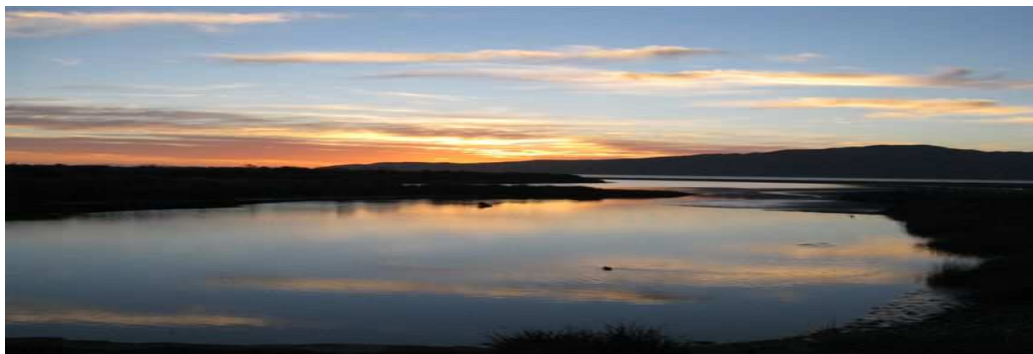


Waikanae Estuary Newsletter
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Waikanae estuary

Photograph Mik Peryer

Falcon

We have had a visit from a falcon. He has been ranging around the beach area for a week or two. I saw him down Te Moana road about six days ago and then he turned up on our bird feeder. I managed to get this photo of him through the glass from our lounge, as I daren't get any closer. He turned and looked at me for the photo shot, and then off he flew. He looks a bit bedraggled because it was a drizzly day and he is quite wet. The next day I saw him fly past our lounge window at speed, heading for the estuary lagoons. The birds down there had better look out or they will become falcon dinner. The estuary isn't the usual haunt of the falcon. They usually are a bird of the bush-land and hill country however they do like to check out the birdlife on the estuary now and then.



Spotted shag

Another recent visitor has been a young spotted shag. There hasn't been spotted shag in the estuary for quite a number of years. The last time it was quite a mature bird with a silver band on its leg; it had been banded on Somes Island in Wellington harbour. This bird was very small, wasn't banded and was very light in colouring to its chest and neck. The back had beautiful blue-green spots showing through the light grey of its feathers. Spotted shags have yellow legs and beak, unlike most other shags which have dark legs and feet.

Fantail

We have had a couple of lovely fantails flitting around our house. What a beautiful little bird they are. They appear very friendly as you walk around your garden; however it's the insects you disturb that they are after, thanks very much.



Pukeko

A pukuko was seen stock still beside the pond, he was eyeing up a duckling in the rushes. Quick as a flash he grabbed it; then took off with those ungainly strides of his away from the pond. My friend Colin was watching and chased the puke back towards the pond. On the water were around a dozen ducks. As a group they rose as one and flew straight at the pukeko, quacking loudly. Well this was just too much for the puke and he dropped the duckling back into the water where it paddled to safety. The pukeko flew away chased by the ducks. However it's not only the pukeko the ducklings have to be wary of. The breeding season is a wonderful time on our lagoons, the mallard ducks can have a brood of ten to twenty ducklings and in the course of a couple of days they can lose the lot. As well as the pukeko there are some very contented hawks, seagulls, and eels about they just love the breeding season.

However the eels may get the ducklings but the shags get the eels. Everyone is trying to eat each other on our lagoons. It's the survival of the fittest.

Have you ever seen a shag eating an eel? They first catch their eel then holding on to one end, flick the eel up into the air, then the shag opens its beak and the eel is supposed to slide down its throat. However the eel doesn't think that that is a good idea and winds itself around the shags beak and holds on tightly. So mister shag has got a fight on his hands, he will at times shake the eel loose and whack it on the water to stun it.

Sometimes the eel, if it is big enough, will get away, but mostly, eventually down the shags gullet it will go. The eel can be seen fighting even as it's going down. The shag will then swim to the nearest log, hop out of the water to rest and digest his dinner, then spread out his wings to dry in the sun. Shags need to dry their wings as they haven't much oil on their body, and they tend to get waterlogged, which helps them to swim under water and catch their dinner.

Paradise ducks

The paradise ducks are in the estuary in increasing numbers at the moment, mostly younger birds, probably this years hatching. They come in at a great height, maybe a dozen birds at a time, then hook their wings and slip and slide from side to side and down they come at great speed, only to level off at the last moment and land in a group.

Our local hawk has been ranging the river and when he approaches the parries, up they go in a mob. They take off and fly away from the perceived threat, then return to their favourite spot on the river until Mr. Hawk returns yet again.



Waimanu lagoon

Photo Mik Peryer

Hope you have enjoyed your copy of our estuary newsletter

Mik Peryer

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