

No sooner had we laid the waterproof accelerated concrete than the tides were upon us. Thankfully everything set perfectly.

Eric Parker (Upper Hutt), Ron Freeston (Lower Hutt), John Smith (Mana), Frank Galvin (Wellington), Conrad Pharazyn (Upper Hutt), Tony Burgess (Lower Hutt), Kevin Kerr (Kapiti), Jean Luke (Kapiti), Roy Slack (Mana), and others from the five branches, deserve the highest praise for their diligence and hard gum-booted efforts. Further work from these and other "work parties" will continue over the months ahead before the reserve's planned public opening in late 1986.

Noel Hellyer, Deputy Director Wildlife Service, has shared the overall responsibility for the reserve. Noel firmly pulled on his Forest and Bird member's hat from the beginning of the project and has thrown himself into the thick of planning, site appreciation, and layout and at weekends shared the hard work of fencing, concreting and planting, and in the evenings lecturing on Pauatahanui. The Society and I pay tribute to Noel Hellyer for the privilege of working with him and for his expertise and quietly proffered advice.

In 1984, so that facilities could be built near and yet not on the reserve, the Society purchased Lot 7, a block of 1.8 hectares between the Pauatahanui Hall and the garage, with half the funds provided by the QE II National Trust. The five Wellington branches are now raising funds to re-imburse the Society's initial contribution. This piece of streamside land runs from the roadway opposite the cottage as an access to the reserve. Lot 7 is being landscaped to become an extension of the reserve with tree plantings, ponds, a car and bus park, and picnic ground.

The basins and trackways

As the tides were regularly inundating the large depressions of the old go-cart track (now called the southern basin) and the cricket ground (northern basin), the birds would flock to these areas to feed during high tide and go elsewhere as the water receded. We therefore decide to retain the water by means of inlet sluices which would trap the receding tides and make it worth the birds' while to stay.

A constant level of water can now be maintained within the northern and southern basins. By constructing in each a number of low islands — some with shells and gravel on top, some with low bushes for cover — safe habitat can be established for shoreline birds such as caspian terns, godwits, spur-winged plovers, banded dotterels, sandpipers and pied stilts. Although island construction is still only at a rudimentary stage, they are already being used by such birds — much to our delight.

Suitable shrubs are now being planted as a screen along the tracks. Surprisingly, birds will tolerate a moving head over a shrub screen, but they quickly take to wing if they see any legs and arms

Volunteers erect the hide on the south basin of the reserve.

Photo: Ron Freeston



moving.

Since we wish to encourage undisturbed nesting, roosting and feeding, the tracks have been located along the edge of the reserve behind plantings of low hedges of *plagianthus*, *olearia* and flaxes. Access paths to the hides in the centre of the reserve are being similarly planted.

The habitats

Society members will soon be planting up the stream banks of the Pauatahanui Stream with overhanging ngaio and flaxes with the aim of introducing the rare brown teal.

The extensive rushes and raupo beds provide suitable habitat in places for the fernbird, now absent from the southern North Island. It is proposed to reintroduce these birds with the assistance of the Wildlife Service, after a continuous programme of wild cat, stoat and ferret trapping.

At the southern extremity of the reserve fronting onto Pauatahanui Inlet, the prevailing winds have formed a dune of shells and sand, behind which is a swamp of dense raupo and flaxes. The secretive spotless crane inhabits this

swamp, and is more often heard than seen. I have also heard its low purring note near the lower course of Ration Creek within the Reserve. It is hoped this little swamp rail will prosper with our improvements to the habitat.

Vegetation

The Society aims to protect and enhance the vegetation of the reserve; thus we have adopted very strict rules regarding plantings. For instance all must be cuttings or seedlings from plants already growing on the reserve, or in certain cases from plants we know once grew there, and are still growing nearby within the catchments of the Ration and Pauatahanui Streams which disgorge through the reserve.

Members involved in the planting and maintenance have included Nick Lambrechtsen (Wellington), Henry James (Wellington), Euan Nicol (Wellington), Suzy Williams (Lower Hutt), Paul Hughes (Mana), Stan Butcher (Lower Hutt), and many other Society members, their children and friends from the region.

Records and sketches from the 1840s have given insights into the likely cover in the higher parts of the reserve which have now been invaded by exotic grasses.

It is interesting to note that most exotic plants die when they get their feet in salt water. A stand of dead macrocarpas along the raised bank which once bordered the old cricket ground provides mute evidence of a combined high tide and stream flood which inundated the reserve in the 1960s. The native salt marsh plants have flourished however. A good 80 percent of the reserve is pock-marked with meadows of bright green *Selliera radicans* and *Salicornia australis*, with tidal pools and expanses of *Samolus repens*, the creeping sea primrose, and the yellow *Cotula coronopifolia*.

The historical nature of the area will be enhanced by a karaka grove to be planted on the Forest and Bird land at the entrance to the reserve. Early European travellers recorded the presence of karaka trees here as a food source for the Maoris of the pa on the hillock above. Other parts of this access land along the stream boundary will be planted in typical coastal forest.

PAUATAHANUI RESERVE DEVELOPMENT

