

Waikanae Estuary Newsletter

No 60 February 2012

The Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve is a Nationally Significant Reserve

Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve

Photograph Eileen Thomas

This is the sixtieth edition of our newsletter –something I never expected to achieve when in 2007 I penned my first letter. Over the sixty months of the newsletter and the sixteen years that I have been retired, I have managed to make thousands of people aware of the wonders of the Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve, its environment and its inhabitants. I have made people, who had no idea that the Estuary was such a special place and one of the most significant natural areas of the Kapiti Coast and New Zealand, realize its beauty and the 64 species of birds that visit at times.

Highlights

Having the BBC in London contact me about the little black shags fishing in packs within the estuary and the herons getting the little fish herded against the shingle banks. The BBC wanted to come over and film this. [Newsletter No 3 May 07]

Arranging for a memorial sign showing the bird species documented on the estuary installed beside the Waimanu lagoon for all to read. [Newsletter No 5 July 07]

Recording up to thirty species of wild birds at times, while touring the lagoons and sand-spit.

Installing a boulder and plaque in memory of Henry the black swan, who graced our lagoons for thirty years, many in a gay relationship with Thomas the goose. Contributions towards the cost came from world-wide. [Newsletter No 34 Dec 09]

The Emperor penguin ‘Happy Feet’ visiting our shores, being nursed back to health then released. [Newsletter No 55 Sept 11 & 56 Oct 11]

Seeing the changed dynamics of the Estuary Reserve when the land-fill closed and the black-backed gulls departed in their hundreds to find another food source. [Newsletter No 28 June 09]

The arrival of the pied shags, nesting and becoming one of the most prominent bird species after the gulls and terns on the reserves. [Newsletter No 1 March 07]

Eight year old Laughlin’s concern for the wellbeing of a black-backed gull that was swimming in circles by the backwash of the Waimanu Lagoon. [Newsletter No 49 March 11]



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The great broad-billed prion seabird rescue which was on the one hand, a wonderful rescue mission by many people on the coast and, on the other hand a tragic seabird 'Wreck'.

[Newsletter No 54 August 11]

The involvement of the National Centre for Biosecurity and Infectious Disease, when we discovered a royal spoonbill was infected with ticks, the first known case reported anywhere on a spoonbill.

[Newsletter No 48 Feb 11 & 55a Sept 11]

Taking the wonders of the Waikanae Estuary birdlife to hundreds of people from Wellington, the Hutt Valley to Waipukaru, through schools and service groups with my power point presentation and my monthly talk on local radio station Beach F/M

Publishing a book 'Tales of Waikanae Estuary'

Being involved with a group of like minded people to form the Waikanae Estuary Care Group. To see the locals working together as a community, planting out the reserve towards recreating things as they used to be.

Watching the increasing species of birds visiting the area following the removal of the rats and possums off Kapiti Island and the planting that has taken place there and the great work by John Topliss and his band of helpers, planting the banks of the Waikanae river and of the Estuary Reserve, by the Care Group. A Corridor for the birds has been created from Kapiti Island through the Estuary Reserve up the river to the mountains.

Problems

Over the years there have been a few problems. The Estuary is an urban area, with housing encroaching ever closer. Scientific Reserves are usually in an isolated area miles from anywhere, where they can be monitored and dogs and fishermen excluded. Here, we have people exercising their dogs, fishermen fishing for whitebait running their trucks up and down the sand-spit and netting for flounder in the river. All these activities are allowed only because of where the Scientific Reserve is situated, and most of these activities were ongoing well before the Reserve was created, so a precedent existed. However, here people and the birds do coexist quite successfully.

Because of the continued fishing in the river and the increase of the shag population more and more shags are getting caught in the nets and drowning. This is particularly sad as they are also nesting and what happens to the nest full of youngsters waiting for the parent to return with food? We have had swans and seagulls entangled in nylon fishing lines and also had a swan which swallowed a baited fish hook which lodged in its gullet. Seals have been caught in nets both in the river and on the beach. [See Newsletters No 43 Sept 10 -- 42 Aug 10 and No 45 Nov 10]

Dogs are supposed to be on a leash around the lagoons and sand-spit where the birds are nesting and the wild life live. What happened when a seal snuck into the Waimanu lagoon and started to feast on the many mullet? A dog off the leash, saw it in the middle of the lagoon having a fish dinner, dived into the water and swam out to where the seal was and frightened it away. Dogs have also savaged black swan which have had to be put down. Even a small wound from a dog can be fatal to the water fowl. [Newsletter No 56 Oct 11]

Cats living in the nearby houses are a continuing problem as they are natural hunters and regularly decimate the ducklings and feed on the skinks which live in the Estuary. We have stoats, hedgehogs, possums, rabbits and rats within the reserve. These have to be kept under control.
 . [Newsletter No 6 august 07]

We even had people netting the ducks within the reserve and spiriting them away.
 [Newsletter No 57 Nov 11]

Having over 12000 'hits' on the web, every month is very satisfying, but it means that as the newsletter is so popular I will have to keep it up. How I manage to find something to write about every month surprises me. Near the end of the month I start to panic with no stories then something pops up and I am away again. I do have to thank those people who contributed stories, photographs and the editing of my letters. I have to admit I have some wonderful people encouraging me and the feedback I get from the newsletters is very positive. The parks and reserve staff have been very helpful over the years with installing the signs, paths and generally keeping the reserve tidy.



Upper reaches of the Scientific Reserve

Photograph Eileen Thomas

Hits last Month Thirteen Thousand four Hundred and Seven.

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae
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