

# Lotus

NEWSLETTER

of the

NORFOLK FIELD NATURALISTS



APRIL 2015



## ESCAPE FROM THE FEBRUARY DEEP-FREEZE

Update to the January presentation Nature Down-Under. Story and photos by: Inga Hinnerichsen



The snow-capped *Ruapehu* volcano, the highest peak on the North Island of New Zealand, 2797m

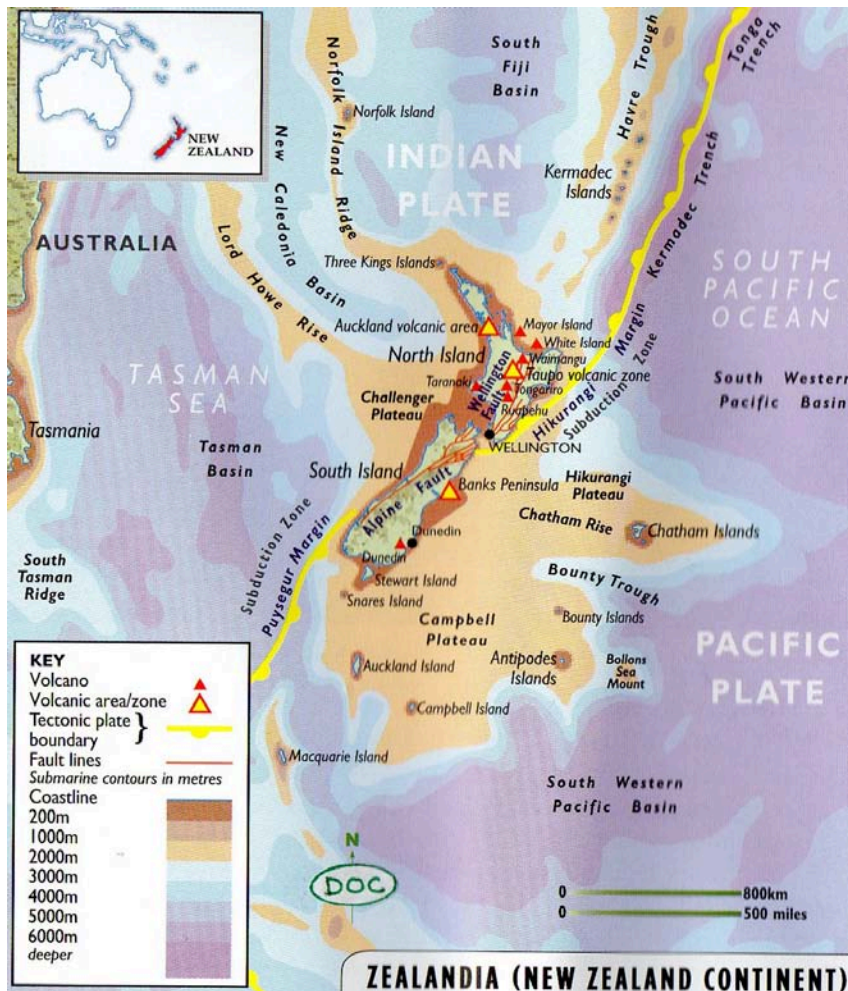
We couldn't have picked a better time for our recent trip to New Zealand!

The summer is still going strong in February (like our August), but the high tourist season is already tapering off and the local kids are back in school. During the week the beaches are less busy and you'll have a better selection of campsites.

On the other hand, this is not a great time to visit Northern Australia! The "Wet" is in full swing, the outback is flooded by torrential rains, devastating cyclones tear at the north and north east parts of the continent. The South is usually hot and dry with plenty of bushfires raging.

Roughly 80 million years ago the land mass now known as Zealandia broke away from the supercontinent Gondwana together with Australia. This continent has since eroded away and risen again from the Pacific Ocean straddling the boundary between the Pacific and the Indo-Australian tectonic plates. The map on the next page illustrates the geological features, including the sub-oceanic topography and the faults along the areas of the volcanic and geothermal activities so characteristic to New Zealand.

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ZEALANDIA geological map (above) (DOC brochure)  
*Tongariro* Red Crater (top right)  
*Ngauruhoe* volcano & *Tongariro* South Crater (right)

Tucked away deep in the South Pacific Ocean the Islands now known as New Zealand stayed uninhabited by humans until the 1300s - that's only about 800 years since the first Polynesians began arriving. Australia has been inhabited by humans about 50,000 years.

The Polynesians, the ancestors of the Maoris, and the rats and dogs they brought with them, hunted the Moas and many other flightless birds to extinction in their first 150 years. The Europeans didn't start settling the islands until after Captain Cook's voyages in the late 1700s. Today there are more than 30,000 introduced plants and tree species and hundreds of birds and mammals, at least 12 of them predators.

This time we spent February exploring more of the North Island (*Te Ika-a-Māui* = The fish of Māui)  
 In the following all Maori names are shown *Italic*.

In *Tongariro* National Park, the oldest in NZ and the 4th oldest in the world, I had the opportunity to experience some of the volcanoes up close and personal during an all-day 19.4 km steep and gnarly tramp (hike): *Ruapehu*, *Ngauruhoe* and *Tongariro*. *Ngauruhoe* was featured in the Lord of the Rings movies as Mount Doom.  
 In the middle of the central plateau lies a dormant supervolcano. Lake Taupo and the surrounding huge caldera are the remainders of a violent explosive eruption ca. 1800 years ago. There is a similar supervolcano in North America: Yellowstone.







A colourful hot spring at *Wai-O-Tapu*

Other geological and volcanic features worth seeing, in spite of often large crowds, include: *Waitomo* (Water in the hole) cave systems, including the Glow Worm Caves, *Waimangu* (Black Water) Geothermal Valley and *Wai-O-Tapu* (Forbidden Water) hot springs. White Island, the newest volcano, can be reached by boat off the coast in the Bay of Plenty. The Coromandel Peninsula is known for the Hot Sand Beach and the very scenic Cathedral Cove.



Brush-tailed Possum eating apple shoots Photo: Wikipedia

Driving along, the road sides everywhere were littered with Brushtail Possum carcasses, victims of traffic fatalities. The latest estimates have their numbers at over 70 million! These furry critters, about the size of a cat, are a major invasive pest. First introduced from Australia in the late 1800s by the fur trade, they now cause huge damages to the fruit orchards, spread Bovine Tuberculosis to cattle and destroy eggs and young of many bird species.

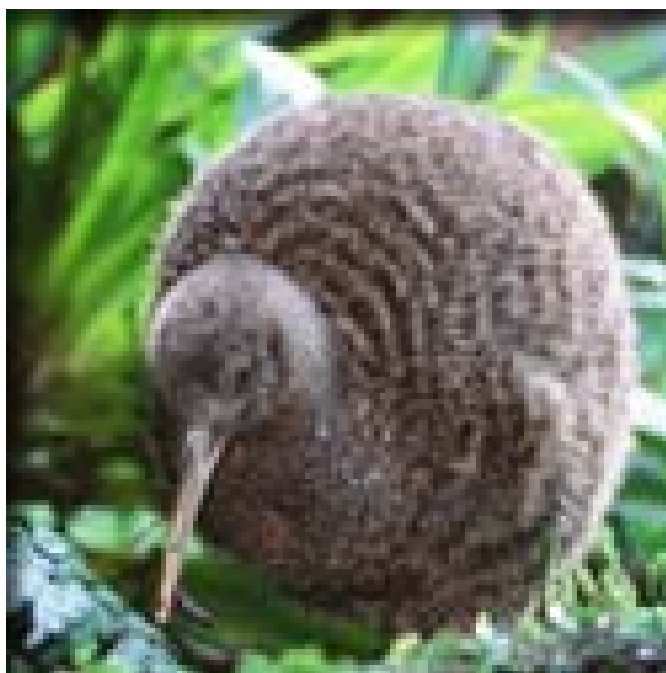
The Department Of Conservation (DOC) has declared an all-out war attempting to at least reduce the Possum population, together with other introduced predators, such as rats, ferrets, feral cats and dogs.

On the bright side, the numbers of the Northern Brown Kiwi on the North Island are on the rise, mostly due to conservation efforts. The Kiwi House and Native Wild Bird Park in *Otorohanga* is another "Must-See" if you have a chance to visit these islands. They have 18 Kiwis in their breeding program. The young birds are placed in nature reserves in remote mountain areas or on offshore islands where the birds are safe from predatory mammals. Access to these areas are usually by special permit only.

Did you know there are 5 Kiwi-like flightless birds of the order *Casuariiformes* in New Zealand?

The Southern Brown Kiwi (*Tokoeka*), the Okarito Brown Kiwi (*Rowi*), the Northern Brown Kiwi (*Kiwi*) - the only species on the North Island - the Little Spotted Kiwi (*Kiwi Pukupuku*) and the Great Spotted Kiwi (*Roa* or *Roroa* or *Roa-roa*). All these nocturnal birds range from threatened to critically endangered.

The Great Spotted Kiwi is also very territorial: at the Kiwi House we observed this behavior at feeding time; the keeper had prepared us before he entered the enclosure. This large, mottled grey fluff ball attacked the keeper jumping up on him kicking and scratching and pecking. It was so agitated it began calling, a loud rising scream: "Krrrrreeee! Krrrrreeee!" Quite a display.



Great Spotted Kiwi Photo: *Otorohanga* Kiwi House website

One of the island wildlife sanctuaries is readily accessible to visitors: The *Tiritiri Matangi* Island north of Auckland is managed by DOC and can be reached by ferry. There you might be able to observe rare birds like the North Island Saddleback (*Tieke*), the Blue-wattled Crow (*Kokako*), the Stitch Bird (*Hihi*) and the very rare South Island *Takahe* (no English name). A species of Gecko and Skink have also been reintroduced to the island.



A Weka hen with one of her 2 chicks

Further north, near Russell, at the Bay of Islands, we found another hidden gem: the Orongo Bay Holiday Park campground. We were very pleased to learn that the Managers of this site are actively involved in habitat restoration and are members of eBird. We parked our small camper van backing on to trees and shrubs at the edge of a marsh. This area is home to another, less well-known flightless bird: the *Weka*. The *Weka* is about the size of a plump chicken with long sturdy legs. Its primaries have evolved into soft coverts. The wings form a smooth mottled brown coat over its body. Note her beautiful red eyes. Many New Zealanders have never seen a *Weka*. We shared our campsite with a hen and her 2 chicks plus a flock of hybridised Mallard/Grey Ducks.

The North Island Brown Kiwi also inhabits this area. As all nocturnal birds, it is difficult to spot, but its

loud cries can be heard after dark. The More Pork (*Ruru*), a small owl named for its repeated calls, arrived in New Zealand on its own from Australia. It is now common and widespread on the islands. One more comment about camping in New Zealand: Campsites are beautifully clean and quiet, just as in Australia, without any "nasties" - no crocs, snakes or really venomous spiders. The Red-tailed Spider can inflict a painful bite, we heard, but never saw any of them. DOC manages many campgrounds. As a rule, they are more primitive than the other commercial sites. One regrettable detail: no campfires are allowed.

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## 2015 CALENDER OF FAMILY EVENTS

[www.naturescalling.ca](http://www.naturescalling.ca)

Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 6 to 8 P.M.

### Amazing Amphibians Hike

**Backus Heritage Conservation Area/Backus Woods.**

Meet at the Education Centre at Backus Heritage Conservation Area (1267 2nd Concession Road, just north of Port Rowan). By donation - \$2/person or \$5/family

Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1 to 3 P.M.

### Mother's Day Craft & Hike in Backus Woods

Meet at the entrance to Backus Woods off the Third Concession Rd. By donation - \$2/person or \$5/family

Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 9 to 11 A.M.

### Hike in Big Creek National Wildlife Area

See the back page for more info.

Coming this summer:



**August 14 to 16, a fun and educational weekend at Backus Heritage Conservation Area**

See the NCEE website or the June issue of Lotus for more info



# A PICTURE-PERFECT ESCAPE TO FLORIDA

Photos and comments by: Len Grincevicius

## Editor's note:

*Len and Janet Grincevicius did what the birds do every winter: They flocked south to Florida to escape from the bitterly cold Fe-brrrrr-uary. Here are some of their photos from their winter escape - enjoy!*

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge on the Tennessee River in Decatur, Alabama:

**Right:** Our first ever sighting of Whooping Cranes. We saw 19 in total, the picture is not great as they were probably half a kilometer away.

Earlier in the winter Wheeler was host to about 15,000 Sandhill Cranes, but by late January there were only about 5,000 left after the majority had already began their migration to the north.



**Top Left:** Sandhill Cranes and Greater White-fronted Geese

**Bottom left:** Snow Geese

**Above:** A Great Egret near St. George's Island in the Florida Panhandle



## ESCAPE...

continued from page 5

The following photos were all taken around St George Island and surrounding area in the Florida Panhandle.

**Below top:** Little Blue Heron

**Below bottom:** Willet

**Right top:** Tri-coloured Heron

**Right bottom:** Northern Mockingbird



## Thank You!

from all of us at  
Norfolk Field Naturalists  
to

**Will Partridge**  
**Guardian Computing**  
For hosting our website free of charge

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

2014-2015 season:

**Mike & Gerree Beacom, Linda Geary,  
Shirley McCready-Nelissen, Terry & Katy Kirby,  
Diana Moir, Sandy & Bernd Mueller,  
Patricia Oxley, Andrew Gibson, Eileen Smith**

We are looking forward to meeting you and hope you  
will participate in and enjoy all the NFN indoor  
presentations and field outings!

**Bathurst Inlet Discovery with Ontario Nature**

Ontario Nature is pleased to be working with Quest Nature Tours again to provide you with another once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: a visit to Bathurst Inlet in Nunavut. Discover the wildlife and landscapes. The Bathurst Inlet area also has a fantastic floral show and this will be a great opportunity for study and photography. For more information on this exciting trip or to request Quest's new catalogue, call 1-800-387-1483 or email [travel@worldwidequest.com](mailto:travel@worldwidequest.com).

**Help Collect Vital Frog Data**

The sounds of summer are coming! Are you ready for more citizen science? Join **Backyard Frog Surveys** to monitor frog and toad species calling in your neighbourhood this year. Biologists will use the vital long-term monitoring data from Backyard Frog Surveys to map species distributions and population trends in the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas. If you can commit to repeated surveying this year, please email [atlas@ontarionature.org](mailto:atlas@ontarionature.org) to ask for your Backyard Frog Survey materials. Calls start in April, so hop to it and sign up today!

**Join Us for a Grand Old Time**

Dreaming of being outdoors in warmer weather? Ontario Nature and **rare** Charitable Research Reserve invite you to our one-day event, **A Day on the Grand** to be held on May 23, 2015 at **rare** ECO Centre along the beautiful Grand River in Cambridge. Highlights of the day include bird banding, guided nature hikes, a special presentation on sustainability and the chance to become a citizen scientist alongside local researchers. **Register now** before spots fill up! The deadline is May 4, 2015. If you have any questions, contact Lauren Wright at [laurenw@ontarionature.org](mailto:laurenw@ontarionature.org) or 1-800-440-2366 ext. 271.

**To learn more about these topics, and more, visit: [www.ontarionature.org](http://www.ontarionature.org)**

**IN MEMORIAM**

On behalf of all of us at the Norfolk Field Naturalists we would like to convey our deepest condolences to the **Barrett family** with regards to the recent passing of

**Joan Barrett**

Wife of **Harry B. Barrett**, one of the Founding Members and the first President of Norfolk Field Naturalists

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT**

Winter 2015

The NFN Board of Directors met on February 24, 2015 to discuss current business. The following are highlights of this meeting:

**Financial:** The 2014 Birdathon cheque arrived in the amount of \$7997.38. Club members raised a total of \$17,994.75 for BSC/Birdathon. 25% of the clubs share (\$1999.35) is put into the Club's Protection and Securement Fund. The Treasurer, Barb Hourigan, reported that as of Jan. 31 there is a bank balance of \$4,266.91 and total assets of \$44,979.54. A GIC valued at \$14,485.77 has been rolled over. Total GICs are valued at \$38,062.63. The need for and the form of a financial audit will be taken forward for member discussion. The costs of different options and the legal requirements will be investigated.

Prince Edward County Field Naturalists have incurred legal expenses in fighting Wind Turbines in a significant natural area. The board feels that the club could contribute \$1000 to help them out. This will be taken to the membership.

**General:** It was suggested that Will Partridge and his business be recognized for providing the hosting of the NFN Web site at no charge. See the note on page 6.

In response to concerns from several members at large and board members it was decided by the board that new name tags will be developed.

The next Board Meeting will be held on April 28, 2015. The report from this meeting will be in the June Lotus.

## Upcoming NFN 2015 Spring Events

### Spring Nature Walk on George and Shirley Pond Nature Reserve

**Saturday, April 18, 9am to noon**

Hike on this 80 acre Long Point Basin Land Trust property. Meet at 1653 Front Road 2 km west of Turkey Point Road.

### Hike in the Wilson Tract

**Saturday, April 25, 10am to noon**

Mary Gartshore will lead a hike through this beautiful Carolinian Tract. To get there go west on Hwy 60 (from Hwy 59), left on West 1/4 Line Road, right on 4th Concession Road until the gate to the property on the right. Contact Mary at 519-586-3985

### Mother's Day Wildflower Hike in Backus Woods

**Sunday, May 10, 1pm to 3pm**

Stroll through the South Tract of Backus Woods, enjoy the diversity of ephemeral flowers along the trail. This is a joint venture with the LPRCA, a small donation is appreciated. Contact Bernie at 519-428-0706

### Movie and Popcorn Night

**Tuesday, May 12, 7.30**

Simcoe Seniors Centre, 89 Pond St. "Revolution" is a startling, beautiful and provocative true-life adventure of Rob Stewart in 15 countries over 4 years.

### Edible and Medicinal Plants

**Saturday, May 30, 10am to noon**

NCEE Nature Educator Cynthia Brink will lead us on this fascinating hike. Meet in front of the St. Williams Forestry Interpretive Centre. Contact Cynthia at 226-567-0465

### Big Creek National Wildlife Area

**Saturday, June 6, 9am to 11am**

Hike the trail with Rick Levick and Bernie Solymár. Learn about the Long Point Causeway Improvement Project and the wildlife in this area. Meet at the parking area off the Causeway. This is a joint venture with NCEE. Contact Bernie at 519-428-0706

## NFN Meetings

Norfolk Field Naturalist meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month from September to May.

Meetings take place at the **Simcoe Seniors Centre, 89 Pond Street.**

The meetings are free and visitors are always welcome. Doors open at 7:15 pm, programs begin at 7:30 pm.

## NFN Mailing Address

**Norfolk Field Naturalists  
PO Box 995, Simcoe, ON  
N3Y 5B3**

## Next Lotus issue:

**April 2015**

**Input dead line:**

**Friday, March 27, 2015**

## About the NFN

Norfolk Field Naturalists members participate in meetings and field outings, many of which are family-friendly. **Membership fees are \$20 Individual and \$30 Family.** Donations are eligible for income tax credits. Charitable registration # 11905869RR00001

Guest speakers present programs on interesting and relevant natural history and conservation topics. Club members receive the Lotus newsletter with articles on local natural history and club activities. Copies of the Lotus are available at meetings, by mail or by email and posted on the NFN web site. Articles published in the Lotus reflect the views and opinions of the authors, but not necessarily those of the NFN.

**[www.norfolkfieldnaturalists.org](http://www.norfolkfieldnaturalists.org)**

## 2014 - 2015 NFN Executive with contact & project information

		<u>All 519-</u>	
<b>President / Field Events</b>	Bernie Solymár	427-9969	<a href="mailto:solymar@nornet.on.ca">solymar@nornet.on.ca</a>
<b>Vice-President,</b>	Peter Carson	586-3985	<a href="mailto:gartcar@kwic.com">gartcar@kwic.com</a>
<b>Environment/Sanctuary</b>			
<b>Past President</b>	Audrey Heagy	586-9464	<a href="mailto:aheagy@kwic.com">aheagy@kwic.com</a>
<b>Treasurer</b>	Barb Hourigan	583-1198	<a href="mailto:bbhourigan@yahoo.ca">bbhourigan@yahoo.ca</a>
<b>Secretary</b>	Eleanor Chithalen	582-4382	<a href="mailto:eleanor.chithalen@gmail.com">eleanor.chithalen@gmail.com</a>
<b>Director/ Membership</b>	Diane Salter	586-7775	<a href="mailto:bigcreek@kwic.com">bigcreek@kwic.com</a>
<b>Speaker Program</b>	Len Grincevicius	428-6796	<a href="mailto:portie_1989@eastlink.ca">portie_1989@eastlink.ca</a>
<b>Publicity</b>	David Curry	875-5601	<a href="mailto:david.curry@hotmail.com">david.curry@hotmail.com</a>
<b>Director-at-large</b>	Barb Hawke	586-8375	<a href="mailto:bhawke@kwic.com">bhawke@kwic.com</a>
<b>Director-at-large,</b>	Inga Hinnerichsen	875-5601	<a href="mailto:daveinga@live.ca">daveinga@live.ca</a>
<b>Director-at-large</b>	Alan Ladd	426-8504	

**Director-at-large**      **Vacant**  
**Director-at-large**      **Vacant**

**Lotus Editor** (appointed)      Inga Hinnerichsen      875-5601      [daveinga@live.ca](mailto:daveinga@live.ca)

**Butterfly Counts:** (appointed)      Adam Timpf      586-9964

**Christmas Bird Counts:** (appointed)      David Okines - Woodhouse Count      519-586-9464  
Linda Thrower - Fisherville Count      905-774-1230

**Honorary President:**      Al Robinson

**Honorary Directors:**      Harry Barrett, Jim Harlow