

Wetlands you can visit in the Wellington Region

The Wellington Region at the base of the North Island lies on an active fault-zone, comprising an extensive valley nestled between two coastal ranges. Its wetlands, some formed by earthquake activity uplifting former harbour or blocking stream valleys, include estuaries and saltmarsh, swamps, lakes and bogs.

Estuaries (including salt marshes) are the most productive of all wetlands, and especially rich in animal life. Many coastal fisheries depend on estuaries as fish spawning grounds.

Most wetlands on private land are **swamps**. They are more fertile than bogs because the water flowing through them brings silt and organic matter. Swamp water levels fluctuate seasonally. Typical swamp plants include raupo, purei and harakeke (flax). The organic matter these plants produce encourages large populations of aquatic invertebrates including insects, water-snails, crustaceans and worms, and vertebrates like frogs and birds.

Lakes are permanent areas of fresh water. Open water areas with shallow margins surrounded by swamp vegetation provide important water fowl habitat. Of the significant number of lakes in the Wellington region, the largest is Lake Wairarapa.

Bogs are rare in the Wellington region. Fed only by rainfall, they are low in fertility and are acidic. They are home to a variety of specialist plant life, with the wettest dominated by sphagnum moss. Drier bogs support a variety of plants including sedges, rushes, umbrella ferns and manuka.

Aside from the extensive Lake Wairarapa complex, less than 3% of the natural wetlands in the region remain. Most were drained between 1920 and 1980 for pastoral land use, and most remaining freshwater wetland are now less than 10 hectares in extent, however they continue to support a range of native species including brown mudfish, recorded in wetlands of the Wairarapa.

Today Wellington has an estimated 10,500 ha of wetlands remaining. Over 7,000 ha is the water surface of Lake Wairarapa alone.

The Wellington wetlands directory is sponsored by Greater Wellington (the Wellington Regional Council).



Some of the better-known wetlands in the Region include:





- The Lake Wairarapa complex comprising shallow Lake Wairarapa, brackish Lake Onoke and their associated extensive wetlands, recently nominated our 7th Ramsar wetland.
- Pauatahanui estuary near Porirua
- Carter Scenic Reserve - an ancient kahikatea (white pine) swamp forest.

Greater Wellington is helping some landowners and community groups to restore wetlands across the Wellington region through its Healthy waterways programme. Many of the Regional Parks that GW manages also have spectacular examples of natural wetlands such as the Parangarahu Lakes in East Harbour Regional Park and the inter-dune wetlands at Queen Elizabeth Park.

Wellington Wetland Agencies

Wellington Regional Council www.gw.govt.nz
 Department of Conservation www.doc.govt.nz
 Fish and Game NZ www.fishandgame.org.nz

¹ ★★★★★ Must see ★★★★★ Worth a special visit ★★★ Worth a short detour ★★ Plan to visit if passing ★ Short stop if passing

1Name / type	Description/ special features	Access, further information
<p>Wairarapa Moana/ Lake Wairarapa/</p> <p>Lake, turf, reedland</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>Lake Onoke, Lake Wairarapa and their wetlands form the largest wetland system (>10,000 ha) in the lower North Island. Important habitat > 100 bird species, large numbers of migratory species and resident waterfowl and fish, including several threatened species. Significant turf plant community. Recently nominated as a Ramsar (internationally significant) wetland.</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wairarapa/places/wairarapa-moana-wetlands/</p> <p><i>Lake Wairarapa wetlands are large, with many access points see website above for options. To get to Lake Domain, turn off State Highway 2 at the start of Featherston onto the Featherston-Martinborough Road (SH53), right onto Murphy's Line and right onto Lake Domain Road.</i></p>
<p>Keith Taylor Wetland</p> <p>Water reservoir</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>Zelandia is a pest-free reserve in central Wellington. It includes a small water reservoir (Keith Taylor) with a restored shallow wetland margin used by shags, scaup, fish and re-introduced rare species including takahe. Entrance fee applies (not-for-profit Trust).</p> 	<p>https://www.visitzealandia.com/</p> <p><i>Short drive or bus ride from central Wellington. Access the Visitor Centre at the end of Waiapu Road.</i></p>
<p>Nga Manu Nature Reserve</p> <p>Forest and wetland complex</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>At 13 hectares this is the largest single remaining remnant of original coastal lowland swamp forest on the Kapiti Coast, with plenty of mature kahikatea, swamp maire and pukatea trees. Native bird aviaries, eel feeding. Lookout tower.</p> 	<p>www.ngamanu.co.nz/</p> <p><i>Access off Ngarara Road, Waikanae. Follow the signpost from State Highway 1 at Waikanae. About 50 minutes drive north of Wellington. Entrance fee applies (not-for-profit Trust).</i></p>
<p>Waikoko Wetland (Mana Island)</p> <p>Lowland freshwater wetland</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>Scientific Reserve 2.5 km from the mainland. Waikoko wetland was restored to provide habitat for North Island fernbird, brown mudfish and a range of threatened plants.</p> 	<p>www.manaisland.org.nz/</p> <p><i>Visitors are welcome to Mana Island. Access may be made only in the bay between the old woolshed and the wharf. Boats must remain offshore after visitors have landed. 'Friends of Mana Island' sometimes run day excursions with a guided tour of the island.</i></p>

KEY



Walks



Birdlife



Boating



Fishing



Highly scenic



Info centre



Interpretation panels



Lookout/ bird hide



Picnic area








Accommodation







Swimming or snorkelling

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<p>Pauatahanui Inlet</p> <p>Estuary</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>At over 4000 hectares this is the largest and least modified estuarine area in the southern North Island and the only large area of salt-marsh and seagrass in the Wellington Region. Forest & Bird Society has created a series of shallow ponds, tracks, and hides, planted native species, and established a visitor centre.</p> 	<p>www.forestandbird.org.nz/projects/pauatahanui-wildlife-reserve</p> <p>30 km north of Wellington. Public access to the Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Reserve is at #5 Paekakariki Hill Road at Pauatahanui village from State Highway 58.</p>
<p>Parangarahu Lakes, East Harbour Regional Park</p> <p>Freshwater lakes</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>Kohangapiripiri and Kohangatera Lakes are across the harbour from Wellington airport. This is one of the largest and least modified lowland wetland complexes in the lower North Island. Home to bittern, spotless crane and rare plants e.g. <i>Lepilaena bilocularis</i>, <i>Ruppia polycarpa</i>. Stock were removed from farmland around the lakes in 2004.</p> 	<p>www.gw.govt.nz/parangarahu-lakes-area/</p> <p>www.gw.govt.nz/parangarahu-lakes-area-co-management-plan-2/</p> <p>East Harbour Regional Park. Two hour walk or 25 minute cycle ride along the flat coastal road from the large Burdens Gate Car park at the end of Muratai Road, Eastbourne. Bike hire is available during weekends and over summer.</p>
<p>Carter Scenic Reserve</p> <p>Freshwater swamp and semi-swamp forest</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>Situated on two old river terraces this 30 ha complex of grass, wetland, forest and shrubland was once typical of the Wairarapa. Contains rare brown mud fish. Rare plants including the shrub <i>Coprosma pedicellata</i> are being reintroduced. Short walks.</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wairarapa/places/carter-scenic-reserve/</p> <p>From Carterton follow Park Road to the end, turn left into Carters Line and right into Gladstone Road to Carter Scenic Reserve. Reserve approx 3 km along Gladstone Road. The car park is about 500 metres along the driveway.</p>
<p>Fensham Reserve</p> <p>Swamp forest and sedgeland</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>This reserve contains one of the few remaining lowland swamp forests on the Wairarapa Plains. The 1-hour loop track passes through kahikatea and swamp maire forest.</p> 	<p>www.forestandbird.org.nz/projects/fensham-reserve-carterton</p> <p>Belvedere & Cobham Roads, 3 kms West of Carterton</p>
<p>Taupo swamp</p> <p>Flaxland</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>One of the largest wetlands in the region, this 30 ha former inlet of Porirua Harbour, raised by earthquakes, was planted with varieties of flax in the 1880s. Rare plants are found here and Taupo Stream is habitat for native fish, including giant kokopu.</p> 	<p>www.tauposwamp.org/</p> <p>https://qeiiationaltrust.org.nz/taupo-swamp-an-outstanding-wetland-treasure/</p> <p>Visible from SH1 North of Plimmerton (about 26km north of Wellington). Parking available.</p>

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<p>Waikanae Estuary</p> <p>Freshwater lake and saltwater lagoon</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>Freshwater lakelets, saltwater lagoons, tidal flats and salt marsh surrounded by dunes at the mouth of the Waikanae River. Significant habitat for waders, seabirds and waterfowl (> 60 species breed here). Banded dotterel, Caspian tern, wrybill, dabchick, variable oystercatcher and spoonbill present. A local restoration project is underway.</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/wellington-kapiti/places/waikanae-area/waikanae-estuary/</p> <p>Beware of quick sand in this area! <i>The mouth of the Waikanae River splits the Kapiti Coast townships of Waikanae and Paraparaumu. The main entrance to the Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve is on Manly St North, Paraparaumu Beach.</i></p>
<p>Waitangi Park</p> <p>Freshwater reservoir</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>Small (<1 ha) constructed urban wetland / stormwater filter. A great example of coastal dryland and coastal wetland ecosystems in an inner city setting and an example of how wetlands can be used in Low Impact Urban Design to mitigate the effects of storm water.</p> 	<p>https://envirohistorynz.com/2010/12/12/waitangi-park-an-urban-wetland-recreated/</p> <p>http://www.waal.co.nz/wsud/waitangi-park/</p> <p><i>Wellington Waterfront, near Te Papa Museum and Chafers Marina. Between Cable, Chaffers and Herd Sts and Oriental Parade.</i></p>
<p>Makara Estuary</p> <p>Estuary</p> <p>★★</p>	<p>The estuary at the mouth of Makara Stream on Wellington's rugged west coast is one of the few remaining salt marsh areas in the region. Habitat for a range of coastal and wetland bird species including occasional white heron. Locals are restoring the estuary and undertake regular beach clean-ups.</p> 	<p>www.gwrc.govt.nz/assets/WRS/Biodiversity/4-Makara-Coast-and-Estuary.pdf</p> <p><i>25 km from downtown Wellington. Head past the Botanical Gardens to Karori West, from the end of Karori Rd, turn into Makara Road and head west to Makara Beach. The estuary is visible from Estuary St or Makara Beach.</i></p>
<p>Waimeha Reserve</p> <p>Lowland freshwater wetland</p> <p>★★</p>	<p>Waimeha Reserve is surrounded by houses and is no longer regularly flooded by the Waikanae River. Nonetheless, it is a picturesque and relatively diverse lowland / coastal swamp with large areas of raupo, sedgeland, toetoe and a small lagoon. A local community group maintains the wetland.</p> 	<p>www.naturespace.org.nz/groups/waimeha-lagoon-restoration-group-and-waimeha-beach-dune-restoration-group</p> <p><i>Waimeha Reserve is in Waikanae, on the Kapiti Coast (about 50 minutes drive north of Wellington). Best entrance to the reserve is on Queens Road, Waikanae Beach</i></p>

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