

**Waikanae Estuary Newsletter
No 18 August 2008**

www.kapitibirdtours.co.nz

Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



Waikanae estuary

Shags

When I was a young lad growing up in Upper-Hutt, we lived on the main road by Quinn's Post. There were open paddocks from the main road to the river. We would take our dogs hunting for rabbits and would end up beside the river. I can remember seeing all these birds sitting on a large tree overhanging the water. I knew they were shags as they would spread their wings as shags do. However I never knew as a young lad what type of shags they were. So now I am going to show you how to distinguish between the shags that frequent our estuary and hopefully help you to identify them.



Little shag

Photo Eileen Thomas

Little shag

This is a little shag, he is usually a solitary bird. He has quite a stubby bill, yellow in adults, dark in the younger birds, with a long tail compared with the little black shag. His colouring can vary from black to pied. Look for him as you walk the lagoons. He may be on his own, on a flax or cabbage tree, if he isn't fishing. He prefers the lagoon and the river for his food, and doesn't go out to sea much.

Little black shag

The little black shag is another species you may see on the lagoons or the river. Thirty years ago the little black shag was seen only occasionally from Wellington to Waikanae. What a change from those days. Now they like to hunt the river and lagoons in packs of up to sixty birds at a time, although thirty is a more normal number. They can be seen sitting in a tree all together, at the side of the lagoon, or on the sand bar on the river. If you study the photographs, compare the snub beak on the little shag with the long grey bill of the little black shag.



Little black shags on Waimanu lagoon

Spotted shag

This shag is a rare visitor and is very distinctive with its yellow feet and bill, grey back speckled with green spots. It has long neck stripes and two prominent crests, when in breeding plumage. Thirty plus years ago ten were observed within our estuary. However I have only observed the odd single bird at times, in the last fifteen years. Funnily enough as I am writing this, there is a young spotted shag fishing the river. I suspect this is the bird that has been down here on his own, off and on over the last few months.



Young spotted shag on the Waikanae estuary.



Pied shag

This is a pied shag. Thirty years ago this bird was rare in the Wellington province, with only a single bird seen at Waikanae. Today these birds are nesting within the Waimanu lagoon and are here in numbers. Looking at the photograph by Karen Moffatt you should be able to easily identify them. Quite a large bird. If you look in the macrocarpa tree on the northern Waimanu lagoon, some may still be nesting, if they are not roosting. They also may be flying down the middle of the lagoon with a purpose, coming and going from their nest to their fishing ground.

Pied shag

The black shag is the biggest shag on our estuary although the pied is almost as large. They can be seen beside the river, usually on their own or there may be half a dozen together. Sometimes sitting with the blackbacked gulls on the sand spit. They also sit on the piles of the wharf within Waimanu lagoon. They will fish the lagoons and the river although they prefer the sea. You may see them with an eel if you are lucky. They are a large black bird with a cream face and black feet.

Black shag



Black shag at Waimanu lagoon
Photo Jody Burgess



Cygnets

Last newsletter I told of the cygnet with the fishing hook and line that it had swallowed and got caught half way down its throat. Andrea Wilson at Raumatī Veterinary clinic removed it and we released it back to its family. Well it's doing fine, it's almost impossible to tell which bird is the recovering one as both cygnets are doing well. See photograph.

This is 18 months of estuary news –I would like feed back as to whether I should continue to publish, or discontinue it--Mik



Waikanae estuary

Mik the Birdman of Waikanae



www.wotzon.com/waikanaebirdtours