

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



Royal spoonbill

Photograph –Barry Culling

A royal spoonbill was flying over the reserve. It was a beautiful day with quite a light breeze blowing. The spoonbill did what the hawks do regularly, it must have found a thermal current as it spiralled around in quite a tight cycle then around and around it went, gaining height until it was almost a speck in the sky. I haven't seen these birds do this before although they fly fairly high up in the sky if going from one feeding ground to another but usually when in a group. This one was on its own and slowly made its way very high up towards the Eastern hills.

Strange birds

There are some strange birds reported within the estuary. My wife and I saw a bird running along our lawn. It was the size of a starling, grey in colour and had a red head. I had an email from a lady who lives around the lagoons telling me of a couple of small birds the size of a sparrow also with a red heads. Then the penny dropped—the flax is in full flower with red pollen and these birds didn't have red heads at all, they had pollen on their heads obviously from feeding on the nectar. So the starling was a young bird just out of the nest and the sparrows were sparrows with pollen on their heads. Just when I was getting excited thinking I could report strange birds within the reserve.

Tourists

The tourist season has started off very well with people from Sweden, Germany, England, Australia, Timaru and Scotland touring the Estuary Reserve within the last month or so. It's wonderful to be able to show people from the other side of the world up to thirty different species of the sixty odd wild birds that inhabit the area. I have to inform them that the swallows are different to the ones from the Northern Hemisphere, as here, in the Southern Hemisphere they have to make their nest the other way around so the eggs don't fall out. Some people do believe me!

Paradise ducks

The young paradise ducks have fledged and are visiting the river in smaller groups than a few years ago. They like to graze the farmers fields', then fly into the reserve for the water and to rest up. We are seeing fewer of these birds now than in other years. Last year we had a prolonged drought. As these birds are water birds and grazers they require large amounts of water to feed and breed in, so the drought has had a huge impact on their breeding and feeding. The mallard and shoveler ducks are in a similar predicament with fewer of these birds on the lagoons.

Dabchicks [update]

Quite a rare bird, they are not usually found in the South Island although reported at Takaka at the top of the Island. It has been quite exciting to be able to show tourists these birds. Not any more. Around the lagoons lives a Burmese cat who regularly hunts the edges of the water. Two dabchicks, breeding in the lagoon, have been found dead on the bank. We don't know how they were killed but it seems very likely a cat may have been the culprit. Very occasionally stoats have been seen in the area but if they were to be blamed they would have been reported more often. This cat is a regular. It maybe quite a long time before we see other dabchicks fly in to replace these birds.

Swans

Strolling around the lagoons you can quite often find maybe half a dozen immature swans resting on the bank. Chances are that there is a large aggressive male swan with cygnets on the water and it has chased these birds off the lagoon. It can be seen with its partner and cygnets to one side. The immature birds will sneak back onto the water from the far side. Next thing, the cob who, can be easily identified by its aggressive behaviour and its hunched-up wings, showing the white flight feathers, will paddle flat out at these young birds. They will just swim away as fast as they can and if too slow, will take to the air, to fly safely away from the aggressor. It's an ongoing scenario. So the swans that are bred on the lagoons are encouraged in no uncertain way, by the resident male swan, to leave for pastures new, and find their own territory.

Chaffinch

A chaffinch alighted on our cabbage and hopped into the leaves and came out with a large green caterpillar. It then flew onto a stick in the garden and proceeded to chew the caterpillar up into a pulpy mess, then, away it went back to its nest to feed its baby. Chaffinches frequent our garden and can be seen all around the Estuary reserve. I even had one follow me around the lagoons one afternoon, I wonder if it was after the insects I disturbed as I walked through the rank grass.

White Goose

On the river there is as pair of Canada geese with four goslings and as part of the family there is a white goose. This may be the goose that took a chance in January 2011 and flew off with the wild Canada geese. See newsletter No 47 Denise's story.



Hits last Month—Twenty three thousand two hundred & two

Wishing you all compliments of the season and a happy new year.

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae
Sponsored by Chris Lee Sharebroking

