

Waikanae Estuary Newsletter
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Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve

Photograph by Mik

Waimanu Lagoon

The council has been draining the lagoons to get rid of the weeds that have tended to take over. The hot sun will dry them up. Different species of birds have found this is to their liking as they can now feed in the middle of the lagoons where previously it had been too deep. We have had up to eleven royalspoonbills having a lovely time.



They feed then fly to another spot on the lagoon and away they go with that sideways movement of their bills until one of them decides that there is a better spot further along the edge of the water and they all lift off and follow the leader. Pied stilts daintily probe the soft mud on the perimeter of the lagoon, while the scaup, the black duck, have also taken a liking to the lower water level and increased in numbers. The little shag oversees all this from the macrocarpa tree beside the weir, where it likes to sit by itself most of the time. Its cousins, the little black shags hunt the lagoon in packs, while the pied shags over fly it, flying to and fro, to their feeding ground out to sea and their nests in the shag tree. The small dabchicks have a baby and there is an influx of black swans with one pair nesting with seven eggs. The mallard ducks have made a comeback from a month or two ago, when they were noticeable by their absence, as have the red-bill gulls and with the coot visiting, we have a large variety of waterfowl on the lagoons at the moment.

Harmony

So if you think all is hunky-dory with the birds on the lagoons, with them living in harmony with each other, think again. Most of the time, they all get on fine, but now and again things don't go smoothly. It mostly hinges around the food supply but breeding also has a lot to do with things. In the photograph two of the red-billed gulls are really going hammer and tongs, with the bird they are fighting about looking on, waiting to see which is going to be the dominant one.



Australasian Bittern

A local resident, Vicki Bunch was walking along the walkway beside the river, when she spotted and photographed this bittern. It was in the rushes, half way between the swing bridge at Otaihanga and the weir, at Waikanae Beach, just where there is a little backwater on the river. Bitterns are very shy and freeze with their beak in the air if disturbed. There hasn't been one spotted at the river reserve for quite a number of years, although they are in the wetlands at the northern end of the beach.



Once upon a time The true saga of Henry the swan and Thomas the goose Part two

Around seven years ago a second swan entered the equation, a very pretty young swan. Thomas the goose rather liked this new swan and looked after it as he had looked after "Henrietta", by chasing dogs away and keeping humans at bay (I've been pecked along with several of the lagoon neighbours, many times by Thomas). So a love triangle was established and ... well, you know what happens with eternal



triangles! Everything was going along fine for a while until this new swan laid an egg and Henrietta helped it make a large round nest. No one thought the egg would be fertile as well, with a name like Henrietta, the original swan was supposed to be female. (Note: it's very hard to establish the gender of mature black swans.) Our new swan then laid four more eggs. Thomas the goose didn't think much of this as the swans were doing their own thing and he was losing control of the situation. So he started to beat both the swans up. Jealousy really is a curse. Through Thomas's antagonism the swans broke two of the eggs – but they did manage to hatch three. This meant that "Henrietta" was really a Henry and he had had eighteen gay years on the lagoons with Thomas the goose. The only way to resolve the dilemma was to change the swans' names, so Henrietta became Henry, the new swan was given Henrietta for her name and Thomas the goose remained exactly the same--Thomas the goose. Once the eggs hatched, however, a transformation took place. Thomas now knew what the swans had been up to so he stopped being aggressive and lovingly looked after the new babies as if they were his own. It was wonderful to see.



This saga is featured as a serial over the next few months

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae

More wild birds visit Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve than any other area in the Wellington province

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