

**Waikanae Estuary Newsletter
No 63 May 2012**

The Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve is a Nationally Significant Reserve
Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001

Red-billed gull



Photograph Roger Smith



It's quite easy to spot the difference between the mature red-billed gull and the immature youngster. The young bird has a black bill and dark feet and is often mistaken for a black-billed gull. Over a period it will slowly colour-up until it reaches maturity. The parents have infinite patience as the baby won't leave them alone, chasing them for

food with a whistling cry. The parents have a raucous cry with their beak wide open. They will scream at another bird if it enters their space especially if there's food about, they also dive bomb.

Caspian Tern

Caspian Terns reside on the sand-spit at times, noticeable because of their bright red bill and their size. They are the largest tern on the Estuary. Watch them ranging up the river forever looking into the water, then down they go with folded wings after their dinner is spotted. Most times, up they come with a little fish in their beak, other times it's try again as the fish live to see another day. These birds are known to range as far away as the coast of South America.



Photograph Gavin Klee

Black-backed Gulls

It is quite easy to distinguish between the mature bird and the juvenile black-backed gull. Youngsters are so different from their parents, being dark brown for the first three years. When seen on the estuary or river they are sometimes mistaken for another species, such as a brown skua, a bird of the Southern ocean, which visit at times.

Photographs Mik Peryer



Both are scavengers although the skua is the more aggressive bird. At times they will chase the gulls until they disgorge whatever they have eaten and take it for themselves. Most all of these gulls chase each other if one has

food, hoping some will be dropped in the chase to be swooped up by the bird doing the chasing. When they have congregated on the sand-spit or river bank, resting, one harrier hawk, flying near by will frighten all of the gulls into the air. When in a group situation I suspect they spook each other. However, singly the black-backed gull will attack a hawk. These gulls are the most prolific birds on the Estuary, they breed locally on the boulder bank at the Northern tip of Kapiti Island.



Red-billed gulls in residence

Photograph Grace Suckling

Hits last Month Thirteen Thousand two Hundred and twenty six

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae

Sponsored by Chris Lee Sharebroking