

Waimeha Lagoon



The view from the Forest and Bird hide. Photograph Roger Smith

Sitting in the Forest and Bird hide, early one morning, observing the wildlife, I knew I would just have to write about this lagoon. So I am writing you a picture of what I have seen.

There wasn't a breath of wind to move the red blanket of fern covering most of the water. This fern is called azolla and is a very small New Zealand fern which floats on the surface with a trailing root; it can be green at times.

Swallows were in abundance, flitting this way and that, diving down, then up again seemingly in a haphazard way. This wasn't so, they have only one thing on their mind and that is to catch as many insects as they can, to satisfy their hunger, or if they have young, to feed their hungry mouths. To one side was a pukeko walking amongst the reeds, its long legs and feet just made for wading or balancing on the undergrowth. It plucked a long stalk of reed from the perimeter of the lagoon, then grasped it with one foot, balancing on the other and stripped the outer cover off the stalk to get to the succulent inner. Then the puke put its head up and gave its high pitched squawk three or four times. The other birds ignored the pukeko and carried on doing what other birds do. A mallard duck was acting like a vacuum cleaner mowing the fern, moving its beak back and forth slurping the fern down as it moved slowly forward. A swan was also having a feast on the fern. However, a swan's neck is made to stretch down into the depth of the water to reach the food growing there and is not like a vacuum cleaner on top of the water. The swan looked most uncomfortable with its neck hooked and held up to the surface of the water, but feed it did, slurping away just like the duck. On the other side of the lagoon the swan's mate was sitting on a nest. Time will tell how many eggs it will hatch.



Looking across the lagoon, to the Forest and Bird hide.
Note the planting around the perimeter of the lagoon.

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Shoveller ducks were very busy feeding in the fern, making tracks through, as they swam along. Two dabchicks with a baby were also feeding as described in my last month's newsletter, but not on the fern. A single royal spoonbill was wading through the carpet of fern also feeding. The lagoon is very shallow in the centre, so is a good feeding area for the water fowl. Grey teal love this lagoon and can be seen here, dabbling in the middle. A couple of pied stilts were making their way around the perimeter on their long legs spearing their beaks into the water for food. Overhead a harrier hawk was slowly casing out the greenery on the edges of the lagoon. Frogs could be heard croaking around the perimeter of the water.



In one corner of the reserve is a children's playground, with swings, slides and all the climbing gear kids love. The activity there doesn't worry the birds, as the lagoon has a covering of trees and shrubs right down to the water's edge. People and dogs can't access the water, only through the Forest and Bird hide. There it is possible to observe the birds through the slots in the hide while sitting on the seating supplied. People can see the birds

but the birds can't see them. It's a win, win situation for both the birds and the humans.

It was a vision of Sir Charles Fleming, who many years ago, saved the lagoon and surrounds from being developed. The planting has been undertaken by a dedicated bunch of twenty to thirty people over the last fifteen years and they have almost finished planting it out with native vegetation, to the extent that the endangered bittern is now visiting after fifty years. Thanks Pam.

Frogs

In my last newsletter I had an article on frogs. Did you know that our New Zealand frogs don't croak and don't have tadpoles? I certainly didn't! I was informed by a friend from California that this was so and that my story about the frogs croaking in the lagoons and the lack of them, because of the possibility of the shags eating the tadpoles, troubled him somewhat. He sent me an article on frogs by Dr Phil Bishop from Otago University stating, "Native New Zealand frogs do not have a normal pond-dwelling tadpole."

I contacted Dr Bishop who replied. "Many New Zealanders have grown up with tadpoles and these are from the three species of Australian frogs introduced to New Zealand over 100 years ago and they have naturalised and can be found over many parts of the country - So your article is fine as it stands as it doesn't explicitly say whether you are talking about frogs in general (which is fine) or native New Zealand frogs which don't have tadpoles that could be eaten by shags.

Also native New Zealand frogs do not produce any calls and do not occur anywhere near the Waikanae Estuary. Hope this helps."

Thanks Dr Bishop

Eileen Thomas's last month's garden frog is just that- in ceramic.



Hits last Month—Twenty eight Thousand three Hundred & seventeen

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae

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