

Our "Lost Cows of Kapiti" book has reached France! I hope India our little French lady can read English. However if she can't it doesn't matter as she can follow the story through the lovely illustrations by Susan Wildblood.



Swans

I was talking to a Scotsman who had just moved to the Waikanae Estuary and he commented that he had noticed how aggressive the black swans were. People are very wary of the swans as they are perceived to be very aggressive, however he also commented upon seeing a young lady feeding a swan from her open hand and she still had her hand after the swan had it's fill.

The swans at Waikanae, who are mostly birds that have been born here, know the area and people very well and are not at all aggressive towards people. They will rush over if on the land to see if you have any food for them and plough through the water to the shore for a feed if one is in the offering. The swans will get very aggressive when nesting and that's when you need to be wary of them. This is the time the male swan, the cob, can't stand the younger birds on the lagoon he has claimed as his own nesting area. He will spend large amounts of time chasing these birds off the water if he can. If he catches up with one he will grab it at the base of it's neck hang on and whack the other bird with it's wings. This is the time when all the younger swans are afraid of these aggressive birds.



David Mudge Photo

As the young birds grow up they will go exploring and even fly as far as the South Island, the Wairarapa lakes and Taupo. Black swans have been imported by our early settlers as game birds but some have made the flight from Australia to New Zealand on their own over the years. If they had missed NZ the next stop is Antarctica.

Swans are on the shooting licence during May. Waikanae birds are safe as long as they don't fly to the Wairarapa where the farmers, at times, get up in arms when they find around five hundred of these birds grazing their paddocks puddling down the mud and fowling the grass with their droppings. They also herd the lambing sheep together in a heap to one end of the paddock and interfere with the lambing. These farms in the Wairarapa are overlooking the lake.

One lovely spring morning we had five young ladies walking the lagoon close to the bank. Along swam a very aggressive male swan chasing three adolescent birds. Up the bank the three birds scrambled with wings flapping to get away from the cob. Our young ladies ran away screaming as the birds appeared intent upon chasing them, they didn't realise the birds were only trying to get away from the aggressive male. So now we have five young ladies who thought the swans were intent on attacking them, they will forever be scared of swans; the girls spooked themselves!



Black swans South Wairarapa from newsletter No 60 Oct 2008

Note the white patch at the base of the swan's neck in David Mudge's photo where at some stage it has been attacked by another aggressive swan.

White-faced Heron

Daintily moving around the backwater on the river side of the weir, this white-faced heron has been feeding there for a day or two. At times he will stand on one leg and slowly rake his foot through the mud on the bottom to disturb the goodies that herons like to feed upon. Mostly he will intently look into the water and stab any thing that looks like dinner as he slowly works his way around the parameter of the backwater.



Photos Rod Weir

It is not only the heron that likes this side of the weir, the kingfisher also likes to feed here. These birds usually arrive at low tide when the water is low and the mudflats are showing. The kingfisher will sit on the driftwood supplied by the photographers or on the fence surrounding the opening to the weir, looking intently into the water and when his dinner arrives will dive down to get it.



The hawk and the magpie



David Mudge photo

What a magnificent bird this one is, look at it's feathers, just one with a nick on it! Note it's fingers on the end of its wing, made for silent flying.

The hawk was doing what hawks do, ranging over the farm land looking for anything that may make a tasty meal. On the same farm lived a family of magpies who were nesting in the adjacent pine trees. Now magpies can't stand hawks especially if they may be ranging anywhere near their nest. Like a little fighter plane heading straight for the hawk flew one of the magpies. Magpies have a large rapier-like bill which they use as their weapon. When the magpie reached the hawk the hawk flared with both talons outstretched, the magpie must have misjudged things a little as next thing it is caught and held by the hawk. Both birds tumbled in the air and down they came until the hawk released the magpie and they both flew off in different directions.. Hawks are scavengers and usually don't take birds out of the sky and they certainly don't take magpies when being attacked. I think it would have been a surprise to both the hawk and the magpie to end up as they did. I have seen a hawk take a seagull out of the sky one very windy day but that is another story.

Fifteen Thousand Four Hundred & Thirty Five Hits last month.

Mik Peryer the Birdman of Waikanae