

## Waikanae Estuary Newsletter

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Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



*Waimanu lagoon Waikanae Beach*

### *Playtime*

*Do birds like to play or is it all looking for food, resting and mating that takes up their life?*

I had a lady tell me about three young black swans swimming in the sea just off our beach and surfing in to the shore on the breaking waves. They did this two or three times, coming into the shore then flying back out to catch the waves again. It was too much of a coincidence not to constitute playtime.

On a warm windy day the black backed gulls ride the thermals and soar high into the sky. They circle around and around, gaining height until they are little specks in the sky and then down they come with hooked wings back into the river. There's no apparent reason for them to do this apart from the thrill of riding the thermals. When the southerly wind blows, the gulls ride the up draught of the wind as it hits the escarpment in front of our house and without flapping their wings ride against the wind at speed, turn around and do it again and again.

On the other hand our harrier hawk at times will fly high circling around again and again, gaining height. It will then do aerobatics, tumbling down and soaring up again, diving and weaving. Unlike the gulls who appear to do this for pleasure, I have a feeling that as the hawks usually do this in the breeding season in sight of their nest, it's to impress their mate by showing off their flying skills. This is not to be confused with the lazy circling flight the hawks do at times when ranging around their territory checking out the eating sites.

### **Pecking order**

The birds like to keep their pecking order. A friend of mine was walking along the side of the Waimanu lagoon opposite the large macrocarpa tree where the pied shags are nesting.

She paused to take a closer look at two young pied shags sitting on the bank. However she moved a little too close and the shags made for the water. One of the mature swans, who have established a nest nearby, anticipating food, swam quickly to the bank, pecking first one then the other pied shag, claiming the right to be fed first. My friend moved slowly on and the swan climbed up onto the grass, still hoping for food. It followed her all the way to the metal bridge, only pausing briefly to acknowledge its partner, sitting on the nest nearby, by dipping its head a couple of times.



**Young pied shags**

### *Dabchick and baby*

I was watching a pair of dabchicks, the little diving birds who are the smallest inhabitant in the estuary, with their baby, on the Waimanu lagoon. There was a scaup, again a little diving bird, near by and every time the scaup dived which was quite frequently, one of the dabchicks also dived. When the scaup popped up the dabchick did the same. Both these birds were very close to each other, and quite close to the baby dabchick. It was almost as if the scaup was taking too much interest in the other's baby and the adult dabchick was keeping it at a distance. I have never seen a scaup being aggressive towards a dabchick; however, something was going on between them. The scaup is quite a lot heavier and a little larger than the dabchick.

### *Cape Barren geese*

We have had a couple of cape barren geese wandering around the town. I suspect they have flown in from a lifestyle block, as they are not a wild bird as such. We have seen the odd one on the beach.



*Cape Barren geese*

### *Blackbirds*

The blackbirds were bought into New Zealand by our early English settlers, who wanted a little of the old country relocated to their new homeland. We had a pair nest in our garden for the first time this year. It took me quite a long time to find it, as they were very vigilant and kept away from the well hidden nest when I was about. There were four babies in there when I found it and the next day they had fledged. The male blackbird would sit on the fence or on our roof with his beak full of worms and cluck cluck loudly, until the coast was clear. You could hear him throughout the day. In the morning our pathway was covered in the bark chips we used to mulch our lovely garden with. Our plant's roots were exposed where the birds had been scratching for insects and worms to feed their family. What excellent parents they were, pity about the garden.



*Waikanae Estuary care group at work*

Hope you have enjoyed your copy of our estuary newsletter

*Mira-Mik Bayen*

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