

## Waikanae Estuary Newsletter

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Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



Waikanae estuary -- Trekking -

Photographer Mik Peryer

The Christmas holidays have seen an influx of holidaymakers, with the river becoming a highway for the kayakers paddling up and down. The fishing boats launched from Otaihanga launching ramp have also been cruising the river to their fishing grounds at the north end of Kapiti Island and beyond. Here on the estuary lagoons the birds have had a fairly quiet time.

However it's been quite noticeable how few of our ducklings have reached maturity. The mother ducks have been losing their brood more than usual this year. The pair of paradise ducks who chased the white heron, [see last month's news letter] have lost their whole brood one by one to a local domestic cat. In a built up area the 'parries' are perhaps a little more vulnerable to cats as they tend to spend more time on the grass verges than most other ducks, as they like to graze.



A bunch of bright eyed male scaup

The scaup have been a little more successful than the other common birds. They tend to be more vigilant and protective of their young as a group. They have a favourite spot at the top of the northern Waimanu lagoon where they congregate in large numbers.

The baby of our resident pair of dabchicks is growing daily and is almost too big to ride on mum's back.

### *Pied Shags*

Of all the birds apart from our black swans, the pied shags are the ones who are breeding the most, with more and more nests being established in the large macrocarpa they have claimed as their own. They have been most condescending and allowed the black shags [look at tree top] to also roost in their tree along with the odd little shag. It's becoming quite a [smelly] little community. Last year was the first year the shags have nested within our estuary reserve which is quite exciting.

In my December newsletter I wrote about the baby shags being thrown out of their nest by the terrible gales we had at that time, how one died and two ended up in the water with one injured bird being taken to the Nga Manu nature reserve, then to the Wellington bird rescue. Well this bird was taken again back to Nga Manu to recuperate. The staff fed the young shag and it recovered well. However we wondered how it would assimilate back into the wild after contact with humans, and no shag parents to teach it how to fend for itself.

There is a "little shag" that frequents Nga Manu and the two birds were seen on the lagoon fishing together. Maybe this little shag instilled some of its skills to our bird, as it flew away a couple of times for the day, returning to Nga Manu for a feed, then away it went out into the wild. Perhaps it's back in the tree with his parents on the Waimanu lagoon.



There are six black shags, one little shag and ten pied shags roosting in the tree, with six of the pied shags nesting

*Our love birds*  
**Henrietta and Henry the black swans with Thomas the goose**

Our love birds have had the run of both Waimanu lagoons here at the Waikanae estuary. It was when the young female swan named Henrietta took up residence six years ago that they became really serious at raising a family, producing sixty nine cygnets in that timeframe. Thomas the goose and the male swan Henry had had a relationship for fifteen years prior to the new female swan Henrietta turning up. The lagoons are bisected by a roadway forming a northern and a southern segment about the same size as each other. It was over the last six years the swans produced all of these babies and, chased them off the lagoons as they grew up to find their own way in the world, and fend for themselves. Over this period the swans had had the sole use of both lagoons.

Now what has happened is that, a couple of their previous brood have returned and claimed the lower lagoon for themselves. They hatched five babies elsewhere and brought them onto the lower lagoon shortly after, saw another pair of swans had made a lovely new nest beside a flax bush and had been sitting on four eggs for three weeks. They chased these two swans with much flapping of wings, off the lagoon and on to the river and wouldn't let them back, so the eggs couldn't be hatched. They wanted the lower lagoon for themselves, and aggressively kept it so.



*The cygnets think that Thomas is their dad.*

Our love birds with their latest brood of five took them from the northern lagoon where they had raised them, across the roadway to the bottom lagoon to show them off, and what happened? Well the new southern family having previously chased off the two swans sitting on the nest weren't having a bar of this and the two mature swans flew from the far end to the roadway, with their juvenile cygnets

swimming up fast and confronted our love birds.

Our love birds couldn't handle these younger birds with their large cygnets, especially Henry with his injured wing and at his age, so they were chased up the bank and back on to the roadway. Our five new young cygnets were left on the lagoon whilst the two large aggressive swans and their quite mature offspring, were all intent on beating up our innocent babies. Well to the rescue came gallant Thomas the goose. He rushed into the lagoon confronted the swans, beat-up one and shepherded the five youngsters out of the lagoon up the bank and across the roadway, back to the top lagoon, saving them, which is more than their parents did.

What a wonderful family has been established over the twenty seven years that Henry the male swan with the injured wing has been on our lagoons, fifteen gay years with Thomas the goose, and six years in an eternal triangle with Henrietta.



*Another one of those Kapiti coast sunsets we have to put up with--- Photographer Mik Peryer*

Hope you have enjoyed your copy of our estuary newsletter

*Mik Peryer*

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