

Waikanae Estuary Newsletter
No 23 January 2009

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Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



Harrier hawk checking out our front lawn

photo by Mik

There have been dramatic [bird] life-changing events happening in the estuary within the last two years.

For more than thirty years the black-backed gulls have been able to feed at the local landfill, and as there has been ample food available from this source they have increased to thousands of birds, from a base of three to eight hundred. It is now quite noticeable how these numbers have reduced. This is because of our local landfill closing. The gulls have not been able to obtain food from this source. In the long term this may not be a bad thing, as these gulls had really taken over the area, to the detriment of the other inhabitants. It will be interesting to see what happens now, how the other species react to the reduction in numbers of these birds.



Black- backed gull

photo by Mik

The other dramatic event which has changed the make-up of the estuary is the pied shags have found it. They have claimed the large macrocarpa tree on the northern lagoon as their own nesting tree. The result being we have a large influx of these birds where up to two years ago they were a rare visitor.

Australian litter

Whilst walking my dog on the sand spit I came across a light blue wheelie bin lid that had washed up on the last tide. I picked it up to deposit it in the nearest rubbish bin. The lid was covered with barnacles on the inside and on the outside had, stencilled in raised letters, "Tweed Shire Council". Realising we don't have Shires in New Zealand I wondered where it had come from. Checking on my computer later, I found a "Tweed Shire" in New South Wales, Australia. This bin lid must have floated across the Tasman Sea to our beach here at Waikanae. I wonder how long it had been at sea. I checked on the local NSW papers and sent an email to the editor of one. "Dear Sir, please keep your rubbish on your side of the ditch and don't pollute our beautiful beaches with your old wheelie bin lids". Then with tongue in cheek, as I felt that I may have been a little abrupt, I offered to come on over to Australia and speak to their school children on the dangers of littering and how it can have a world wide effect, especially on the bird life.

I do quite a lot of speaking to groups and school children. To facilitate this and spread the word on the fragility of the estuary and the wonderful birdlife that exist in this area, our local Community Council saw their way clear to procure for me a laptop computer and a projector, so that I would be free to produce my power point presentation, without borrowing the equipment. This was a wonderful gesture and let's hope I can expand my talks this New Year, to justify their faith in me.

White-fronted terns

Now that the white-baiters have departed the terns have moved back to our estuary. There are around six to eight hundred of these birds on the sand spit at the moment.

If you disturb them, up they go all together, then reform as a group and land one after each other like a waterfall in another spot. They still stay on the sand spit until ready to move on to another fishing ground. One day they are here and then they are gone.

These birds are known as the swallows of the sea with their curved wings and graceful flight.



White fronted tern photo by Mik

The Nature coast is just that and over the years we have documented how the birds interplay, one with each other.

We have seen swans herding lost ducklings back to their parents; the white goose [Thomas] being a father figure to numerous broods of cygnets; the little black shags herding the fish against the shingle banks and the herons rushing over to get the little fish that throw themselves out of the water to get away from the shags. We also saw how the red-billed gulls couldn't stand the large white heron visiting and dive-bombed it and how the ducks as a group chased the pukeko which had pinched one of the ducklings and saved it. Also we saw that rare visitor, the little egret being hassled by the red-billed gulls. [These stories in previous newsletters] However we have never ever seen a blackbird feeding a skylark baby in its nest, especially when both skylark parents are also feeding it. See the wonderful photograph taken by David Mudge. [courtesy Nga Manu images.]



Photo by Mik

Learning sailing on the Waimanu lagoon.

Hope you have enjoyed our newsletter No 23--Mik the birdman of Waikanae



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