



Tucker Beach: from forgotten wasteland to thriving wildlife haven

Just a few years ago, invasive weeds, illegal dumping and abandoned vehicles made the Tucker Beach Wildlife Management Reserve a place few people knew about and fewer still visited. Yet beneath this neglect lay a dynamic landscape, ecologically resilient and echoing with cultural significance. Today, the reserve is almost unrecognisable. The braided river birds are back. Native plants are taking hold. People are returning to walk, learn, and reconnect with the whenua. And at the heart of this transformation is a group of people who recognised this place as special and refused to give up on it.



Bird watchers are attracted by a diverse assemblage of braided river birds, shags, kingfishers, and small passerines.
Credit: Dawn Palmer



Cars abandoned on banded dotterel nesting habitat before restoration.
Credit: Rosemary Barnett

A landscape shaped by people, culture and river

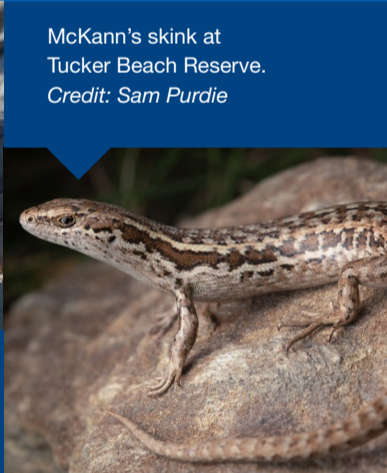
Long before gold miners named the area for its deposits, the Kimiākau (Shotover River) was part of a vast network of kāinga mahinga kai and travel routes across Central Otago. A nohoanga entitlement at Tucker Beach continues to provide Ngāi Tahu with a place to rest, gather and maintain their connection to the river and surrounding landscape.

The dynamic gravel beaches and terraces carved by the Kimiākau are vital habitat for braided river species - Banded Dotterels, Black billed Gulls, Black fronted Terns, Little and Black Shags, and the Kōtare/Sacred Kingfisher. Lizard species including McCann's skinks inhabit the grassy terraces.

This is a landscape that shifts, adapts and endures - and one that responds quickly when given the chance.



Black-fronted terns with chick.
Credit: Steve Couper



McCann's skink at Tucker Beach Reserve.
Credit: Sam Purdie



Banded dotterel at Tucker Beach Reserve.
Credit: Steve Couper



Trustees: (left to right): Steve Couper, Rose Barnett (Chair), Martin Cheifetz, Dawn Palmer, Tess Wethey, Sally Mingaye; missing - Jason Smit.
Credit: Tucker Beach Wildlife Trust / Chamber of Commerce



Volunteers in action.
Credit: Steve Couper

Restoration rooted in community

In 2017, a small group of residents assembled, and eventually formed the Tucker Beach Wildlife Trust with a simple goal: restore the reserve so wildlife could thrive again. Guided by a Conservation Management Plan and supported by a Community Agreement with DOC, the Trust began clearing weeds, planting natives, and building partnerships.

Momentum grew. Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC), Otago Regional Council (ORC) and Lottery Grants came on board with funding. This, along with Jobs for Nature and countless volunteer hours from local schools and other conservation groups supercharged the effort - enabling large scale weed removal, predator control and extensive native planting.

The results are now unmistakable. Tucker Beach is once again a place where wildlife flourishes and people can experience a braided river ecosystem right in the heart of the Whakatipu Basin.

And the mahi continues in full force to ensure the open braided river habitat provides the space native plants, lizards, invertebrates and birds need to nest, feed and thrive.

How you can support the restoration of Tucker Beach

Whether you can give time, energy, or resources, every contribution helps protect this special braided river ecosystem.

- > Volunteer days, predator control, and community events run throughout the year. Keep an eye out for upcoming opportunities and events on the [Tucker Beach Facebook page](#).
- > Companies can now ["Adopt a Plot"](#) at Tucker Beach - supporting planting, maintenance and long term care of a dedicated restoration area while giving staff a meaningful, place based volunteering experience.

