

Waikanae Estuary Newsletter

No 45 November 2010

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Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001

An Estuary update

Thomas the goose is progressing well in his quest to be a father figure to the three cygnets. The parents are being very tolerant, although the cob isn't too happy with Tom's persistence. We now have three trees with pied shag nests. They have moved into the little one by the weir and at the northern end of the southern lagoon, in addition to their large tree on the northern lagoon, with many nests. The royal spoonbills also like to roost at the top of this tree along with the odd black shag.

The local powers that be have installed new wheelchair friendly paths around the two lagoons as well as upgrading the existing, this is a great improvement. No more wet feet.

The white-baiters have been getting quite good catches. The word has got around with thirty five cars on the sand-spit this weekend and with many more people fishing the river.

Sad times for Moira and me as Meg our Springer Spaniel had to be put down at thirteen years old. It's strange walking the lagoons in the morning without her.



Thomas with the new cygnets—hoping to become a father figure once more.

Pied shags industriously building their nest in the tree by the weir



Photographs by June Deakin [Scotland]

Pied shags in distress



I had a ring from a fellow who had spotted a pied shag caught in a set net in the river, asking for assistance to free it, or rather asking me to free it. These birds have razor sharp beaks and will attack if cornered. I grabbed my full chest waders, a very heavy parka with long sleeves for protection to my arms, a couple of old towels, a pair of scissors and a knife. Down to the river I went. The bird was in a net quite a long way out in the river. It had been in there for about an hour and was struggling less and less and was under the water a fair bit of the time. I waded out midstream and reached over and grabbed the net and pulled it tight to entrap the bird more so that it couldn't

peck me. I wet the towel and threw it over the bird and then grabbed it through the towel around its neck and held on tight so it couldn't get me with its beak. With my free hand I reached into my pocket, retrieved the scissors and proceeded to snip the net from around the bird's body. I also had to be careful of its feet as they have long sharp claws at the end of their 'webs'. It took quite a little while to free the bird as it was really tangled tightly. I managed to ease it out of the net and waded towards the shore with it, still hanging onto its neck through the wet towel. I then threw it out of the towel away from me and the net. I had previously released a spotted shag from a net and it made straight for me. I had to use the towel like a bullfighter to fend it away, so I was very wary this time. However, it landed on its back, took a minute to right itself and paddled across the river to the far bank where it waddled out of the water to recover.



The two photographs are by Rob Jackson and are of a pied shag caught a couple of days later. Rob and a white-baiter managed to pull the net to shore and free the bird. The terrified shag lashed out with its razor sharp bill and slashed its rescuer on the hand. He wasn't as prepared as I was and had no protective clothing. Apart from some missing feathers and skin damage the shag was in pretty

good shape after its ordeal. Pity about the white-baiter.

The true story of Henry the wild black swan and Thomas the white goose documenting their thirty year sojourn on the Waimanu Lagoon at Waikanae New Zealand

Part nine

An earlier brood of cygnets were only four months old, didn't have their flight feathers so couldn't fly. Their parents started another nest sitting on six eggs and suddenly changed from loving to aggressive parents. The swan not sitting on the nest would attack the youngsters and try and chase them over the road to the lower lagoon.

Sixty-nine eggs have been laid in the six years since the nice young female swan, now named Henrietta turned up.



Henry and Henrietta the black swans with Thomas the goose have hatched their six eggs. Henrietta moved off the nest onto the lagoon and five of the babies followed, but the last one was a little



hesitant. The result was that when they all started swimming across the water this one was left behind. The two parent swans didn't seem to worry about this straggler. It upset Thomas the goose and he swam back to the little cygnet and stayed with it until it managed to catch up with the rest. This family is a threesome without doubt. They now have only five cygnets as one was taken by a large eel. People think this is terrible as a baby swan is so cute and fluffy, however all creatures on or in the estuary have a right to live and it's the old saying "the survival of the fittest" that prevails.

Photographs by Eileen Thomas

This saga is featured as a serial over the next few months

Hits last month eight thousand nine hundred & forty two

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae

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