

Waikanae river at low tide.

The tide was out and the sand-banks were exposed. Starting from one end, the red-billed gulls have congregated on the water's edge, as they usually do at low tide. It's almost as if this is their meeting place where they exchange greetings and catch up on the local gossip. Paradise ducks are squawking



their peculiar noise as they strut about,



the female making that recurring cry while the male is not so noisy. Pied stilts are present, daintily wading in the shallows, probing the mud for food. Black-backed gulls are here in large numbers, with the younger birds as large as their parents but still in their drab colouring. Pied

oyster-catchers are about, along with the variable, also probing the wet sand for food. On a large log in the river are eight little black shags, having just hopped out of the water after fishing as a pack. A couple of large black shags are also present sitting on the sand beside the waters edge. Further up the river on another fallen tree are the pied



shags with their wings outspread to dry after just finishing their fishing expedition. Starlings are running this way and that along the wet sand; I am not sure what they are feeding on but they are very busy. Pukeko are on the river verges within the vegetation, running along the wet puddles with that comical long legged stride of theirs.

A couple of royal-spoonbills wading the water's edge, are swishing their bills sideways through the water, as they do when feeding. High in the

sky the skylark is singing his song of love for all to hear. A couple of white fronted terns are flying the river with their beaks pointed downwards looking for a white-bait dinner, and the swallows are ducking and diving over the water after insects. Mallard ducks are dabbling in the shallows along with a couple of shoveler and a solitary kingfisher is still as a statue on a log on the water's edge. In the vegetation on the edge of the river are the blackbirds, thrushes, greenfinches, goldfinches, sparrows and hidden from sight, the fern-birds.

Overseeing all this is the harrier hawk just quietly gliding along above the far bank over the vegetation, not worrying the birds at all- although I have no doubt everyone of them knows it's about and are keeping a wary eye out.



Photographs--Fern-bird and skylark by Gavin Klee-- gulls, and kingfisher by Roger Smith.

If you would like to tour the Estuary from your lounge, go to verbal stories.

<http://www.kapitibirdtours.co.nz/tales-of-the-waikanae-estuary/>



Pukeko

The pukeko is a wader and scavenger, always on the look out for food, and will take a duckling if the opportunity arises. You would expect to find them foraging at the water's edge, however, they also like to pinch plants out of gardens as long as there is a convenient escape route nearby. When they swim they look ungainly in the water, their feet on their long legs are not webbed, but long toed like a chook. Flying mainly in the evening or at night they can cover large distances. The last place you would look for one of these birds is in a tree, but they can be found clambering through the branches looking for food as shown in Anne Clement's photograph.

Swans

The swan, mentioned as sitting on six eggs last month, has hatched them. The adult swans can be seen on the lagoon, putting their heads under the water and pulling the weed from the bottom up to the surface, for the youngsters to feed on. The two cygnets from the previous brood are still on the lagoon, having spent a lot of their time beside the new nest as their parents sat on their six eggs. This in itself, on our lagoons, is unusual. Normally when a new nest is started the parent birds change from being loving parents to aggressive parents and chase the first birds off the water and away from their new nest. Even more unusually they are letting the older cygnets, now around four months old and changing colour, swim next to the newly hatched brood. Although, I noticed the cob chasing them to one side if they got too close, it is not aggressively chasing them off the lagoon as previously.



Photograph Roger Smith.

Oystercatchers



Photograph Gavin Klee

Oystercatchers are nesting on the sand spit and aggressively protecting their eggs. The nests are just a depression in the sand with camouflaged eggs. Taking tourists out the other day we inadvertently walked too close to a nest and the oystercatcher flew at us and whacked me on the shoulder with it's wing- what a brave bird, It did give us the message!

With Christmas approaching Mik's book would be an ideal present.

“Whatever Next --More Tales of Waikanae Estuary”

**It is available from local bookshops or from the author
e/mail–mick.moir.peryer @paradise.net.nz**

\$29.99 plus postage local \$1.40 Aus \$2.50 O/Seas \$3.00

Online payments can be made to account

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