



## Seahorse Survey Underway

Fears that New Zealand seahorses will suffer a similar fate to those elsewhere is prompting the Western Underwater Research Team in Auckland to undertake a national survey of their numbers and distribution. The seahorse is popular in Asia, medicinally and in the pet trade, leading to a drastic fall in its numbers in some parts of the world.

Seahorses are more common than apparent; their colours blend with the seaweeds they frequent. The fish can remain motionless except for its fluttering gills.

Biologically, they are bony fishes, with a swim bladder but no teeth or stomach. They eat tiny crustaceans such as brine shrimps and fish fry which are swallowed whole.

Their breeding is unusual. The males carry the young.

Couples court and stay together while brooding. The

female lays sticky strings of eggs and deposits them in the male's pouch where they are fertilised. After 10 days to six weeks, depending on the species, the young are ejected from the pouch. The young then fend for themselves.

A special permit is required to take seahorses from the wild and to date this has only been granted for educational or scientific purposes. Survey Seahorse 2000 invites divers to record the occurrence of the fish underwater, and for 'beachcombers' to record any dead specimens they find washed up on the shore.

To get more information about Survey Seahorse 2000 phone (09) 827 7008. If you want to contribute to the survey contact Mike Percy at Survey Seahorse 2000, PO Box 20-296, Glen Eden, Waitakere City. Email: seahorse2000@xtra.co.nz

## National Trust for Wetlands Formed

A higher profile for our vanishing wetlands is sought by a new trust founded in the Waikato. The National Wetland Trust of New Zealand is the product of a millennium initiative of the Waikato Conservation Board which in 1998 promoted the concept, to raise public awareness of wetlands and provide a central point for sharing wet-

lands information.

Among its promoters is Gordon Stephenson, chair of South Waikato Forest and Bird, a distinguished life member of the Society, and author of *Wetlands, Discovering New Zealand's Shy Places* (Government Printer 1986).

'The Waikato is an appropriate place to start a National Wetland Centre because this

region is, in many respects, the "wetland centre" of the country,' he says. 'There are three wetlands in Waikato registered as having international significance under the Ramsar Convention of the World Conservation Union.' (The Ramsar wetlands are the Kopuatai Peat Dome, Whangamarino Swamp, and the Miranda mudflats of the Firth

of Thames.)

'The Trust has a vision of New Zealand's wetlands being restored, enhanced and appreciated,' Gordon Stephenson says.

To do this it hopes to establish a centre as a place for education, and for appreciating the wetlands.

It also plans to establish wetland trails, both regionally and nationally.

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