

Discover TE WAI ŌREA WESTERN SPRINGS LAKESIDE

NAU MAI HARAE MAI

Western Springs Te Wai Ōrea is considered a site of regional ecological significance because of its important ecosystem types and presence of threatened native species.

This guide aims to help you learn more about the natural and historical attractions found in the park and explore pathways and areas that you may not have visited before.

MĀTAKITAKI TUNA / EEL WATCHING

Te Wai Ōrea means 'waters of the eel' and the area was once highly valued by Māori for its clear spring water and place from which tuna (eels) could be harvested. The bridges near the Stadium Road entrance to the park are great places to stop and look for tuna (eels).

New Zealand has two species of native eel, tuna hinahina (shortfin eel) and the endemic ōrea/tuna kuwharuwharu (longfin eel). Both species grow and mature into adults in freshwater lakes and streams before migrating to the sea to breed. They are long-lived and slow growing, with most migrating at around 20-30 years of age and 70 cm in length. Some mature females may be more than 60 years old and over 150 cm long when they travel to the sea. New Zealand longfin eels must swim more than 5,000 km to their breeding grounds in deep oceanic trenches close to Tonga. This journey is extremely taxing, and the eels will die after spawning, breeding only once in their lifetime. Eggs hatch into larvae known as leptocephali, which drift back to New Zealand in ocean currents, and then transform into elvers that swim upstream.

Eel populations are at risk from human activities including fishing, pollution and habitat loss and modifications to waterways such as dams and culverts that impact their ability to migrate.

For more information about eels and to download an 'Awesome Eels Activity Sheet' visit doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/freshwater-fish/eels

MĀTAKITAKI MANU REPO / WETLAND BIRD WATCHING

The lake is home to an abundant and varied community of bird species. Many species breed from August to March, and feed on plants, invertebrates, and other small animals around the lake.

Look out for New Zealand's smallest species of duck, the pāpango (New Zealand scaup or black teal) and weweia (the New Zealand dabchick); both are endemic to New Zealand. Other native birds you're likely to spot include pūkeko and kōtuku (white-faced heron).

Common introduced species include rakiraki (mallard duck), kuihi (goose) and kakiānau (black swan). Mallards have hybridised widely with the endemic pārerā (grey duck) throughout New Zealand, to such a degree that pure grey duck are now rare and considered endangered.

There is a large sign on the Great North Road side of the lake that will help you identify and learn about the other birds commonly found here, or download a Wetland Bird Identification Guide available from aucklandcouncil.govt.nz.

WAIKARE-ROTO / WATER FLOW INTO THE LAKE

Te Wai Ōrea sits on a foundation of volcanic rock, which flowed down from the eruption of Maungawhau (Mount Eden) around 8,000 years ago. Fractures and pores that formed during the cooling of the lava allow water to pass through easily. Rain falling on nearby volcanic cones, including Maungawhau, Ōwairaka (Mount Albert), and Te Tātua-a-Riukiuta (Three Kings), filters through the porous rock and flows underground, eventually surfacing at Te Wai Ōrea Western Springs.

Several springs can be found around the southern edge of the lake; they are visible by gentle rippling of the water. It is estimated that one to two million litres of water are discharged into the lake every day, almost enough to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool! Water exits the lake into Motions Creek and flows into the Waitemata Harbour.

NGĀ HUA KŪKŪWAI / WETLAND PLANTS

Traditionally for Māori, repo (wetlands) are taonga, treasured places from which plants and animals can be gathered for kai (food), rongoā (medicines) and raranga (weaving). Two common wetland plants, tī kōuka (cabbage trees) and harakeke (New Zealand flax), were valued by Māori and European settlers for a variety of traditional uses. Their leaves could be used to make kākahu, (clothing), whāriki (mats), kono and kete (baskets), taura (ropes), āhere (bird snares), hī ika (fishing lines) and kupenga (nets). Pōuto (floats) and mokihi (rafts) were made from bundles of kōrari (harakeke flower stalks). Both plants had many rongoā (medicinal) uses. For example, harakeke sap was applied to boils and wounds and used for toothache; harakeke leaves were used as dressings and for binding broken bones; and the juice of harakeke roots could be applied as a disinfectant. Tī kōuka leaves could be prepared in different ways to heal cuts and stomach upsets. The shoots, roots and central trunk of tī kōuka were an important food source, their taste giving the tree its English name 'cabbage tree'. Visit sciencelearn.org.nz/topics/te-repo to find out more about the traditional uses of wetland plants.

TĀHUHU KŌRERO TUKU IHO / HISTORY

Before European settlement, Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) was home to many hapū (tribes) who moved around the area as food supplies changed with the season and cultivation cycles. Te Wai Ōrea was one of the two major wetlands in the central Auckland region and an important location for the harvesting of eels. Changing relationships between hapū resulted in occasional battles. During one of the battles in the Tāmaki area, Kawharu (a warrior raised in the Manukau) fought local iwi at a site overlooking Western Springs Te Wai Ōrea. On the ridge, today traced by Surrey Crescent, Te Raeokawharu (Kawharu's brow) marks the spot where the invading chief rested. In 1830-1840, during the Māori musket wars, Ngati Tahinga, Waiohua, and a smaller number of Te Taou lived in the wider area, called Te Rehu.

The first European owner of the land around Te Wai Ōrea was William Motion, a Scottish settler. He operated a flour mill there from 1846 until 1875, when the land was bought by the council at the time as a water supply for the city's growing population. An artificial lake was created and a pumphouse built to pump water up to reservoirs in Newton. Pumping was discontinued at Western Springs in 1928, having been replaced by reservoirs in the Waitakere Ranges. The pumphouse and its impressive double-beam steam engine still stands as an important heritage structure at MOTAT, which opened in 1964.

The 1920s saw the opening of Auckland Zoo and Western Springs Stadium. Part of the lakeside area became a popular camping ground in 1933, with the roaring of lions imparting a safari-like atmosphere. During World War Two this was converted into a camp for American soldiers.

Auckland Council assumed responsibility for the land in 1961. By this time the park had become overtaken by exotic plants and scattered with rubbish, and the lake was choked with waterweed. Over the years the council has transformed the park into an attractive recreational area. Restoration work continues to increase native biodiversity within the park, with planting around the lake margins and forest regeneration projects on the northern slopes, bringing those habitats closer to their natural historic states. This will help the park function as an ecological corridor for the movement of flora and fauna across the Auckland region.

Te Wai Ōrea Western Springs is now lauded as one of Auckland's premier parks. It now hosts Pasifika, one of Auckland's most popular annual public events, and it is enjoyed by both locals and tourists to this day.

For more information on future development plans for the park visit aucklandcouncil.govt.nz and search 'Western Springs Development Plan'.

TOP TIPS FOR VISITING

- Whilst feeding the birds at the lake is not encouraged, please consider bringing oats, peas or seeds as a healthy alternative to bread if you're very keen to feed the ducks. Bread is not good for the health of the birds and encourages bacteria to grow in the water causing diseases such as botulism which can kill birdlife.
- Bring a wildlife guide to help you identify the plants and animals you see.
- Coordinate your visit with a trip to MOTAT (open 10am to 4pm) or Auckland Zoo (open 9.30am – 4.30pm), check online for last entry times.
- To find out how to get involved with local conservation projects please email: mylocalpark@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz
- To report a problem please go to aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/report-it or call 09 301 0101.