

"That's why it's such an important area to look after, as other feeding areas are damaged through human encroachment; so this area is vital," he says.

Watercare manages the site, clearing weeds from roosting areas to give them total peripheral vision as a precaution against predators.

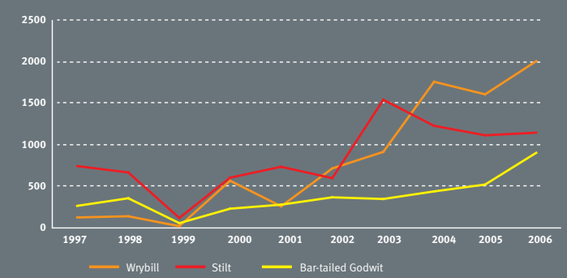
Predator trapping by the Auckland Regional Council (ARC) has been a large contributor to recent nesting successes according to Ray, and new trapping techniques have meant problem stoats are now being stopped, along with possums, rats and hedgehogs.

ARC Ranger Iain Frengley caught 11 stoats this year, and hopes to continue trapping next summer. "We've only been trapping since January – that's not very long to get such high numbers; so I was very surprised," he says.

Ray believes continued weed and predator control are the keys to birds' continued welfare. "By and large the whole thing is good as long as someone looks after it."

One final coastal section near the new treatment plant still awaits restoration, once another stage of rehabilitation is complete. This will become a further natural area, adding another natural habitat to the once-inhospitable site.

**Bird numbers on Watercare land 1997 – 2006**




*Source: Ornithological Society of New Zealand, Winter Census*



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