



QEI National Trust
Open Space New Zealand
Ngā Kairauhi Papa

Taupo Swamp: A wetland of national importance



Taupo Swamp: Protected in perpetuity by a QEI covenant

A rare survivor

Taupo Swamp has, amazingly, survived more than 150 years of human-induced change.

Attempts to drain it for farming failed. Instead, the harakeke (flax) was maintained and commercially harvested.

Road and rail construction was also a threat. Fortunately, both Centennial Highway (now State Highway 1) and the main trunk railway line skirted the main swamp to avoid the poorly drained peaty soils.

Today, the 30 hectare wetland area is the largest remaining harakeke (flax) swamp in the Wellington region.



Looking south over Taupo Swamp, 1937–38
Major earthworks occurred with the newly constructed Centennial Highway (left) and the main trunk railway line (right). Note the central drainage ditch, which failed to drain the swamp.

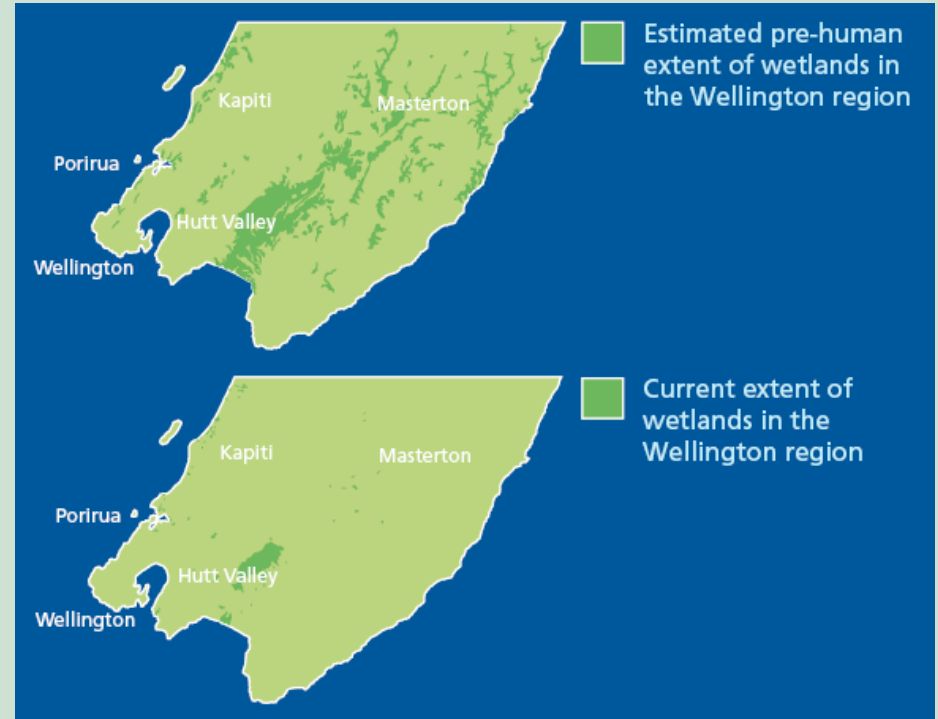
Photo: Pataka Porirua Museum

Safeguarding Taupo Swamp forever

Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII) purchased Taupo Swamp in 1986 to protect its special values.

The Trust is grateful to Porirua City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council, individuals and the local community who contributed to the original purchase and continue to assist with ongoing management.

QEII also thanks the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board, WWF–New Zealand and the Biodiversity Condition Fund for restoration funding.



Wetlands in the Wellington region have dwindled since human settlement. Less than 6% remain in the region and the surviving wetlands contain precious biodiversity.

Maps courtesy Greater Wellington Regional Council.

Harakeke: A multi-use plant

Harakeke, New Zealand's native flax, has many uses

Māori used fibre from the long, strappy leaves for making clothes, whāriki (mats), ropes and kete (baskets). All parts of the plant were useful for dyes of various colours. The roots and the flax gum found at the base of the leaves were used for medicinal remedies, and the nectar was a valued food sweetener.

A thriving flax industry sprang up in New Zealand during the 1860s. It supplied local and overseas markets with such products as rope, upholstery, sacking and floor coverings until the 1970s.

After attempts to drain Taupo Swamp failed, European settlers began planting flax in the late 1880s to hasten its natural spread. With help from Ngāti Toa, several different flax varieties were introduced to improve the quality of the fibre.

The harvested flax was transported north to the Foxton flax mills. The last load was in 1960.





Women manufacturing harakeke garments and implements at the Taupo Pa, Plimmerton.

Lithograph: George French Angas, 1847.
PUBL-0014-59, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.



Man harvesting flax with a scythe during the 1910s. The flax leaves were tied into bundles for transporting to the flax mills.

Photo: G- 9565-1/1, Agriculture Department Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.



At Foxton, the flax leaves were scraped and washed to extract the fibres, which were then hung out to dry.

Photo: F- 145795-1/2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

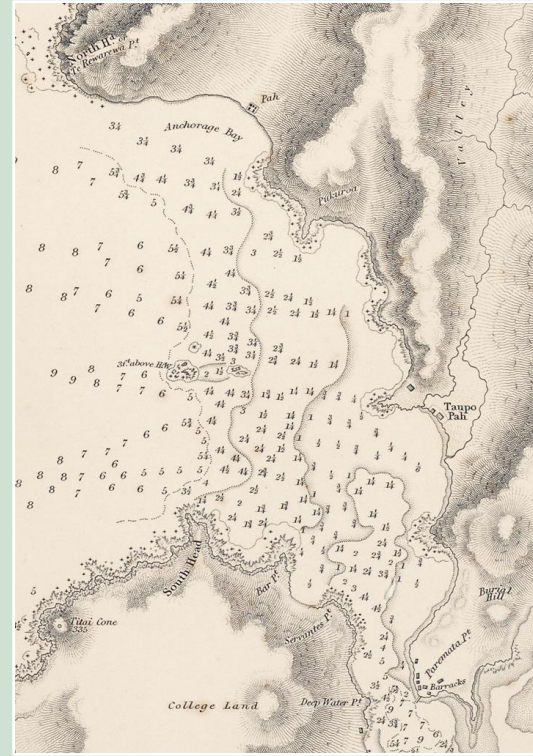
Taupo Pa



Taupo Pa, 1847

Taupo Stream can be seen flowing out just this side of the palisades. The stream flowed through Taupo Swamp and the lagoon – rich sources of food and fibre for Ngāti Toa.

Lithograph: George French Angas, 1847.
PUBL-0014-57, Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington, New Zealand.



Admiralty chart drawn by Captain Stokes, 1850, showing Taupo Pa where Plimmerton Beach is today. Ngāti Toa built the pa in the late 1830s–1840s on a point of land between the sea and a large lagoon.

The surrounding water was a natural defence. In 1855, the Wairarapa earthquake raised the land near Plimmerton, causing the lagoon to drain away, and the pa was abandoned.

Chart: MapColl 832.47aj/1850/Acc.12431, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

Royal visit

The Trust was established in 1977 and was named after Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second to commemorate her Silver Jubilee.

In 1986, the Queen (centre) visited Taupo Swamp to see the Trust's work first-hand.

Also pictured: Margaret Shields, MP, and Hon Les Gandar, Chairperson of the QEII National Trust Board.



Precious biodiversity

Taupo Swamp is one of the few wetlands in the Wellington ecological district where the vegetation is largely indigenous.

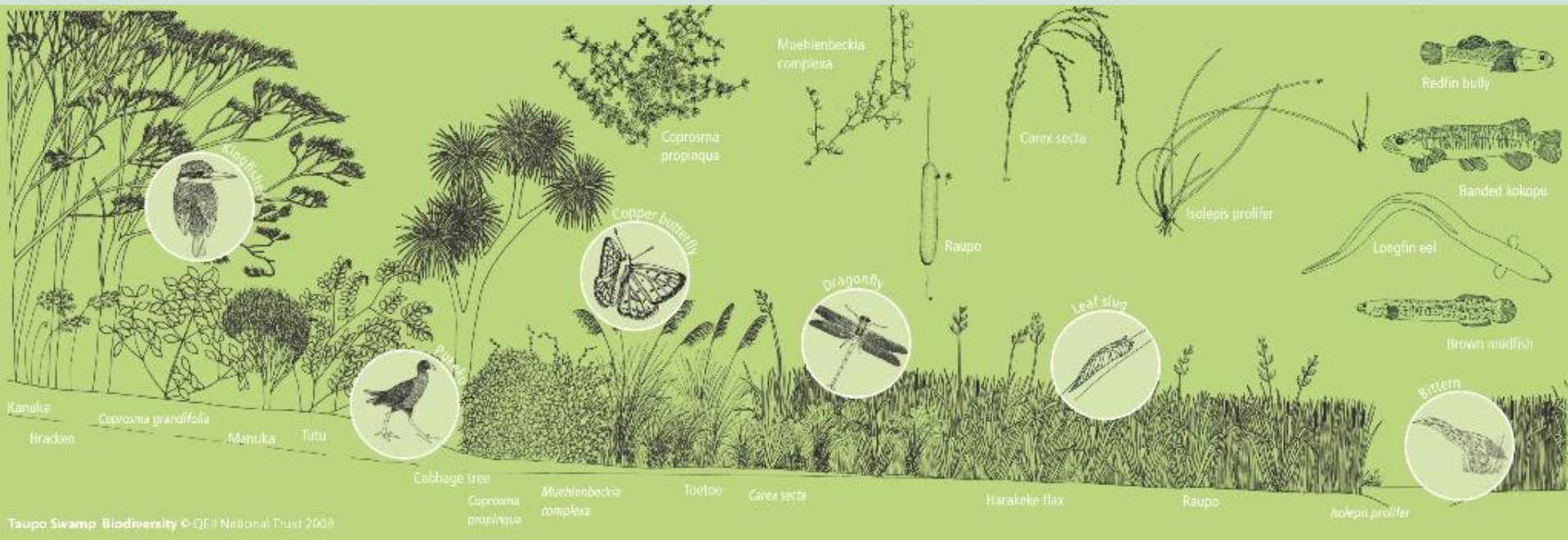
Variations in ground and water levels have led to diverse plant communities developing.

In the lowest places, flax and raupo keep their feet permanently wet, while toetoe, bracken fern and native shrubs prefer the drier conditions around the edges.

The swamp is also home to native fish, birds and insects.

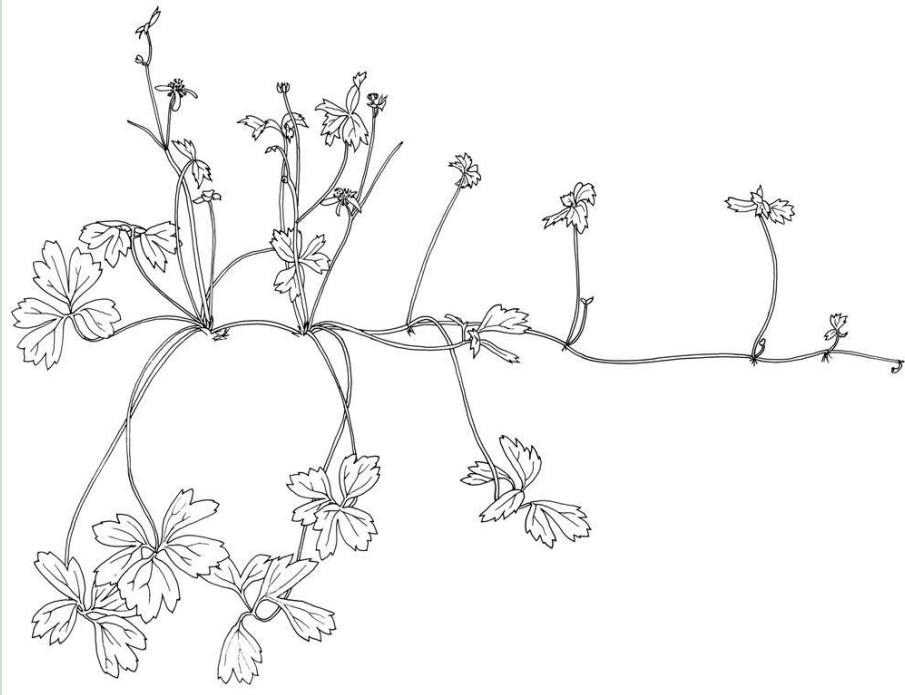


Taupo Swamp: Diverse indigenous communities



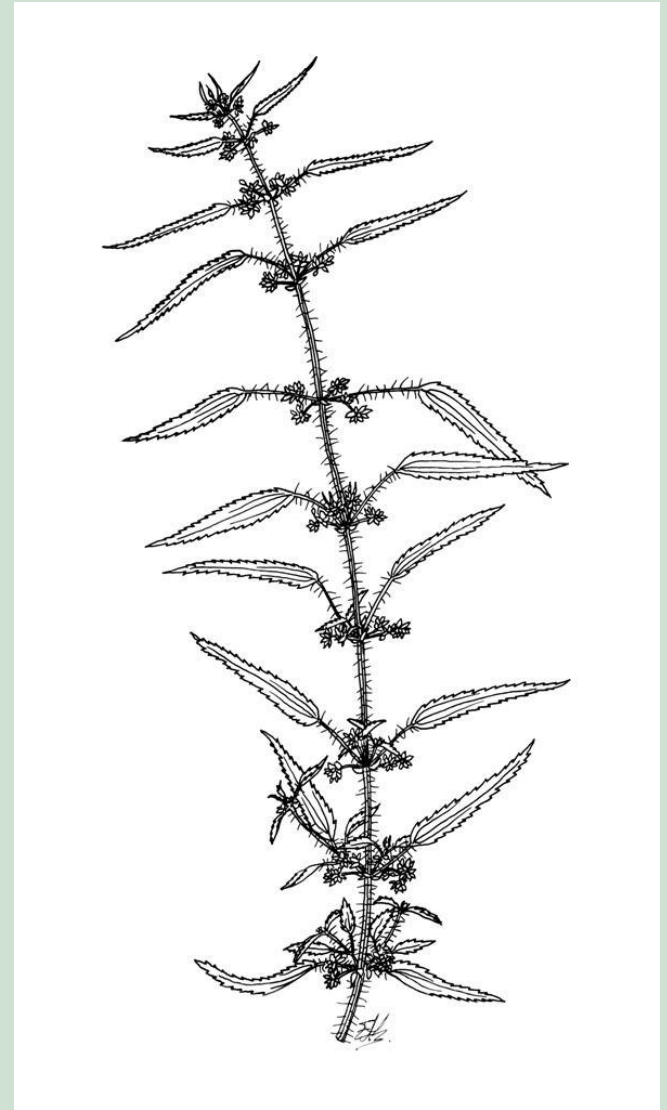
Rare plants

These herbaceous species occur in the deeper parts of Taupo Swamp but are rarely seen.



Ranunculus macropus

Swamp buttercup



Urtica linearifolia

Swamp nettle

Taupo Swamp needs our help to survive

Maintaining the swamp's life blood – water

The swamp is vulnerable to changing activities in the surrounding landscape that could affect the quantity and quality of water draining into it.

Increased run-off and sedimentation could affect the water table (ground water level).

Chemical pollution from the adjacent road, truck stop and rail is a threat.



Run-off from the highway and catchment is collected in soak pits to separate sediment and toxic substances, such as oil, before it enters the swamp.

Combating exotic newcomers – weeds

Exotic weeds threaten to invade the swamp's special native plant communities.

Blackberry, willow, gorse, broom, Japanese honeysuckle and Darwin's barberry are the worst invaders.



Gorse and blackberry were cut and sprayed before planting native seedlings.

A positive future for Taupo Swamp – protected by a QEII open space covenant in perpetuity



As part of the SH1 –widening project, the Ara Harakeke Pathway was developed to provide safe public access beside the swamp, with roadside planting to buffer the swamp from the road.



This fish ladder was installed at the weir in 2005 so native fish could more easily migrate between the sea and the swamp for spawning – a necessary part of their life cycle.

The ladder was a collaborative project between QEII, Greater Wellington Regional Council, Porirua City Council, Ngāti Toa and the local community.