



Autumn Newsletter | March 2025

There's been a huge amount of progress at Orkney Wetland and across the catchment over the past few months, thanks to the dedication of our farmers, volunteers, and supporters. From celebrating World Wetlands Day with a fantastic turnout, to final construction touches on the wetland and the installation of the new Orkney sign, it's been an exciting time.

The wetland is now fully connected, with creeks flowing through nearly a kilometre of ponds and thriving *Carex secta* plantings. Bird monitoring and trapping efforts are paying off, with ongoing predator control and the arrival of new cygnets! Meanwhile, we're continuing to work with farmers on fencing grants and sediment management plans to protect waterways across the catchment.

Looking ahead, the new walkway and viewing platform are nearly complete, and we're excited to welcome Clyde and Omakau schools for visits soon. If you'd like to get involved in bird monitoring, predator trapping, or our upcoming community events, we'd love to hear from you.

Thanks for being part of this journey — your support is making a real difference.

Nicola McGrouther, Thomsons Catchment Project Manager.



What's been happening

Backyard Gardeners Supporting Wetland Restoration

The first Backyard Growers workshop took place on Wednesday 26 February, bringing together a fantastic group of locals keen to grow native plants for the Orkney Wetland restoration.

Held at Pete's Yard in Ōmakau, the workshop was a hands-on session where participants potted up over 300 flax seedlings. These seedlings will now be looked after in backyards across the community for a year before being planted in the wetland, playing a vital role in restoring native biodiversity.

A huge thank you to Jo Wakelin for growing the seedlings and to our dedicated growers: Johanna, Nikki and Roger, Kim and Jack, Lorna, Colleen, Leo and Alice. Your enthusiasm and effort made this event a great success.

Restoring wetlands is about creating a healthier environment for future generations. Wetlands help improve water quality, provide habitat for native wildlife, and act as natural flood protection. By growing plants at home, backyard growers are making a direct contribution to these efforts. This initiative is a simple and rewarding way to be part of a meaningful conservation project, whether you have a green thumb or are just starting out.

If you missed out but would like to get involved, it's not too late. We can set plants aside for you — just send a text to 027 493 9500 or email thomsonscatchment@gmail.com to arrange pickup.



The Story Behind the Name

The Orkney Wetland takes its name from the McLeod family farm, which in turn was named after Scotland's Orkney Islands — the homeland of the first farmers to work this land. Robyn and Pete McLeod chose the name to honour the region's history and those who came before them.

Located in the Manuherekia catchment, the five-hectare wetland has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from a willow-surrounded area into a thriving ecosystem with over 40,000 native plants and rare bird species. In October 2024, it reached a major conservation milestone when it was officially protected under a QEII National Trust restoration agreement.

Thanks to the dedication of the McLeod family and the Manuherekia Catchment Group, this special place is safeguarded for generations to come.



Have You Seen the New Orkney Wetland Sign?

If you've been along the rail trail recently, you might have spotted a new addition — our stunning Orkney Wetland sign.

A huge thank you to Kim and Steve Hore and the team at Cen Eng for their incredible work in creating this sign. Now installed on the rocks overlooking the wetland, it not only marks this special place but also highlights the ongoing efforts to restore and protect it.

Next time you're on the trail, take a moment to enjoy the view and the sign that celebrates Orkney Wetland's journey.



Final Touches Complete at Orkney Wetland

More great news to share! In February, the two main creeks — diverted for the past two years during wetland construction — were finally reintroduced, allowing water to flow naturally through nearly 1km of ponds and *Carex secta* before exiting near the rail trail bridge.

This marks the final step in shaping the wetland's ecosystem, which will continue to mature, absorbing nutrients and enhancing water quality over time. A huge thank you to Cody West and the team at S & B Civil for their dedication — not only in constructing the wetland but also in completing the finishing touches, tidying up the surrounding areas, and even building a new track on the hill.

With these final pieces in place, Orkney Wetland is set to thrive as a restored habitat for years to come.



Supporting Farmers with Fencing and Sediment Management

We're currently working alongside farmers in the catchment to complete fencing grants and develop sediment management plans. This initiative not only supports positive practices but also helps identify any areas where improvements could further reduce sediment runoff.

By collaborating with farmers, we can highlight the great work already being done while ensuring that targeted solutions are in place where needed. We're halfway through our visits — if we haven't been in touch yet, feel free to reach out. Phone Nicola on 027 493 9500 or Haines on 021 448 001.

Bird Monitoring and Trapping Update

The bird monitoring and trapping teams are doing an incredible job, with regular catches of ferrets and hedgehogs, and a stoat recently caught, helping to protect native wildlife. Their efforts are making a real difference in maintaining a safe habitat for our growing bird population.

Excitingly, our resident swan pair has successfully hatched their cygnets! After weeks of careful nest-building, adjusting its elevation as the wetland filled, the swans have welcomed four fluffy new additions. Mum and Dad are keeping a close watch over their little ones as they explore their new home.

We'll keep you updated as they grow — keep an eye out for them next time you visit the wetland.





Celebrating World Wetlands Day

World Wetlands Day at Orkney Wetland was a fantastic success, with 45 people attending — many visiting for the first time. It was a great opportunity to share the wetland's progress and highlight the important conservation work happening in the catchment.

Attendees learned about the ongoing predator trapping efforts led by our dedicated wetland trapping team and gained insights into how the wetland functions. A guided walk through the area allowed everyone to see firsthand the transformation of the landscape, with the towering *Carex secta* nearly overtopping some of the kids!



A huge thank you to the Otago Regional Council for their support, with Becky Clements joining us and providing a tent that offered much-needed shade. We also appreciate everyone who came along to celebrate this special place.

Looking ahead, exciting developments are on the horizon, including a brand-new public viewing platform that will allow even more people to appreciate the wetland's beauty and ecological value.

What's next?

There's plenty happening in Thomsons catchment over the next few months.

▶ Walkway and Viewing Platform Progress

If you've been near the rail trail, you'll have seen the new walkway taking shape. Next, Andrew Kerr and the Breen team will be building a viewing platform overlooking the wetland in March, with information signs to follow soon after. We're aiming to open the hill track to the public by mid-April!

▶ Trout Removal

Further trout removal will be carried out above the fish barrier in Thomsons Creek to support native fish populations.

▶ Sediment Management Plans

These continue to roll out across the catchment, helping identify and address potential runoff issues.

▶ School Visits

Clyde and Omakau schools will be visiting the wetland and Thomsons Creek, giving students a chance to learn about freshwater ecosystems firsthand.

▶ Bird Monitoring & Trapping

Predator control efforts continue, and we're always keen for new volunteers. If you'd like to get involved, text or call Kim on 027 288 8484.

▶ Trapping Info Session

Want to learn more about predator trapping for your own property or to help at Orkney Wetland? The trapping team has invited DOC's Dave Goodman to Muddy Creek Café on Friday 28 March at 9am. All are welcome!

There's heaps to look forward to — keep an eye on our Facebook page for more updates.

