

The Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve is a Nationally Significant Reserve

Waikanae Estuary bird tours 9051001



Photograph Graeme Joyce

The shag tree at roosting time.

The recent storm has played havoc with some of the birds, especially the pied shags nesting in the large macrocarpa trees. With many nests, and young, built on flimsy branches overhanging the water, the wind has been just too much and a lot of the nests and youngsters have been blown away. Some of the more established nests built further back in the trees have survived, but most of them have disappeared. However, with the weather clearing, nest rebuilding is in full swing. Shags can be seen flying to the river where they find their nesting material, then back to their nest with a large twig or other building material in their beak. Every shag in the tree took to the air during the large earthquake the other Sunday. They must have got shaken up like the rest of us.

The weather is just part of living and dying on the lagoons for our birdlife.

The brown is where the tree is devoid of foliage caused by the shags acid droppings. Most of the roosting birds are on the fringes, as the nests are in the middle, and not for roosting

The royal spoonbills appear to have survived the storm OK. I don't know how as they couldn't have flown, along with the other birds, in the gale force winds. They tucked themselves high up on the lee side of the macrocarpa tree.

Waimeha Lagoon.

On the Waimeha lagoon is a group of paradise ducks, mostly this year's youngsters. There are also shoveler ducks, note the big spoon bills.

This lovely lagoon is well worth a visit. Being very shallow and secluded with no houses running down to the water and surrounded with trees and shrubs it's an ideal breeding lagoon. From the little Forest and Bird hide it is possible to observe the birds and not disturb them.

They don't know you are there.



Shoveler ducks. Photo Lena Berger



Roger Smith took this photo of a one-legged shoveler which has been around for a little while. Let me know if you spot him on your strolls around the lagoons. What a handsome bird he is, his disability doesn't seem to be worrying him too much. Ducks when they feed like to be bottoms up, dabbling under the water. Can you imagine how hard it must be for a one-legged duck to stay in one

place while feeding. Its head and part of its body is under the water and it is paddling upward with its one webbed foot. It's a wonder it doesn't go around in circles.



Mallard drake

Celine the Goose.

Celine, the injured Canada goose, has now returned to the Waimanu lagoon from where she was rescued. [See last month's newsletter.] She recovered well, so we released her on to the northern lagoon where there are three Canada geese. She paddled up the middle in their direction then diverted to one side. It may take a little while for her to reacclimatise after realising she can't fly and is on the lagoon for good. It's difficult to tell which bird is Celine when swimming on the lagoon with the other geese, as her disability isn't apparent.



I am a little bewildered; I wonder what's in store for me?

She seems quite happy to be back and has settled down well.

Craig named her Celine, as he names all the birds he nurses back to health. It's very hard to tell the gender of Canada geese, as it is with swans, so Craig, we hope your guess is correct!

Breeding season.

It's the middle of winter and everyone is feeling the cold staying tucked up in their houses. On the lagoons it's different, the birds are getting ready for the breeding season, pairing off and exerting their authority. Take the starling as an example; they are not quite ready, but having nested in a certain spot every year, they are making sure no one pinches their site. Staying in the vicinity, they chase away any other bird that comes anywhere near their patch. The aggressive behaviour of the other birds is a sure sign the breeding season isn't far away. When you see the ducks chasing each other you can bet your boots it's a drake doing the chasing with a view to mating. The female duck plays hard to get at times but in the end, sooner or later, the ducklings appear.

Natural disaster.

Strewn, from one end of the beach to the other, right on the high tide mark, were many thousands of these small fish. I wonder what killed them, whether it was a nature occurrence or something more sinister? The worrying part of the story was that the gulls didn't appear to be feeding on them or maybe they had eaten so many that they were full and resting. In the photo of the beach, the wind was slowly pushing the fine sand over the fish. Checking things out the next morning there was no sign of the fish however, there were bird prints in great numbers up and down where the fish had been. Seems to me, a great feast had taken place.

E/Mail from Andrew Stewart [TePapa]

The fishes are pearlides, a mass-schooling fish of the mesopelagic zone (200 - 1000 m depth). I strongly suspect there was a thermal inversion caused by the foul weather which subjected these fishes to thermal shock, killing them.



The fish can be seen strewn the length of the beach.

I have a 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-one thousand & Eighteen

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae
Sponsored by Chris Lee Sharebroking