



# The Inlet

Newsletter for Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet

AUGUST

2015

*The Inlet* is a newsletter that brings together local and regional news affecting the Pauatahanui Inlet and its environs.

*The Inlet* comes out three times a year and current or back issues can be downloaded from our website.

*The newsletter includes items of concern that affect the area as well as general interest topics for everyone.*

*Please contact us if you would like to contribute to **The Inlet**.*

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## FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

It is often said that the only thing in life that never changes is change itself and, as we report in this edition of *The Inlet*, this fact is no less true in the life of our committee in 2015. The annual AGM, which is a major event in our calendar, held on 25 June, saw two of our longstanding and hardworking committee members, Dick Fernyhough and Beverly Fairfax, stand down as they moved on to different things. Fortunately for us they will not be too far away and both have already been very helpful in answering questions and giving advice as we manage the transition to a new treasurer and also to a new secretary.



We are also very fortunate that this transition has been made painless as both these roles, we are delighted to report, have now been filled by two new recruits who come to us with great pedigrees. We are extremely happy to have Stephen O'Neil and Helen Reilly joining the committee in these capacities. There is more on these changes later in this issue of the newsletter.

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I would now like to offer my personal congratulations to those responsible for initiating and making the recently released '*Home to Harbour: Maota i le Talafatai*', the Samoan language extension of the 2011 Living Waters documentary series. It was presented and researched by Larissa Toelupe, directed and produced by Cheryl Cameron and filmed and edited by Matty Warmington.

I was privileged to see the documentary on a large screen at the launch where mayor Nick Leggett addressed the audience. He said: 'These waterways are at the heart of Porirua City and we all need to play our part in protecting them. We have a big Samoan population within Porirua and this new documentary helps reach that community in their own language with messages that will resonate and engage them.'

At the end of the screening my reaction was that the film is superb in every respect, particularly Larissa's on-screen presentation. Larissa is a trustee of the Porirua Harbour Trust and a member of the Te Awarua-O-Porirua Whaitua Committee.

You can see the film (with subtitles) at <https://vimeo.com/126013162>.

**Tony Shaw**

## 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's AGM was held at St Mary's Church in Whitby on 25 June and the meeting was significant in that it marked the loss of both Beverly Fairfax and Dick Fernyhough who, after many years of service to the Guardians, did not stand for re-election. They will be sorely missed as both have made major contributions during their time on the committee.

Beverly started her involvement as webmaster in 2005 and was elected to the committee in 2009. She subsequently increased our profile in the local press by writing interesting stories about our activities. Beverly's lively and creative approach, combined with an enormous amount of work, has resulted in the transformation of the website and the membership brochures, and the expansion of the scope and profile of the photographic competition and many other facets of GOPI's activities.

Dick joined the committee in 2009 and has been treasurer since 2010. Dick's custodianship of the accounts and finances has been excellent. He has guided us through the exercise of becoming a registered charity, the changes to the national accounting standards for 'not-for-profit' organisations and new financial reporting standards for registered charities.

Fortunately, all other members of the committee were re-elected for the coming year and, in addition, we were delighted to accept a nomination for Stephen O'Neil, who has a firm background in accounting, for the now vacant position of treasurer.

Following the formal part of the meeting the 30 members present were treated to a very informative talk from the widely respected ornithologist Ian Armitage. This talk was so interesting and relevant to the interests of our wider membership that a feature article summarising the presentation has been included in this issue of the newsletter.

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## OUR 2015-2016 COMMITTEE

Although there have been some changes since the meeting (see below) the following officers and committee members were elected at our 2015 AGM.

Tony Shaw	Chairperson
Denis Fairfax	Acting Secretary
Stephen O'Neil	Treasurer
Michael Waldron	Newsletter Editor
John Wells	Committee
Janet Ryan	Committee
Mary Dinniss	Committee

At the conclusion of the AGM we still had the long-vacant position of secretary to fill but we can now report excellent news on that front. Helen Reilly, who many will recall was the name behind the book *Pauatahanui A Local History*, has now joined us as our new secretary. At the AGM Denis Fairfax had offered to continue as acting secretary until we could fill the vacant position and although his offer is now no longer required Denis will be continuing as a general member of the committee.

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## OUR COMMITTEE BURSTS TO LIFE

*We have already mentioned how pleased we are that the vacant positions of secretary and treasurer have now been filled. As is normal with new committee members we have asked each of them to tell us a little about themselves.*

### Helen Reilly - Secretary



Helen Reilly's career as a teacher spanned 30 years, ranging from primary school to high school in Scotland and South Africa and then, in New Zealand, to university (Massey and Victoria) where she taught English literature and academic writing. In 2003, she re-qualified as a public historian. Since then she has written and published five books, four energy histories and one local history – *Pauatahanui A local history*.

Helen and husband Robert have been living in Whitby since 1995. She says, 'When we moved south, we initially intended to buy a house in Wellington, where we worked, but we fell in love with Pauatahanui Inlet and decided this was where we wanted to live.'

### Stephen O'Neil - Treasurer

Stephen grew up on a hill country farm in Nelson and has always enjoyed the 'Great Outdoors'. It was only during his OE, living in London, that he realised how much he missed living near the sea. On his return to New Zealand he settled in Wellington, moving to Camborne 3 years ago, and may have been seen by some locals on stage at Mana Little Theatre. From his home he now looks out over the beautiful Pauatahanui Inlet and often enjoys spotting spoonbills with his family while walking its shores.

Being a chartered accountant with over 20 years' experience, he brings a specific set of skills to the committee and he is looking forward to learning more about the issues involved in providing guardianship to the Inlet.





## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INLET TO BIRDS

### *Our AGM Guest Speaker presentation*

*On the evening of our AGM in June we had the pleasure of introducing Ian Armitage, a member of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand council and formerly the Society's Wellington Regional Representative. Ian entertained us with a fascinating look at how important Pauatahanui Inlet is as a home for wetland birdlife using a variety of statistical information gathered over 30 years by members of the Society. This is a summary of his talk.*

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Ecologically speaking Pauatahanui Inlet is one of several coastal and estuarine habitats to be found in the lower North Island that are colonised by wetland and oceanic birds. Other areas of significance are Lake Wairarapa, Lake Onoke, Wairau Lagoons and the Manawatu and Ohau Rivers. Pauatahanui, however, is unique in that it is the largest wetland in the south-western part of the North Island and is important as a staging post for birds migrating between the North and South Islands. Although fewer species of wetland birds, and smaller numbers of birds overall, visit Pauatahanui Inlet compared with Lake Wairarapa and the Wairau Lagoons, it is nonetheless an important site of regional and national significance. What makes Pauatahanui Inlet so important ecologically is the diversity of habitats that it contains, giving it the ability to attract numerous bird species all year round.



*Photo courtesy of Ian Armitage*

Ecologically valuable habitats in Pauatahanui Inlet include the salt marshes at stream estuaries, particularly at the Pauatahanui and Kakaho Streams, shell banks around the margins of the Inlet, roosting sites (mostly provided by artificially constructed roosts now that so many of the shoreline trees have disappeared) and sand and mud banks that are exposed at low tide.

The bird populations of Pauatahanui Inlet have been monitored now for 30 years by members of Birds New Zealand, the popular name for the Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. Starting in 1982 the society began surveying all bird species in two-year blocks at 10 year intervals, covering six specific areas of the Inlet. Four such surveys have now been completed, enabling a comprehensive report on changes in the occurrence and population of bird species in the Inlet to be made.

In explaining the accumulated data Ian Armitage gave the AGM a very informative presentation to illustrate how the Inlet has influenced the populations of wetland birds over this time.

From 1982 to 2014 a total of 35 wetland, estuarine and oceanic species have been regularly observed, with four others having been seen at other times while remaining unrecorded on the scheduled surveys.

Of the wetland species 12 are classified as 'Threatened' under the New Zealand Threat Classification System while eight more are 'At Risk'. Threatened species include the white heron and shore plover, while among the 'At Risk' group are the South Island pied oystercatcher, pied stilt and the Royal spoonbill.

## *The Importance of the Inlet to Birds.....cont.*

The area is not of course populated just by wetland birds and the survey has also identified 22 land bird species living in or visiting the Inlet. So the total number of individual species of bird that have been seen over this time exceeds sixty.

During the 30 years of observations there have been significant fluctuations in the number of wetland bird species recorded and it is interesting to note that in 1983 there were fewer species than there are today, hinting at an increased habitat variety. Seasonally there are always more species present in the May/June winter period than October/November, demonstrating the overwintering value of the Inlet.

Possibly a more significant negative trend, however, is in the total population of birds recorded which, for the winter period, has fallen sharply since counting began from a peak of nearly 2000 on average in 1993 to under 1000 in 2013. (Not all of this decline, however, is due to changes in the Inlet, as part of it can be attributed to the culling of black-backed gulls at the council rubbish tips.)

This drop in numbers has affected many species but some more than others. The black shag and little shag have experienced large declines, to be partly replaced it seems by the pied shag, and while both species of tern (Caspian and white-fronted) have fallen in number it's good to see that the threatened Royal spoonbill has demonstrated resilience with a positive trend. Other species showing declines are the white-faced heron, red-billed gull, pied stilt and kingfisher while two species of oystercatchers, the banded dotterel, paradise shelduck and black swan are all doing well.

Such changes in population size between species probably reflect the influence local semi-urban development has had on the habitats and food sources around the Inlet and illustrate how complex the ecology of such an environment can be. We hope that the initiatives the local government organisations have taken in more recent times to care for the whole of Porirua Harbour will have a positive effect on our Inlet and stem the degradation that has occurred over these years.

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*Ian Armitage is a Wellington resident who has had a long interest in environmental issues. He chose forestry as a career eventually becoming an international forestry development consultant to several Asian countries. With a keen interest in birds he joined organisations such as the National Oiled Wildlife Response Group for Maritime New Zealand and was involved with the wildlife management and recovery operations for the Rena sinking in 2011.*

*More recently Ian reported on the potential impact that construction of the Te Ara Piko pathway would have on the birds around Kakaho stream estuary.*

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## **ON THE HORIZON**

**A**nother of our major activities is the annual Clean-up of Pauatahanui Inlet which will take place sometime in October or November. A date has not yet been finalised for this exercise but we will be in touch when the details are confirmed.



## SHOULD PAUATAHANUI INLET BECOME AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT?

### *The Zonta/Rotary 'celebrity debate'*



When the mayor of Porirua is heard arguing that Pauatahanui Inlet should be filled in and turned into an international airport, then you know something is not quite right.

And when Government Minister Hekia Parata suggests that the Wildlife Reserve at the head of the Inlet is too valuable to lose because it's where Andrew Little and the Labour caucus hold their annual retreat, then it would be fair to say that something is definitely not right.

Well, not serious anyway. Several Guardians' members found the invitation to the inaugural Zonta/Rotary-organised 'celebrity debate', held on 14 June, simply too hard to resist, and were rewarded with a highly amusing afternoon's entertainment. Speakers for the affirmative (Chris Gollins, Philip Whearty and Nick Leggett) argued most persuasively that by moving some of the surrounding hills into the Inlet, an airport of international repute and value could easily be achieved. A flow-on effect would be the development of Mana Island as a 5-star resort. In the face of such an economic boost to the region, who could possibly object to the death of a few thousand cockles?

The negative team (Tommy Honey, Tracey Johnson and Hekia Parata) were having none of it. For some reason, they seemed to think that conservation was more important than economic development. They failed to be convinced by the affirmative team's argument that having an airport instead of an Inlet would mean that more people could appreciate the surrounding hills (or what would be left of them), and that real estate prices would skyrocket when people realised they wouldn't have to leave home to watch planes landing and leaving – all could be viewed from the sitting room window.

The arguments put forward by the negative, in spite of being delivered with much skill and verve, failed to convince the adjudicator, well-known broadcaster Hewitt Humphrey. Having attempted, before the debate, to read the eight pages of debate rules (an attempt he abandoned after Rule 2), he announced that the team that managed to flatter him the most would win. On this basis, the negative would have won hands down, especially after second speaker Tracey Johnson shamelessly praised Mr Humphrey for every quality known to mankind.

In the end, however, it was 'imagination, humour, good structure, energy and originality' that won the day, and although there wouldn't have been a single person in the audience who seriously thought the idea was a good one, it was the affirmative that provided the most entertaining argument.

The Guardians' members present were delighted to hear that our efforts to promote and protect the Inlet



### ***Should Pauatahanui Inlet become an International Airport?.....Cont.***

have reached the Beehive. It wasn't enough to swing the debate in the negative's favour, but Hekia Parata argued that turning the Inlet into an airport 'would contradict the efforts of local community and conservation groups.' She specifically drew attention to the GOPI clean-up, photo competition and 'work towards a sustainable future for the area.' Of course we preened.

The debate and its accompanying auction was a fundraising event and raised \$3,765. This money is to be used for information boards on Te Ara Piko – and we can only hope that the information never relates to the departure time of the next flight!



***Members of the debating teams, from the left:***

Nick Leggett, Philip Whearty, Tracey Johnson, Chris Gollins, Hekia Parata, Tommy Honey and adjudicator Hewitt Humphrey.

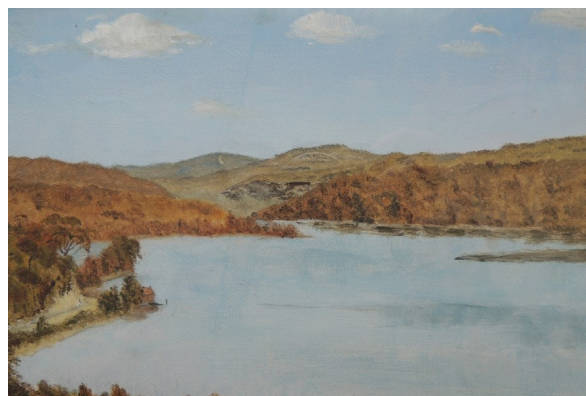
## **NOW AND THEN**

Artist painter Miss Winifred Fannin had the luxury of many more viewpoints around Pauatahanui Inlet than we have today.

Winifred and her family settled in the North Island from Ireland and she spent part of her life in the Wellington area between 1890 and 1900. Some time around 1895 she painted this scene of the Inlet from an elevated position located above Grays Road where the suburb of Camborne now exists. It appears to show a tree-lined shore where Whitby is today but much of the distant hills were already denuded of the once extensive forest cover.

Unfortunately this perspective cannot be replicated today without intruding on private property but the lower photograph, taken a few weeks ago in less than ideal weather, shows the scene as it is now from just above road level.

The road skirting the cliff to the left is just visible from this angle but the foreshore at the end of the Camborne Walkway dominates the view. There was of course no telegraph pole back in the 19th century.



## FEATURE ARTICLE

*Our April Newsletter expanded on the featured Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve by describing the ecology of the area and how this has been developed primarily as a bird sanctuary.*

*In this last section we explain how the management focus is now aimed at maintaining the reserve in its current state and some more of the challenges that are faced weekly by the team.*

### PAUATAHANUI WILDLIFE RESERVE PART 3



#### Ongoing Management

**I**t has been nearly 30 years in the making but the plans for the Reserve have now largely been implemented. However, while the original objectives have all been met, ongoing habitat management is still required for the health of the Reserve.

The primary reason for this need is that the Reserve, despite the best efforts in habitat development, is not a natural feature. It has been created to emulate a typical estuarine habitat that did not exist before and if left to its own devices, would degrade over time, reverting to a mixed native/exotic coastal succession, and losing much of its present character in the process. It is important for encouragement of a mixed population of wading birds to maintain the present sequence of four vegetative zones so that the whole ecosystem provides the required conditions for the birds. Only the saltmarsh is self-sustaining because of the very special conditions that occur in the inter-tidal zone. Only salt-tolerant plants can grow in these situations and these are limited to a few specially adapted species. The areas further inland, however, will change over time if left to do so. As an example of this the coastal tree daisy is not a long-lived species and older specimens will die off, leaving gaps in the ground-cover that invasive exotics can colonise.

Additionally, the Reserve is situated in a semi-urban locality and so has become significant as a casual recreation area. It also plays an important role in environmental education, especially for local primary school children. This means that the Reserve has to balance ecological and environmental concerns with provision of safe, easy access for a wide range of visitors.

For these reasons three aspects of reserve management feature prominently in the ongoing maintenance schedule: visitor facilities and resources, weed reduction and pest control.

A point has now been reached where about 50% of the day-to-day work schedule goes into maintaining



**FEATURE ARTICLE cont....**

high quality tracks, bird observation hides, grassed areas and facilities such as car parks, a picnic area and a BBQ. The team is also involved with providing resources for teachers bringing children on school visits.

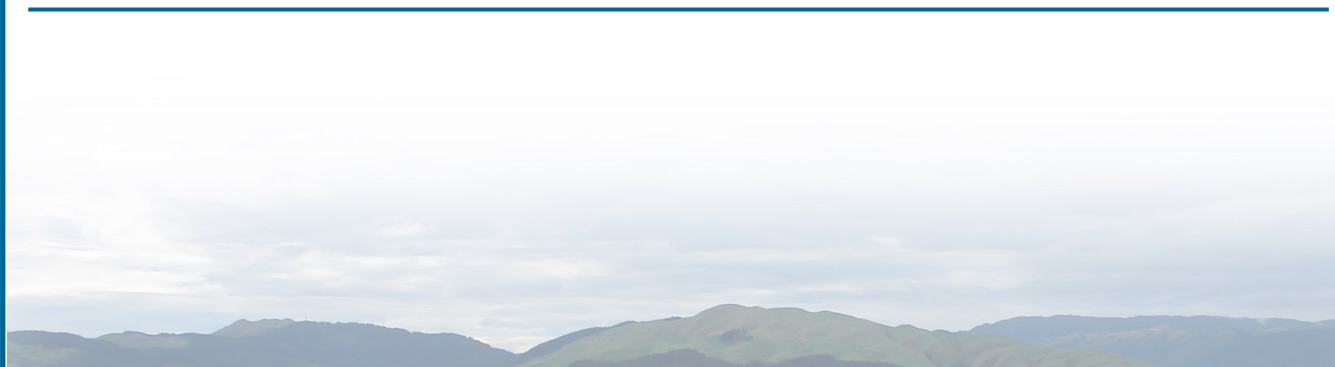
Weed extraction, the second aspect of ongoing management, is a never-ending process. Because the Reserve has been reclaimed from a state of varied human habitation, many weeds were established in and around the Reserve and these had to be removed during the large-scale planting programme devised to create the Reserve as envisioned. Many of these exotics, however, such as blackberry, gorse, periwinkle, bindweed and fennel, are highly invasive and extremely difficult to eradicate and it is vital to ensure that such exotic left-overs from the original reserve land do not re-invade and over-run the area. Also there is a need to be constantly on the lookout for innumerable garden escapees and to deal with them before they have a chance to get established.

Grasses are also a difficult family of plants to control, smothering young seedling shrubs before many of them can get established. Releasing on a regular basis (the manual process of removing encroaching plants from around the base of seedlings) is the only way to control this. In areas not planted, grass-selective herbicides can be of use, while, if all vegetation is to be removed, Roundup is the most effective method.

Then there is pest control. Pauatahanui has been settled for more than 150 years, resulting in a range of non-native species that are well established. So the native wildlife needs protection from rats, stoats and cats (both feral and domestic) and, as poison baits are not allowed, the use of traps designed to catch these key species is considerable. Traps and lures are set particularly along the eastern boundary and a trapping roster operates throughout the year. Mice, while not a huge problem for the bird population, are voracious in large numbers and can do quite a lot of damage to the vegetation as well as their predation on lizards. Again, while numbers of these animals in the Reserve can be controlled reasonably successfully, the populations are always supplemented by new individuals coming into the Reserve from the surrounding areas.

With careful and consistent management by the members of Forest and Bird and the enthusiastic teams of volunteers that support them, there is no reason why this significant wildlife sanctuary, created from essentially a waste land at the eastern end of the Inlet, could not continue to develop and evolve further. It has however already achieved the aims and objectives set by the founders of the Reserve and has become a haven for many species of wetland birds with a mature selection of native plants representing the four zones of an estuarine succession.

We hope this series of articles on the Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve has expanded the knowledge and understanding of our readers about this wonderful place and also that it has done true justice to the dedicated members, past and present, of the Reserve Management team.



## FAMILY CORNER

### WHERE DO THE BIRDS LIVE?

**Y**ou will see over 60 different kinds of birds in and around Pauatahanui Inlet. This is because the Inlet provides lots of different habitats (places where the birds live). You will see, for example, fishing birds, birds that eat cockles, snails, worms and small crabs, birds that eat grass and algae, birds that eat insects...

Can you put the following birds into their correct habitat? Some of them will go into more than one box. If you need help, you can look on our website: <http://www.gopi.org.nz/birds/>



(With thanks to Jared LeRoy for the photo.)

**Pukeko, gannets, spoonbills, gulls, pied stilts, black swans, paradise shelducks, herons, shags, oystercatchers, mallards, kingfishers, plovers, ducks.**

TIDAL FLATS AND SAND BANKS	SALT MARSH AND NEARBY PASTURE	OPEN WATER	STREAMS

#### ANSWERS

TIDAL FLATS AND SAND BANKS: spoonbills, oystercatchers, gulls, pied stilts, herons, plovers, ducks, black swans  
 SALT MARSH AND NEARBY PASTURE: pukeko, paradise shelducks, mallards, kingfishers  
 OPEN WATER: shags, gulls, gannets  
 STREAMS: ducks, kingfishers, pied stilts

## PLEASE SIGN UP A FRIEND OR NEIGHBOUR

**S**ign up a neighbour, friend, or another family member. Just explain to them that membership numbers really count in giving us a strong voice to argue for what we all value about the Inlet. Membership forms can be downloaded from our website <http://www.gopi.org.nz/assets/membersForm/Membership-new.doc> or copied from the one at the back of this newsletter. Better still, if you've received this newsletter by email, just forward it to others with a note encouraging them to join.

### EMERGENCY NUMBERS FOR THE PAUATAHANUI INLET

**Pollution:** Discharges of contaminants to air, land, storm-water drains, streams, rivers or sea and for after hours consent enquiries: Greater Wellington 0800 496 734 (24 hours)

**Boating infringements:** Greater Wellington 384 5708 (24 hours)

**Illegal fishing activity:** Ministry for Primary Industries 0800 476 224 (24 hours)

**Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve:** Department of Conservation 0800 362 468

Let us know what you have reported so we can keep an accurate record and follow up if necessary.

**233 9391 (Chairman, GOPI) or [pauainlet@gmail.com](mailto:pauainlet@gmail.com).**



## Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet

[www.gopi.org.nz](http://www.gopi.org.nz)  
[pauainlet@gmail.com](mailto:pauainlet@gmail.com)

### Membership Form: new members

To join the Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet, you can pay your subscription either online or by post.  
**IF YOU ARE PAYING ONLINE, PLEASE REMEMBER TO FILL IN THIS FORM WITH ALL DETAILS, AND EMAIL OR POST IT TO US.**

#### Online payment

1. Pay your sub via e-banking into our Westpac account 03-1533-0009387-00. In the 'Particulars' or 'Reference' columns, **YOU MUST** write your surname **AND** initials **AND** the period of your sub (1-yr or 5-yr).
2. Then fill in this form and either email it to us at [pauainlet@gmail.com](mailto:pauainlet@gmail.com) or post it (see next column for our postal address)

#### Postal payment

1. Write a cheque made payable to 'Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet'.
2. Then fill in this form and send it, along with your cheque, to: Membership Secretary, Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet, Box 57034, Mana, Porirua 5247.

Please fill in your details for our records. If you are filling in this form electronically, **click** at the beginning of a dotted line and then type.

Name: .....

Address: .....

E-mail: ..... Phone: .....

Please put ☒ next to the subscription you are paying (electronic completion – **highlight** the box and type lower case x.) We are also very grateful for donations. (We are a registered charity for tax purposes: registration number CC47523.)

One-year individual (\$12.00)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Five-year individual (\$50.00)	<input type="checkbox"/>
One-year family (\$15.00)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Five-year family (\$60.00)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Donation: \$ .....	Do you require a receipt for your sub? <input type="checkbox"/> or your donation? <input type="checkbox"/>		
Date subs paid: .....	Reference appears as: .....		
(e-banking only)			

We'd like to send you newsletters and notices via email. May we do this? ☐

Please tell us which of our activities you would like to be part of.

Annual Clean-up day	<input type="checkbox"/>	Submissions to local bodies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Three-yearly cockle survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	Our educational programmes for schools	<input type="checkbox"/>
Website and video clips	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:	

**NOW EMAIL OR POST THE FORM. THANK YOU AND WELCOME**