

## Waikanae Estuary Newsletter

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Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



The Oxbow with the subdivision up to and behind the trees

*This estuary of ours is a wonderful place for the birds with hundreds living within the estuary and surrounds. However, it's also a very dangerous place for them to live, especially with the influx of humans who through their thoughtlessness, greed and untidiness, unwittingly put the birds lives in danger. Following are some examples.*

### Progress

Progress they call it and unfortunately we are noticing the effect of this within our estuary. There are existing power lines along the perimeter of the ox-bow which is where the river used to run and is now a backwater. The birds rather like this area and regularly feed and nest there. Along came the developers, created a lovely subdivision right up to the oxbow and in went the street lights. When the birds feeding and roosting on the wetlands of the oxbow decide to fly in the evening, or the night, they rise up out of the water in the dark over the trees and bang they are blinded by the glare of the street lights. They can't see the existing power lines and fly straight into them. We have lost four Royal Spoonbill, two swans, a goose and a couple of sea-gulls in the last few months since the lights were installed. Fortunately the local council has been made aware of this and the lights are in the first instance having shades installed. We will see what effect this has.

### Fishing

In newsletter No 17 July 08 I told of the cygnet that had swallowed the fishing line and had the hook caught in its throat and how Andréa from Raumati Veterinary clinic removed it. Here's an X-ray of the swan's neck with the hook in place. The cygnet has fully recovered and is now flying.

We had a red-billed gull on the river, flapping unnaturally in the water. It had nylon from a fishing line wrapped around its body. The tide and its flapping took it to the other side of the river where it got caught in a willow branch, washed down in the last flood. Being a kind-hearted fellow, I waded across the river, swimming the last deep part, caught the bird unwound the nylon, and threw it into the air...one very lucky bird.



I had a phone call from a lady who lives by the lagoons. She was most upset as one of the baby swans had become tangled in some very heavy nylon fishing line someone had left in the water. The swan had nylon wrapped around its body really tightly and the other end of the line was tangled in the growth on the bottom of the lagoon. The swan tried to take off but as it did the nylon tightened and flipped the bird onto its back and with its head on the end of that long neck whacking onto the water it almost knocked its self out. We tried to loosen the line from the swan's body but it was extremely tightly wound and needed to be cut. My friend had brought down a pair of scissors so we cut the nylon from around the bird's body and released it... one very happy bird.

### Plastic bags

Quite often we see seagulls flying past over the river trailing a plastic bag, like a parachute, caught around its neck or on its foot. When the bird lands on the water the bag fills and acts like a sea anchor. The bird can't take off, it has to paddle to the river bank and onto the water's edge to let the water drain out of the bag before it can fly again. Eventually, thank goodness, the bag comes loose and the bird is freed.

### Dogs

We have lost swans and ducks to the inconsiderate and illegal running of dogs off the leash around our lagoons. It's instinctive for a dog to attack any bird it finds on the bank or in the water. The owners don't believe that their lovely dog would ever attack a bird, but, it's inbuilt to all dogs' nature to chase anything that moves. They may not intend to kill; however, just a little injury is enough to inflict a fatal wound.

*It's very difficult to educate people on the fragility of the ecology of our estuary –we just have to keep on plugging away. –Mik*

We have been talking about the thoughtlessness of a lot of people –let's now talk of all those people who love nature. The children, who delight in the open spaces, chasing the birds and the little feathers fluttering in the breeze; being able to draw on the wet sand with a stick, make a sand castle, and paddle in the last little wavelet that comes in.

I like to see the enthusiasm of the tourists, about everything we here in Waikanae and New Zealand take for granted; the greenness of our landscape the driftwood on the seashore, the seashells on the beautiful beach, the sand we walk on, the white baiters lining the edge of the river, the wonderment of their catch, [especially when informed the fish have to be gutted and the eyes taken out]; the cleanliness of our country, the friendliness of the people. Even the birds are friendly and unafraid of people, especially around our estuary. The air you can *drink* and the beauty we are surrounded in and don't even notice. Let's keep it that way.



*Waikanae Estuary evening*

*Moira and Mik the Birdman of Waikanae wish you a happy Christmas and a prosperous new year*



Limited copies of my book "Tales of the Waikanae Estuary" are still available for Christmas presents. Tour gift Vouchers are also available