

Waikanae Estuary Newsletter

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The Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve is a Nationally Significant Reserve

Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001

Thomas the Goose –an Update

On the 24th of February 2009 the eternal triangle of Henry, Henrietta the black swan and Thomas the goose ended after Henry passed away. Henry was thirty years old and had six years on his own, eighteen gay years with Thomas the goose and another six years with Henrietta.

With the passing of Henry, Thomas and Henrietta stayed together for a few months then Henrietta being a young bird took off with another. This left Thomas on the lagoon by himself. Tom tried his hardest to become a step dad to any of the swans on the lagoon who were nesting, but to no avail. The female swan, the ‘pen’ would tolerate him, but the male, the ‘cob’ wouldn’t have a bar of him anywhere near their young. So Thomas was left on his own for around two years and for a few months was looking in a sad state, loosing condition and a lot of feathers. Eventually, he perked up and started to look his old self again. He likes to stay at the top end of the



Photograph Eileen Thomas

Northern lagoon, and visits Iris and John’s home which backs on to the reserve quite regularly. He waddles up their back path, knocks on their back door and if it is open he goes into the kitchen and pinches fruit out of the bowl. He also likes to check out the bedrooms at times. Luckily the floors are tiled.

There are two white ganders on the lagoon. Thomas is now around thirty years old and the other gander “George” who turned up on the lagoons around six years ago, is of undertermined age and has always been a loner. Someone deposited two geese on the lagoons much to the delight of the two ganders. Both ganders mated up and Thomas became a dad to five goslings for the first time ever and a week later George’s mate hatched two. Then the trouble started. As there was only a week between the hatchings there wasn’t much difference in the size of the goslings. George moved in on Thomas and took over the two broods and Thomas was barred from being a dad and wasn’t allowed to be part of the extended family. He ended up to one side and then over a period just gave up trying to be involved. It is quite sad as, when with the eternal triangle [see love story] he was such a marvellous step dad to the cygnets. So Thomas was again on his own. There were swans nesting by the little bridge on the top Waimanu lagoon who managed to hatch five young. The parents were very vigilant and Thomas was kept at bay and not allowed anywhere near the cygnets. Tragedy struck—the cob died. We don’t know why, but these things happen on the estuary. Birds live and die there. This left mother swan on her own, to fend for the babies by herself-- all very upsetting.

Gallant Thomas comes to the rescue.

At last after two years on his own, apart from the little time he was allowed to look after his own brood of five goslings Thomas has come back into his own again. He has stepped into the breach and has become a step dad to the five cygnets. Out of tragedy has come a triumph, he now has a purpose again in life. Mother swan, who we suspect is one of Henry's siblings from way back, is quite happy to have him helping out, and keeping those dogs, older swans and humans at bay. The new brood was taken over the roadway to the bottom lagoon. The cygnets had to traverse the gutters and the roadway to get there. The gutters are about the same height as the babies and they fronted up to them, then had to give a big hop up, flopped their bodies onto the top and slithered over onto the footpath; away they went, with mum and Thomas to check out the bottom lagoon. On this lagoon live around half a dozen



juvenile swans. Thomas, after seeing the new brood down the bank and into the water, went about chasing these swans away from the new babies. Tom over the years has only on rare occasions chased a swan but now that he was back in control, he became very aggressive and he shifted those birds smartly, away to the far end of the lagoon where they stayed. It is quite remarkable, after all these years to see him back doing what he is best at, being a step dad again.

Photograph Eileen Thomas

Thomas, back where he belongs, a step dad again.

The swans hatched five but have lost two, so Thomas is now looking after three.



Photograph Moira Peryer

Hits last Month Sixteen Thousand Four Hundred and Fifty.

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae

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