

**Waikanae Estuary Newsletter
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Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



The sand spit with a build-up of sand

Our estuary is doing well. Following the formation of the Waimanu lagoons in the nineteen seventies, we have had quite an influx of different species, as well as increased numbers of birds, compared to the survey conducted from 1969 to 1972 by *Falconer, Fleming and Wodzicki*.

Before 1972, there were no reports of the Canada geese. They now invade our river swooping into the reserve late in the evening in groups of up to 70 to 100 birds; their honking as they fly in can be heard around the neighbourhood. In the morning about six o'clock off they go in groups to their feeding grounds, all around Kapiti.

The little diving birds the scaup, are now breeding in our lagoons. At present there are over one hundred birds, probably mainly juveniles watched over by some adult females.

Welcome swallows as well as pied shags are nesting around the lagoons. In addition royal spoonbills are now resident, with around twenty in the river reserve.

Another change is the increase in the numbers of black swan especially in the last six years when breeding took off.



Welcome swallow

Harrier hawk

We have a pair of harrier hawks resident within our estuary reserve; they nest in the rough ground well hidden from view. However from our vantage point overlooking the river their comings and goings are regularly observed. They have fledged a baby and it's wonderful to see it hovering over the river verges with its parent near by.

The hawks are top of the food chain and when the hawks are doing well it shows that the estuary is in good health. We have hundreds of black backed gulls resting on the sand spit at times. When they lift off into the air if it's not dogs or people who have frightened them, you can bet your boots it will be a hawk.

The birds spook each other and they all react together and lift off away from the threat, however singly or in pairs black backed gulls will attack a hawk.

The Interplay between the species

Every bird on the estuary lagoons knows what the others are up to. They don't like change, as witnessed when the little egret paid us a visit, and was hassled and chased by our resident birds. The same thing happened when the large white heron arrived a couple of weeks ago; the local birds also gave this bird a hard time, with ten red billed gulls chasing it off the lagoon onto the river, with a pair of paradise ducks joining in the chase.



Cygnets.

However all is not aggression, as seen when a mallard duck with a large brood of very young ducklings had one separated from the rest. One of our resident black swans saw this baby was in distress, swam over and shepherded it back to the mother duck. The duckling thought the swan was being aggressive and was most upset. However the swan persisted and eventually the duckling was reunited with its family. It's these little goings on that make living by the estuary most rewarding.

Hedgehogs

It is the season for the hedgehogs to be out and about with their babies. My dog Meg is a nuisance, when I let her out last thing at night, she will rush along the sand hill and bring back a hedgehog. She carries it in her mouth very pleased with herself, never mind the prickles, and sometimes I have a job to make her let it go. Spaniels have very soft mouths, so she doesn't hurt it although it stays curled up in a ball with prickles alert.



Meg

In the morning they are nowhere to be seen. The hedgehogs were introduced by our early English settlers –I don't quite know why as they are a real pest in New Zealand, eating the ground nesting, birds' eggs.



The view from our front lawn

Hope you have enjoyed your copy of our estuary newsletter

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If anyone has some little nature stories I could use in my newsletter please let me know.