

Waikanae Estuary Newsletter

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Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



Waikanae estuary

Photographer Eileen Thomas

The survival of the fittest

Mallard ducks and to a lesser extent the little brown diving bird the 'scaup' have been losing their young at quite an alarming rate. Two days ago I saw a scaup with six babies and the next day she had two. The mallard ducks over the last couple of months have hatched forty-six ducklings and lost forty-five of them, only one reaching maturity. However, there are some very contented seagulls, pukeko, eels, rats, cats, and stoats around, they all love this time of the year. It's just the way of things. They all have to survive in the wild and although the mallards lose so many of their young they still manage to increase in numbers. This hasn't just happened; it's been like it forever. There is one redeeming feature and that is the fact that recently black-backed gulls have reduced in numbers quite dramatically within our estuary and are not ranging over the lagoons looking for an opportunity to pluck a duckling off the water as they had been doing in the past.

Pukeko and Takahe

While taking some American tourists around our estuary lagoons I was asked the question; what is the difference between a pukeko and a takahe, as they have very similar colouring? Not having been asked this question before, I thought it may be a good idea to explain the difference.

Pukeko are known as a swamp hen. They love the water and swamps, although they also like to graze around the edge of pastures. They are good flyers and can cover quite long distances, flying mainly at night. Some of them have been known to stay in the area they were born, whilst others have wandered far and wide, depending on how much food is available. If you compare the two species they generally look alike but in reality, are quite different. The pukeko appears ungainly but can run quite fast and is a lot smaller boned than the takahe.

The takahe, were thought to be extinct and were rediscovered in 1948 in the Murchison Mountains, in the South Island. They are an endangered species and although they look, in colouring, similar to the pukeko, walk differently as they have shorter thicker legs [not made for wading]. They are a much heavier bird and can't fly.

Coming from mountainous country they would never have seen the ocean. When relocated to Tiritiri-Matangi Island at Auckland some have been known to go swimming in the sea, something a pukeko wouldn't do as they like fresh water. Takahe have also been relocated to Kapiti Island, where you can get up really close, as they have no fear of humans. When looked at together, the difference is quite obvious.



I will leave you to differentiate between the two D.O.C photographs.

Penguin

Katharine was swimming at the beach here at Waikanae when she was eyeballed by a little blue penguin. The bird was on the surface and swam around her in a circle. She was probably the funniest thing the penguin had seen in a long time. They are seen quite often by fishermen when boating to the fishing grounds around Kapiti Island, they also nest under the door step at the nature lodge on the island and at various locations throughout New Zealand. At times they are found dead washed up on our beach.



Little blue penguin

Love Birds

Henrietta and Henry the black swans with Thomas the goose have been having a hard time of it with this last family. They had been kicked off the Waimanu lagoon where they had raised sixty seven of their babies in just under the six years after the young female swan Henrietta turned up. Another pair of swans with young have aggressively chased them off the lagoon and for the first time they had to make a nest up the creek behind the swings in Queens Road well away from everyone. They hatched six cygnets there and after many aggressive encounters with the swans who had claimed the lagoons as their own managed, over time, to get back onto the Waimanu lagoon. The six cygnets that can now fly have themselves been chased away, this time by their own parents, Henrietta and Henry. Thomas the goose would never be aggressive to the cygnets, as I am sure they think he is their dad. This is the story of the swan's life. Raise a family until they are large enough to look after themselves, and then chase them away off the lagoons to the river. Then start another family, although in this case I am not sure Henry, with his disability and at his age, being around thirty years old, is capable of another family. However, having a young partner is a help. Eventually these young birds will fly away to the South Island and to the Wairarapa lakes and beyond, until old enough to raise a family of their own. And having learnt from their parents will repeat the saga all over again



Photographer Eileen Thomas
Don't mess with me.
[Thomas the cygnet's step-dad]



Kapiti island

Jon Callwood

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae



I know how many newsletters I send out-- it would be nice to have an indication of how many are sent on to others.--Mik