

VISITING THE ESTUARY OF THE HEATHCOTE AND AVON RIVERS/IHUTAI

The following information can be used to help plan your educational visit to the Estuary of the Avon and Heathcote Rivers/Ihutai. Have fun and remember to look after this estuary and the plants and animals that live here during your visit.

NOTES FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS



Left: Rawhiti School at the Estuary of the Avon and Heathcote Rivers/Ihutai. Photo: Tanya Jenkins

Right: View of the Estuary of the Avon and Heathcote Rivers/Ihutai from South Brighton. Photo: Cameron Walker

Key information



The Estuary of the Avon and Heathcote Rivers/Ihutai is the largest semi-enclosed shallow estuary in Canterbury. Here, fresh water from both the Avon River/Ōtakaro and Heathcote River meet and mix with salt water from the ocean.

The estuary area includes 880 ha of mud flats, 100 ha of paddocks and 240 ha of oxidation ponds. It includes several parks and wetlands.

Te Ihutai is of great cultural significance to tangata whenua and is an important mahinga kai site for several iwi.

For more information, see  Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust.

Getting there

The Charlesworth Reserve and McCormacks Bay Wetland Reserve both have facilities suitable for large groups and education visits.

To access McCormacks Bay Wetland Reserve, turn off State Highway 74 at Ferry Road and continue to Main Road and then McCormacks Road.

To reach Charlesworth Reserve, turn into Linwood Avenue and then continue on to Humphreys Drive.

South Brighton Park is an alternative location for your visit, which can be accessed at the end of Beatty Street.



1


Visiting the estuary of the Heathcote and Avon Rivers/Ihutai

VISITING HARBOURS AND ESTUARIES: NOTES FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

Visitor facilities and parking


Charlesworth Reserve

Parking is available for Charlesworth Reserve at the car park next to 54 Charlesworth Street.

There are toilets on Humphreys Drive near Charlesworth Reserve. See  Charlesworth Wetland.

McCormacks Bay Wetland Reserve

Parking for McCormacks Bay Wetland Reserve is along McCormacks Bay Road, adjacent to the reserve.

Toilets and a playground are located at the reserve on McCormacks Bay Road. See  McCormacks Bay.

There are large grassed areas and picnic sites at both reserves, as well as drinking water. There are also plenty of food outlets nearby.


South New Brighton Park / South Brighton Domain

This park has a large car park with a fantastic playground and public toilets. There is also a bookable picnic area – contact Christchurch City Council for details.



Suggested self-guided activities for school group

The Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Education Resource

by Tanya Jenkins / Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust.

This education resource has a range of options for self-guided activities at this site. Click on the link at  Education resource for teachers and parents.

Biodiversity survey


Investigate what is living in this estuary by completing a Marine Metre Squared Project (Mm2) sandy shore or rocky shore survey at low tide at McCormacks Bay, Pleasant Point or along Humphreys Drive, adjacent to Charlesworth Reserve. For more information, see  Marine Metre Squared and  *Activity 9: Visiting estuaries*.

Note: when conducting a Mm2 survey, it is important to keep disturbance of sand and animals to a minimum and put them back where you found them.


Observing shorebirds / five-minute bird count

The best places for viewing wading birds are McCormacks Bay, Pleasant Point or at the Linwood Canal on the northern edge of Charlesworth Reserve.

Make sure you are quiet and still to maximise your chances of spotting shorebirds. Birds like to sit on the islands far from shore, so binoculars would be useful for viewing them.

The DOC website provides instructions on how to carry out  Five-minute bird counts.

Estuary survey

Look for key species of seaweeds, plants, snails, crabs and other invertebrates of the estuary on the beaches at low tide. See  MarineWatch estuary survey species ID slides.




Suggested self-guided activities for school groups

Beat plastic pollution with Young Ocean Explorers

Find out how you can help beat plastic pollution in estuaries by completing this  Young Ocean Explorers assignment.


Short walks


Wetland Edge Walk (15–20 min return): The  Wetland Edge Walk takes you around the wetland at Charlesworth Reserve.

Estuary Edge Walk, New Brighton (30 min, 2 km): Take the  Estuary Edge Walk over the boardwalk on saltmarsh around the estuary.

Health and safety considerations

- The weather can be very changeable at this site, so bring appropriate clothing for a range of conditions.
- There may be sharp objects such as broken glass, litter, sticks and shells on the mud flats, so please wear full shoes with intact soles.
- Mud flats can be extremely slippery, so watch your footing.

Also see *Section 1: Planning your visit to the estuary in the Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Education Resource* by Tanya Jenkins / Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust for other health and safety information for this site. Click on the link at  Education resource for teachers and parents.

Teachers should also consider general risk management around water and general health and safety considerations for schools in coastal environments – see  Activity 9: Visiting estuaries.

Note: The health and safety considerations listed here are not a substitute for a detailed safety plan.

This plan should be written by the educators, staff and students who are visiting the site. It should reflect the school's safety policies and procedures and be based on accepted best practice in EOTC. A prior site visit by staff is highly recommended to identify and manage any current risks/hazards.

Native or endemic species found at this estuary

More than 114 different bird species and 28 different fish species live in this estuary.

Approximately 5% of the population of South Island pied oystercatchers/tōrea live in the area. You may also spot wading birds such as variable oystercatchers/ tōrea, pied stilts/poaka, white herons/kōtuku, little black shags/kawau tūi and white-faced herons/matuku moana. Rare but regular visitors include bar-tailed godwits/kuaka, grey teals/tētē, royal spoonbills/kōtuku ngutupapa, white-fronted terns/tara and wrybills/ngutu pare.

The Bromley ponds support 75% of the New Zealand shoveller/kuruwhengi population and 15% of the New Zealand scaup/black teal/pāpango population. You can also see these birds at Linwood Canal.

Flounder, eel/tuna, yellow-eyed mullet and whitebait/juvenile īnanga are found in the water of the estuary.

Tunnelling mud crabs, stalk-eyed crabs, and mud flat snails are common on the mud flats.




Habitats found at this estuary

Charlesworth Reserve

You can find saltmarshes, a salt meadow, tidal pools, coastal bush, shrubland and shallow open water at this reserve.

McCormacks Bay Wetland Reserve

This bay hosts regenerating saltmarsh, coastal shrubland, mud flats open water and coastal bush.

For other habitat information for this site, see the Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Education Resource by Tanya Jenkins / Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust – click on the link at  Education resource for teachers and parents.

Education providers in the area

Christchurch City Council

Christchurch City Council offers related  Learning Through Action programmes at nearby locations for schools and education groups.

Other education experiences

Canterbury Museum

Nearby  Canterbury Museum offers a range of relevant learning experiences and education programmes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Tanya Jenkins (Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust) and Vanessa Mander (DOC) for their assistance, advice, photos and contributions to this resource.

Protect our wildlife from invasive pests – check your clothing and footwear for weed seeds and soil before and after each trip.

The banner has a light blue background with a decorative wave pattern at the top. It features the text 'Discover our estuaries' in blue and green, the Department of Conservation logo and name 'Te Papa Ataubai', and the website 'www.doc.govt.nz/estuaries' and hashtag '#ourestuaries'.

Discover
our **estuaries**

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Ataubai

Visit DOC's interactive web resource
www.doc.govt.nz/estuaries
#ourestuaries

The banner has a light blue background. It features the text 'Experience Monitor Restore' in blue, a map of New Zealand with city markers, and the text 'Resources Links to more information for iwi community groups, experts, visitors, teachers and children.'

**Experience
Monitor
Restore**

Resources
Links to more information for iwi community groups, experts, visitors, teachers and children.

