



Marsh crake in a raupo border, Boggy Pond. This is believed to be the first colour photograph published in New Zealand of our smallest and most secretive rail. Photo: P Moore



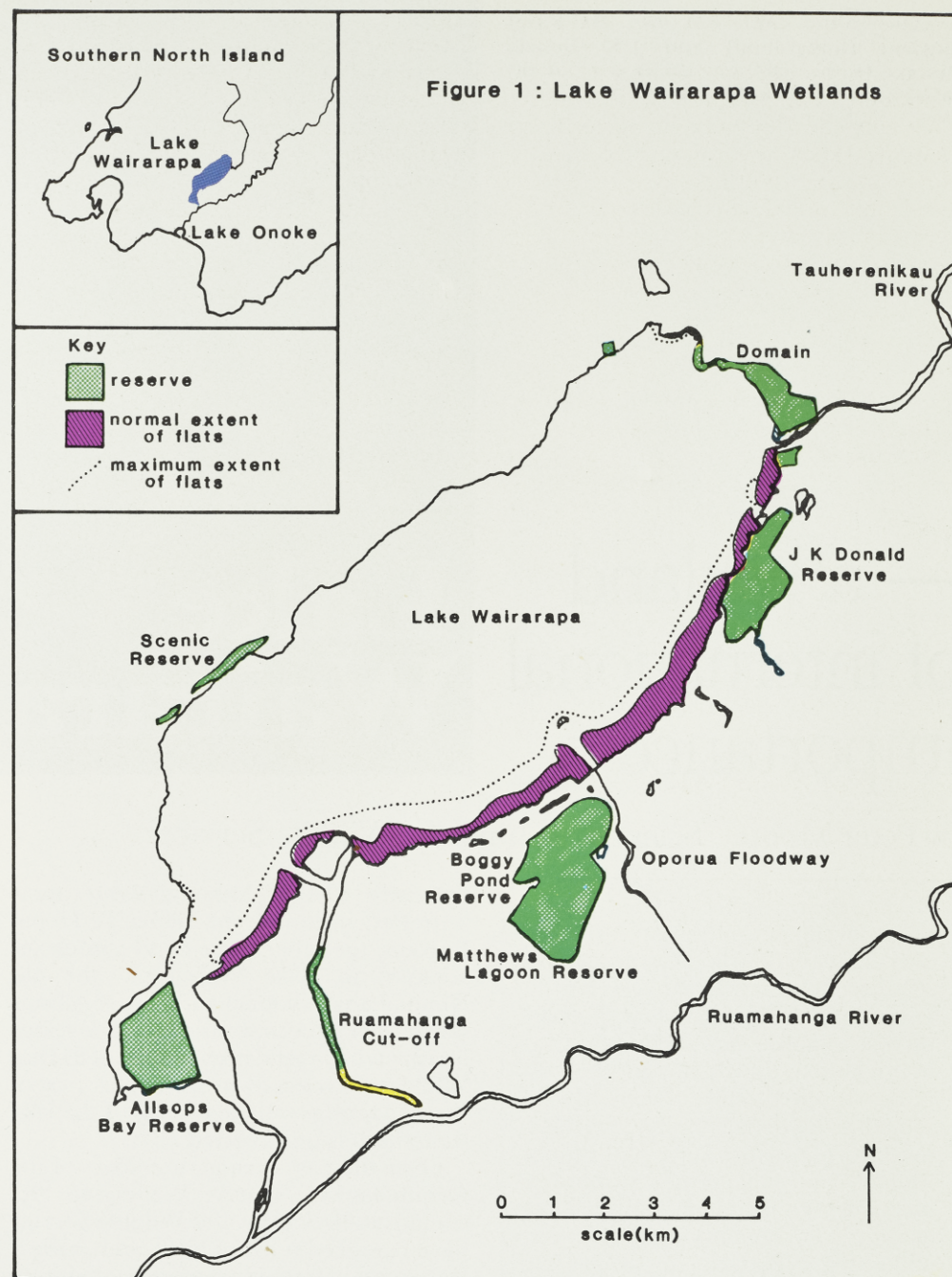
Spotless crake wading in shallow water at the edge of a raupo stand in Boggy Pond. Photo: P Moore

numbered at least 47,500 along the eastern shore. In 1983 the maximum on the eastern shore was about 20,000, with a further 5,000 in other parts of the wetlands. While the sight of thousands of birds in a flock and the roar of beating wings as they take to the air are most impressive, the presence of such large numbers makes counting them a daunting task. Waders are the second largest group, comprising residents, internal migrants and Arctic migrants. They number more than 1,600 throughout autumn and winter.

The greatest numbers and diversity of species in the wetlands are found along the eastern shore of the lake, particularly to the north of the Oporua Floodway.

Waterfowl

The wetlands are important to native waterfowl such as the New Zealand shoveler, which in autumn 1983 rose to a peak of around 3,600 birds. Spectacular rafts of shoveler and other ducks were a feature of the eastern shore at this time. They were largely restricted to shallow water zones and used a narrower range of habitats than the introduced waterfowl.



Paradise shelduck are also abundant, having increased dramatically since hunting stopped in 1968. In January 1983 there were about 1,900 shelduck present, mostly in moulting flocks in Allsops Bay; the majority later moved to the eastern shore before leaving the wetlands in winter. More than 500 grey teal were present at times, often flocking on the eastern shore or favouring secluded ponds near Matthews Lagoon. The other native, the grey duck, was once numerous but now may number as few as 220.

The two introduced species, mallard and black swan, are the most numerous birds, and much of my time in 1983 was spent counting them. Mallards fluctuated widely in numbers — from 15,500 in autumn to fewer than 600 in spring. They fed and loafed in shallows of the lake and ponds except in the hunting season, when they spent most of the day far out on the lake, in safety. Even though black swan numbers have more than halved at the lake since 1977, the 3,000 to 5,000 birds present constitute an important part of the declining national total. Nesting colonies have also disappeared in this period because of wetland drainage and human

disturbance, leaving only solitary nests scattered throughout raupo swamps. Cygnets are reared in the ponds before their parents take them to the lake. Cygnet numbers have dropped from nearly 2,000 in 1977 to 400 in 1983. Swans grazed vegetation in a wide range of habitats from pasture to deep water. Another introduced species, the Canada goose, had a small resident population which increased to 50 birds in winter.

The waterfowl breed at pond margins near the lake, the ducks usually constructing nests in *Carex*, grass clumps or on sheltered mounds at the base of willows, surrounded by water. One small pond in Donald reserve had black swan, grey teal, shoveler and mallard nesting close together.

Waders

Native waders predominate at the Lake Wairarapa wetlands. In 1983 there was a resident population of at least 300 pied stilts rising to more than 1,200 in autumn and winter. Wherever there was shallow water suitable for wading, pied stilts were sure to be found, including pond margins when water levels were low in summer and