

Stoats



Rabbits were introduced to New Zealand by our early settlers to supplement the larder and as game. They breed [just like rabbits] and soon a plague of rabbits took over farms on both islands. The rabbits eat the grass right down to their roots and their dropping and pee kill the rest. Soon many of the farms became a desert with burrows everywhere. Shooting was inefficient as was poisoning. The difficulty was the pelt trade, as their fur was valuable and trappers made sure they didn't trap too many so

they could come back and trap some more when they breed up again. The farmers lobbied the Government to bring in stoats to kill the rabbits and also to make the rabbit's pelts worthless to stop them being farmed [As the trappers were doing] This was done. Stoats were introduced and became a protected species. What a disaster this has been for our ground nesting birds. By the time stoats were taken off the protected list they were widespread on both Islands.

Look at the condition of this stoat photographed by Roger Smith on the Waimanu Lagoon. A blackbird was sounding its alarm call from a nearby bush for all the birds to hear.

Our Waikanae Estuary Care Group is doing its little bit by trapping pests within the Reserve, with the total catch for 12 months, comprising 12 weasels, 7 stoats, 43 rats, 4 mice and 4 hedgehogs, all introduced pests.

Dabchicks

The dabchicks rather like our lagoons and most of the lagoons spread along the coast, as they prefer still water without much movement. They can also be seen on farm dams and ponds and are in the lagoons on both side of the Waikanae River but do tend to move around, flying mainly at night. They are starting to nest. The young are carried on their back and even tunnel under mum's feathers at times



Banded Dotterel

Stumpy the banded dotterel is without a foot and was last documented in the November 2012, No 69 newsletter and has been observed again, looking in splendid condition, nesting in the reserve. His disability doesn't appear to be worrying him at all.

Nursery



Mother swan made a lovely nest and along came a goose and decided that if it's good enough for a swan to nest in this sunny spot its good enough for her. In the photograph by Malcolm Thorpe, the goose has just come off her nest [see the eggs] and the two swans, one still on hers, are taking a real interest, as much to say "Where are you off to?" That's the cobb on the left. The pen was sitting on four eggs

of which three hatched; the goose has yet to hatch her eggs.

Fernbird

The fernbird has been secreted within the Estuary Reserve for a lot longer that we realise. Matt Ward rediscovered it in 2012. However, I have had an email from England from Sarah Jane Hills who receives my monthly newsletters, recalling being taken to much the same area in the 1990s by a friend from DOC, to view this little bird. It is so secretive it's no wonder it hasn't been reported more often. Now that a walkway through the Scientific Reserve and a foot-bridge across the Mazengarb stream has been installed, creating access to this area, I only hope the fernbird's habitat isn't being compromised.

Wrybills



Three wrybills were in the Estuary Reserve. They were probably staying over for a while before making their way to the South Island where they breed in the braided rivers of Canterbury and inland Otago. A black-



backed gull was moving the birds along the shore line, not letting them feed at the edge of the water. The birds flew past the gull onto the softer sand to rest and proved very difficult to see. The photographs by Roger Smith show how these birds use their crooked bill to feed.

Thomas the Goose

Thomas is settling down very well at Craig Shepherd's Wellington Bird Rehabilitation Trust, considering he has lost sight in both eyes. He has for a companion "Siggy" the injured cygnet and they are getting along fine. We are very fortunate to have such a caring person as Craig to look after Thomas in his remaining years.



Hits last Month—eighteen thousand seven hundred & ninety five.