



The Nukuhou saltmarsh is located on the Wainui Road near Cheddar Valley half way between Whakatāne and Ōpōtiki.

Here, where the Nukuhou River enters the harbour, is a place where land and sea intermingle. At the harbour margin, mangroves have colonised the shallow muddy water. Behind them lies a great expanse of saltmarsh vegetation dominated by the rushes juncus and oioi and fringed with saltmarsh ribbonwood.

The saltmarsh vegetation provides habitat for secretive marshbirds. You may hear the 'tchip' call of the fernbird (Matatā) or even see one flying low amongst the reeds. Other secretive marsh birds will be fossicking for crabs and worms around the margins of the marsh.

This saltmarsh is the largest remnant of an ecosystem that was once extensive around all our estuaries. The Nukuhou Saltmarsh Care Group is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing this beautiful environment and to promoting its special character to the wider community.

## Nukuhou saltmarsh care group

Thanks to the efforts of the Nukuhou Saltmarsh Care Group, the saltmarsh, and the birds who live there are thriving.

Members of the group meet on the first Sunday of every month. At these working bees, the birds are counted, traps baited, tracks maintained, plants weeded and planted.

If you would like to join the group, help out or get more information, please contact:

**Stuart Slade** (07) 312 4583 or call in and see him at the Cheddar Valley pottery

The Nukuhou Saltmarsh Care Group is supported by the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, the Department of Conservation and the Ōpōtiki and Whakatāne District Councils.

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The  
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## Caring for the saltmarsh

A group of local residents formed the Nukuhou Saltmarsh Care Group in 2003 with the aim of protecting rarely seen marsh birds around the mouth of the Nukuhou Stream. It was found that fernbird, banded rail, spotless crane, and bittern were present, along with some more common birds such as pūkeko.

Since all these birds nest on, or close to, the ground it was expected that predators such as rats and stoats may be affecting nesting success. Consequently bait stations for rats and traps for stoats were set up in a grid around the margins of the saltmarsh. There are now 48 bait stations and 26 stoat traps. By 2011, 238 stoats and weasels had been trapped.

## The lookout

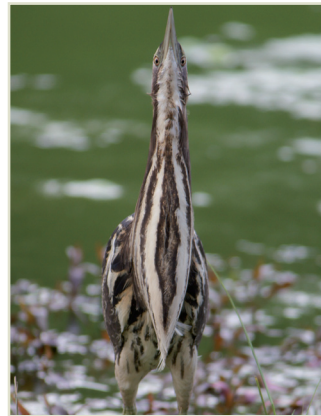
The Burke Road corner has been transformed, with the removal of weeds, planting of native plants, the construction of the interpretation point and a boardwalk into the margin of the saltmarsh. The area was previously an eyesore of dumped rubbish.



*Fernbird*



*Tangled foliage of saltmarsh ribbonwood*



*Bittern. When alarmed it stands still with head erect.*



*Banded rail*

## The birds

Bird numbers in the saltmarsh have been monitored every month since 2003. In 2010 fernbird numbers had increased from about 20 to between 80 and 100. Banded rail rarely seem to call but a huge increase in their footprints has been noted and they are now seen more often.

## The Nukuhou River walk

The Care Group has formed a 2km walking track from the lookout. You can walk along the edge of the saltmarsh to a whitebait spawning area a little way up the Nukuhou River.

Bittern regularly visit the paddocks across the road to feed and several have been killed by vehicles. The road embankment has now been planted with native trees to encourage the birds to fly higher and avoiding oncoming traffic.

The large old macrocarpa trees provide a roost for several species of shags.

Past the bridge, the posts in the river edge are the remains of a wharf where butter from the Cheddar Valley Dairy Factory was shipped out. This old building is now a pottery.

At Te Ru, the saltmarsh is dominated by saltmarsh ribbonwood.

A wasteland of blackberry and other weeds has been cleared and replanted with natives.

A duckboard provides a walkway over an area that has been contoured and planted with native sedges to provide whitebait with a greater spawning area. Whitebait lay their eggs on the foliage during high spring tides. The lower reaches of the river hereabouts are a popular whitebait fishery in the season.

