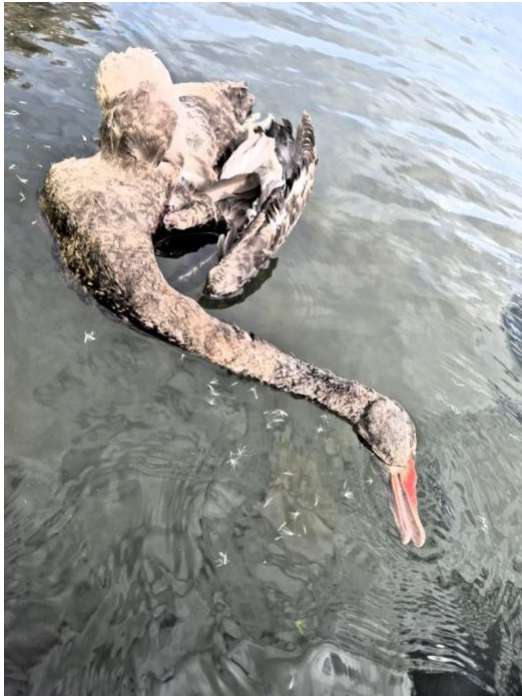


1 dead swan, 2 floating ducks, and some beer cans in a willow tree

From [Dr Lynley Tulloch, May Safely Graze](#)

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It was fair to say that this horror made my blood run as cold as the river itself. Further upstream I found bags and bags of bottles and beer cans dumped just up on the bank. They spilled out and into the water, bobbing like the dead duck they were merging with. This duck had lost all the feathers on his neck.



A dead Black Swan

Just a few days after the opening of duck shooting season on 4 th May, 2024 I planned a kayak down a section of the Waikato River. The air was crisp as a Granny Smith apple and smelled dank. Before my journey had even begun my eyes caught sight of a beak and feathers wrapped in a black bag by a rubbish bin. Sure enough, there was a bag of dumped ducks, buzzing with flies and decomposing in the half-baked sun. The ducks with their broken wings and raw flesh were like ripe strawberries on the turn. They lay in their unsung grave, victims to the ‘sport’ of duck shooting.





The dumping of ducks is illegal according to the New Zealand Fish and Game Council. It can carry a fine of up to \$5000. Drinking alcohol while hunting is also frowned upon by the New Zealand Fish and Game Council. However, judging by the amount of beer cans also in the rubbish bin the no-drinking rule seems to have been taken with a grain of salt.

It left a bad feeling. There was something terribly sad about the single wing that fluttered uselessly on the tarmac. I took a picture because I hoped it would say the thousand words that now caught like a river rock in my throat.

The thousand words of ducks on the wing; of the breath of wind; of the sandy bottom of the river; of the heights of clouds.

The story ended here. In a rubbish bin. Dumped. Like no one cared. Except they did. I cared. And so do many other animal lovers who loathe duck-shooting season.

I got in my kayak and glided away from the death of ducks. The ducks didn't deserve to die and I vowed to get them some justice. But the horror was not yet over. To my side in the water was a putrid body of another duck. Then a few strokes of the paddle revealed yet another dead duck. This duck lay on his back with his feet facing skyward. The world has turned upside down and the clouds now scudded across the bottom of the river. This duck would never fly again.

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the water, bobbing like the dead duck they were merging with. This duck had lost all the feathers on his neck.

Save Animals from Exploitation (SAFE) has drawn on international studies which show that 20 to 40% of water birds that are hit by shotgun pellets are never retrieved. With around one million water birds shot in Aotearoa New Zealand each year this would equate to the maiming or around 200,000 birds who go on to suffer prolonged pain or death.

I'm trying to see things from the perspective of the ducks and other waterbirds that are killed every season. With every turn of the river I don't see a 'sport'. I see death, pain and fear. I know the human perspective unfortunately too well. For humans this is a great weekend and fun. Maybe they will eat the birds – maybe they won't (cue dumped ducks). The birds on the other hand, despite being framed as 'game', are victims of a cruel attack.

This is their home, the one they live in all year round, raising young and forming flocks. Who are we to invade it, loaded with guns, duck decoys and whistles, boats, motorised engines, waders and beers?

Who indeed? For the ducks and other water birds we are not their equals in a sports game, and this is not fun. This is their lives. Paddling in despair I came around the bend of the river to find a dead black swan. Her graceful arching neck was now collapsed like a piece of sinewy rope. She floated in the river currents, her eyes looking skyward to a world now lost to her. It's not commonly known that you are allowed to shoot swans during duck shooting season. Fish and Game Regulations on the Auckland / Waikato season give an indication of the variety and amount of water birds hunted. This includes eight bags of Mallard and Grey Duck and ten bags of Paradise Sheldrake duck in a single day. Also up for grabs are quail, pukeko, pheasant and geese. As if this isn't enough, some of these ducks are native to Aotearoa New Zealand. In fact, three native duck species, in decline or endangered, are allowed to be shot under the outdated Wildlife Act 1953. They are the Grey Duck (Parera), the Shoveler (Kuruwhengi) and the Paradise Shelduck (Putangitangi).





The river was now eerily quiet as I paddled along to the next landing. A few ducks hid in the undergrowth while duck decoys bobbed realistically near maimais. Each maimai a death trap, decorated with ferns and flaxes so the ducks don't know of the danger within. Gun shots rung out in the distance, and I longed for the end.

Finally I reached the landing. But just before I got there another ghoulish surprise waited. A dead sheep, all flesh removed and head and skin hanging on a pole over the water stared down at me. It was like a haunted house. I had seen people camping not far from this poor sheep during the opening weekend of duck shooting. It is likely that the sheep remains came from their meal.

It is time to ban duck shooting and make a stand against this violence to waterbirds.



Dr Lynley Tulloch is an Early Childhood Education Lecturer at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). She is a long-time animal activist.