

The Scheme's

..... A Lemon

On the face of it citrus fruit would not appear to be a powerful weapon in the battle to save our estuaries and wetlands from pollution. However, as our Bay of Plenty field officer Ann Graeme demonstrates in this article, the Tauranga branch of Forest and Bird recently discovered that the humble grapefruit proved an important point in wetland protection.



The grapefruit bobbed off down the drain to the river and the watchers plodded after them. Because the tide was low the river was restricted to its narrow banks and the grapefruit whirled along at a fine pace. Only the boats and the lightweights of the party could keep up with them and we envied the pukeko their big splayed feet as we stumbled and sank in the mud.

As the river became wider and shallower and firmer, we waded through beds of Pacific oysters and were glad of our sneakers to protect our feet from the sharp shells. Pacific oysters, new to Tauranga Harbour, are flourishing. They are keenly sought for food, and the ones we opened were large and succulent. Flounder were also abundant. Then we passed a group of rare wrybill plovers as they fossicked in the mud.

The grapefruit travelled about two kilometres to the mouth of the estuary before the rising tide stopped them and pushed them back up the river. As the tide rose still further the river spilt over the mudflats, and the grapefruit dispersed over the estuary. The experiment was finished. We had proved our point.



Effluent from a piggery is discharged out of this flap valve (top left) at low tide into the middle of Tauranga Harbour. When our Tauranga branch heard of plans to increase the discharge rate to 126,000 litres daily, they conducted a novel experiment with grapefruit to see how far the effluent would travel. The grapefruit begins its three-hour journey at the valve (top left) before drifting out into the Wainui River (top centre). The grapefruit prove difficult to keep up with in the mud (top right), but a good number of Forest and Birders manage to follow the trail to the end (above). They proved that the effluent would pollute shellfish beds and have forced the pig farm owners to look at land-based treatment.