

## Waikanae Estuary Newsletter

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**Where have all these black-backed gulls disappeared to?**

Have a look at the photograph taken from the same spot on the next page.

### Pied shags

The terrible storm we had a couple of weeks ago was very stressful on our nesting pied



shags. They have their nests right on the end of flimsily branches in their tree and I really don't know how they don't get thrown out of their nests or flung off the branches in a storm like we have just experienced. These birds have been nesting for around two years now and have babies all year around. Shags have almost become the predominant species within our lagoons, not quite displacing the resident ducks and at times outnumbering the scaup

**Mum and three babies**

### Paradise ducks

We have a lot of young paradise ducks in the river and on the Waimeha lagoon. They are young birds and haven't paired off yet. The female birds are the ones with the white heads which is quite unusual as with most birds the male is the most colourful. When the paradise ducks sit on their eggs their white head stands out, not like the mallard which blends into the background. We also have Canada geese frequenting the river most evenings, with some of them staying most of the day. One group of these birds have a white goose living and flying with them. I have seen this group feeding at Queen Elizabeth Park at Paekakariki at times and the white goose is a real giveaway, whereas the Canada geese tend to blend into the background.

### Could we have a new Eternal Triangle?

We at last have some good news as it appears that Henrietta may have found a new mate. Thomas the goose is still in the picture as he gets on really well with Henrietta although he's not too sure of this new swan. He puts himself between it and Henrietta and sometimes chases it away and has been seen to grab it by the tail and hang on tight. Shortly after this, the two swans swam up and talked to each other, raising and lowering their heads as swans do. I do believe something's in the air and it looks like maybe it is going to be a new threesome. This is taking place on the backwater by the weir and in the river because of the other swans claiming the two lagoons as their own.



Henrietta Thomas and the new [male?] swan

## Falcon

I was in our family room when I saw a movement outside our window. It was a falcon taking a starling out of the sky and landing on our lawn with it. I looked out of the window and the falcon looked at me then flew with its prey towards the river. There were about a dozen starlings in the group and they chased the falcon or rather flew in the same direction. By the time I had grabbed my camera all were gone. It's great to see the falcons in the estuary doing well, as they are top of the food chain and if they are doing well, along with the Harrier hawks, it shows the estuary is in good health



Falcon

## Little black shags

The little black shags are back in the estuary hunting in packs. They have been very active in the Waimanu



lagoon with around thirty fishing together. The red billed gulls follow the shags around the lagoon, I am not too sure what the red billed gulls are getting from the shags. However they are after something as they dip and dive over the shags and then alight on the water and take food off the surface. Perhaps the shags disgorge what they are catching or maybe just disturb the insects in the water.

## Human Intervention

So many gulls in the first photograph are the product of human intervention in the form of the landfill. These gulls wouldn't survive within the estuary feeding on the natural food as there are far too many of them. With the closing of the local tip, they have had to find a new tip, or starve to death. They have relocated in their hundreds to the new landfill at Levin. The black-backed gulls that are now in the estuary, maybe about three hundred are generally staying and feeding naturally on the sand-spit and the river mouth. This recent photograph, below of the river is from nearly the same place as the earlier one and is devoid of gulls.



There are royal spoonbills, black swans, pied shags and little black shags in the river but no black-backed gulls.

*Hope you enjoyed our Twenty-eighth newsletter*

*Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae*

[www.wgtn.wotzon.com/waikanaebirdtours](http://www.wgtn.wotzon.com/waikanaebirdtours)

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