

The Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve is a Nationally Significant Reserve

Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



Eileen Thomas and Craig Shepherd releasing Thomas

Thomas the goose's homecoming.

Last month I wrote about Thomas being very sick and going into rehab and Christine Mander from the PetVet Silverstream clinic trying to find out what caused his illness so that he could be treated and hopefully fully recover.

Craig Shepherd from The Wellington Bird Rehabilitation Trust nursed him back to health.

Christine's Story

On arrival at the vet clinic, Thomas had no obvious injuries or signs of respiratory or gut infections. He was still eating small amounts of food but was quite apathetic and unable to walk at all, nor stand for more than a few seconds without toppling forwards or sitting down on his bottom.

Blood samples showed no sign of anaemia or organ failure and were remarkably normal for such an old sick bird. Results for lead poisoning would later prove negative also. Conscious x-rays were taken to see if there might be signs of arthritis or other damage to Thomas's spine or legs (fortunately no) or heavy metal (such as lead, copper or zinc) in Thomas's stomach - heavy metal poisoning is a common cause of birds presenting with leg weakness and other damage to the nervous system. There was only the tiniest piece of wire in Thomas's stomach (which may or may not have been toxic) but there seemed to be far too much whitish (on x-ray) indigestible material there. It is normal for most birds to have some grit in their stomach but too much can indicate a problem and interfere with digestion. Two days later, the x-rays were repeated, this time under anaesthesia. Unfortunately, these showed very little change, even though Thomas had been eating and defecating almost normally.



During his initial four days at the Vet Clinic, Thomas was getting only slightly stronger and was really just holding his own weight-wise. Christine sent the x-rays to the radiologists at Massey University Veterinary Teaching Hospital for a second opinion and they agreed that the amount of grit in Thomas's stomach seemed excessive and may be part of his problem.

The simple solution was to flush Thomas's stomach to find out what was in it. As he was eating by himself, Thomas had been sent back to Craig's place for ongoing supportive care in a more natural environment while Christine waited for his radiology report. This happened faster than expected and so poor old Thomas was back at PetVet Silverstream the very next day. Thomas was again put under anaesthesia and kept asleep using Isoflurane gas through a tube down his windpipe. He was then carefully strapped with his head downward to a slant-board at about 45 degrees so that no fluid could accidentally get into his airways. Several litres of warm water were gently flushed through a second tube into his gizzard (muscular stomach) and at least a quarter cup of fine gravel, quartz, ground glass, shell and a small amount of sand were removed. Christine was anxious that this might not help Thomas (for example, the grit might have accumulated because of an underlying problem with his stomach movements) but his recovery sped up from that point on. Almost immediately after waking up from his anaesthetic, he began to eat better, walk better, gain weight and make a whole lot more noise! We will never know for sure what caused Thomas's predicament – perhaps a food shortage during the recent drought or some sort of toxin that temporarily interfered with normal gizzard function. But, for the time being at least, Thomas seems to be recovering well. After a couple more days in hospital at PetVet Silverstream, Thomas was sent back to recuperate in luxury for several weeks at Craig's place, before being deemed strong enough to tough it out with the other birds back at Waikanae Lagoons.



Photos Eileen Thomas
Six years in a love triangle.

The cygnets think Tom is their Dad.

Henry the black swan with the injured wing who couldn't fly was six years on the lagoons by himself—eighteen years in a 'gay' relationship with Thomas the goose, then the two of them were in an eternal love triangle for six years with Henrietta the other swan, producing between the *three* of them seventy-three babies.

Photo Colin M McKenzie

Eighteen years in a 'gay' relationship.

I would like to thank all those people who contributed to the cost of Thomas's care.-Mik

I have a new icon on my web-site which takes you to stories I have recorded—includes the love story of Thomas and Henry's thirty year sojourn on the Estuary Lagoons—

Hits last Month—Twenty six thousand two-hundred & fifty three

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae
Sponsored by Chris Lee Sharebroking