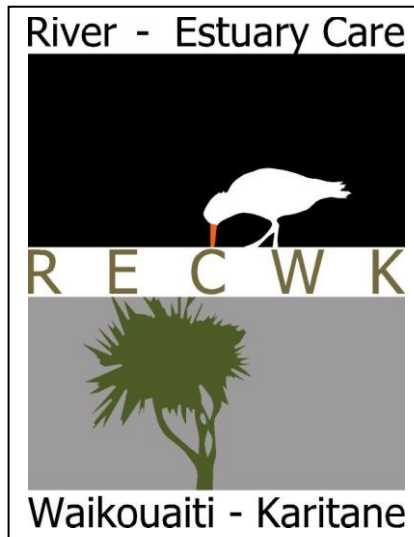


River Estuary Watch

River-Estuary Care: Waikouaiti – Karitane

JUNE 2013

Buzzing: Community Based Conservation



How fortunate are we that our small communities are caring for our rich coastal environments! We have individuals and formal groups working to conserve and enhance our natural ecosystems.

Specifically 4 groups are actively working and cooperating with one another. The East Otago Taiapure Management Committee, The Hawksbury Lagoon group, Kati Huirapa Runaka ki Puketeraki and River-Estuary Care: Waikouaiti -Karitane all have strong commitments to make community based conservation and local fisheries management work. In the past few years active collaboration, especially in organising opportunities for volunteers to work on local projects, have been fruitful. Locals are joined by short term volunteers to get real work done in the field.

Lately we are being asked to share our way of doing things with others.

We have presented a DOC sponsored Sea Week library talk in Oamaru, given talks to University of Otago geography department students interested in collaborative conservation, and hosted field labs for uni Marine Ecology students. This is all good. We know we are still learning as we go but are finding that talking with others about “the way we work” very satisfying. It also builds our confidence in what we are accomplishing on the ground. Each group has its own focus and strengths but working together is a real buzz.

Patti Vanderburg
Information/Education/Advocacy Project Leader

Karitane Bird Counts

Caspian Terns, White-faced Herons, Banded Dotterels, Royal Spoonbills are a few of the 34 species of shorebirds that have been recorded in the Waikouaiti River Estuary at Karitane over the past 11 years.

Ducks are the most dominant species by numbers (especially Mallards and Grey Teal in the shooting season). Next most common are Black-backed Gulls, though these are mainly found at the gull colony on the Merton Arm rather than in the estuary. Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls, and Bar-tailed Godwits are the most common wading birds in the estuary, but they are only there at certain times of the year. Pied Oystercatchers are the most common wader found all year round.

While there are fluctuations between seasons and years, overall the species observed and their counts in the estuary appear to have been relatively stable over the 11 years. There have been no substantial increases or decreases in any species.

The bird counting group of Waikouaiti-Karitane River-Estuary Care meets at six week intervals to count the shorebirds in the estuary. The first count was made in November 2001. We have now completed 94 counts, with a total of 105,965 birds counted. We are planning to celebrate our 100th count later this year.



Banded Dotterel

Counts are made at low tide when birds can be more easily counted as they are spread out feeding on the exposed sandbanks and in shallow water. The usual number recorded each count is 1000-1200 birds, our largest count was 3,656 (in March 2009). But the bird numbers in the estuary can be much higher at times, especially in autumn with the arrival of very large flocks of roosting Black-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns.

Derek Onley, our local ornithologist (bird specialist) has given us much valued advice and help. Over the 11 years some 50 different people have helped at times with the bird counting. Helen (Brad) Bradbury, Wynsome Brosnan, Kathy Halliwell, Ailsa Johnston, Derek Onley, and Peter Watson have been our most frequent counters, each having made more than 40 counts.

Alan Kilner

April 2013 Volunteer Week



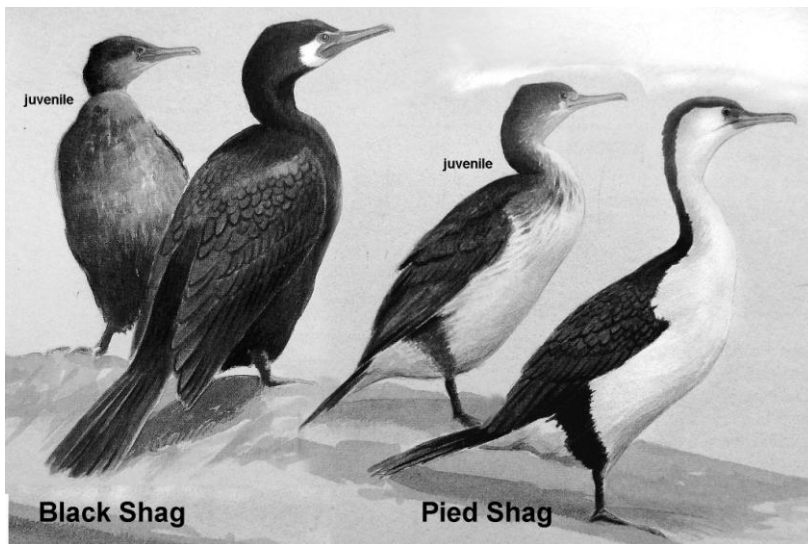
The Common Cormorant or Shag

When he wrote this in the 1920s, Christopher Isherwood got a hard time from British ornithologists, for clearly the common cormorant and shag were not one and the same but completely different species. He'd have got an even harder time here from Perrine Millais Moncrieff who published *New Zealand Birds and How to Identify Them* in 1925, for there are 13 species in New Zealand and they are all called shags. Unless that is, for some unfathomable reason, you object to the word shag and insist that all, or at the very least the black-footed ones, are called cormorants.

If you find that a bit confusing then you should have been down by the wharf on the last River Care Bird Count when there were 10 or so shags. Almost every one of them looked different but in fact there were only 3 species. Lucky really, because there could easily have been five species which would have added another half a dozen plumages to sort out. The species by the wharf on Sunday were little shag, black shag and pied shag.



Little shags are the smallest of the three, about the size of a skinny mallard. They are also the commonest on the estuary. At times there can be 20 or so sitting along the railings on the railway bridge but there are nearly always one or two around elsewhere on the mudflats along the edge of the channel or on convenient rocks, posts or boats. They are also the ones that you often see diving and swimming



underwater in the shallows. By far the easiest way to identify them is by their small size and shape. Their bill is short and stubby compared with the other two and when dried out they have a squarish head, a distinct forehead and even a hint of a crest. Try using plumage to sort them out and things get more tricky because the adults come in a wide range of blacks and whites, from merely white chinned, the commonest around here, to completely white underneath. And just to complete the range, the juveniles are a scruffy brownish black all over; much like most young shags. They are also often called little pied shags, a name best ignored at this point.

Black shags are the next most frequent species. There are about a dozen on the estuary at the moment; more than usual. They seem especially content sitting on the bare branches of the large dead tree that, until the next big flood or tide, has come to rest in the middle of the river just before the road rises up into the village. They are big. 10cm shy of a metre long and weighing well over 2kg, they are half as big again as little shags and have a distinctly long, solid bill and sloping forehead. You will be pleased to hear that adults are consistently dark all over apart from white cheeks and a white but often hard to see patch on the thighs. Even the juveniles look like scruffy versions of the adults. Apart, that is, from the occasional irritating youngster that has a distinctly pale breast and belly. They occur throughout much of the world

and are simply called cormorants in the UK and great cormorants in Australia, something best forgotten when trying to identify them.

The un-“common cormorant or shag” by the wharf was the pied shag. There were 3 of them last Sunday, each in a different plumage. They nest along the east coast of the South Island, north of Banks Peninsula and south of Owaka in the Catlins. They are unusual around Dunedin, but 1 or 2 birds have turned up at Karitane each winter over the last 3 years. Adults are black and white like the whitest of little shags but are as large as, if a little slimmer than black shags and have a similar long bill and sloping forehead as that species. Tagging along close by Sunday’s adult was a dark, scruffy juvenile which, if it weren’t for its association with the adult, would have been easily mistaken for a young black shag. And just to complete the set, over on the rocks by the wharf was a paler brown, still somewhat untidy bird with a whitish breast and belly; most likely a chick from the season before last, yet to moult into adult plumage. The species also occurs throughout Australia where I’m pleased to say it’s also called pied shag. Despite this welcome consistency, perhaps we should abandon the English names and resort to the Maori equivalents: karuhiruhi for pied, kawau for black and kawaupaka for little?

Confused? Better go out and have a good look around the wharf for this is only shag identification 101. The next newsletter will cover the 6-7 plumages of the other 2 local shags. They are relatively easy to tell apart from the lot above though. If, that is, you can see their feet. Pied, black and little all have black feet. The others, the spotted and Stewart Island shags have yellow or pink feet.

Mr Christopher Isherwood may have been completely in the dark about shag nomenclature and identification, as you may well be by now, but he was right about the paper bags. Shags often nest in very exposed places like cliffs and bare branched trees and the reason for the paper bags? “You will see no doubt, it is to keep the lightening out.”

By Derek Onley

There’s no Tussock like Snow Tussock, like....

Chionochloa rigida – better known as Narrow-leaved Snow Tussock – was unexpectedly discovered on the Merton Tidal Arm in 2004. Botanist Kelvin Lloyd was in the final days of a botanical survey of the Waikouaiti Estuary when he came upon a stand of approximately fifty of these plants. Growing on a slope and reaching down to the very edge of the water line this was apparently the closest to sea level that this indigenous plant had been recorded.

At the time of this discovery the stand of snow tussock was being threatened by gorse and Scotch broom. Subsequent to this discovery volunteers make periodic forays to this location to clear the encroaching ‘weeds’. The most recent Volunteer Week saw an energetic group once again ‘tear into’ the gorse further pushing it back from the tussock. Recent growth and young plants suggest that Snow Tussock will continue to thrive in this location. While there we also planted several dozen native cabbage trees, toe toe, and flax.

Joel A. Vanderburg
Revegetation Project





History of the Taiapure

Thanks to Dr Anne-Marie Jackson for allowing us to reproduce her article, which was recently published in the Runaka newsletter "Panui".

On 9 March 1992, members of the Kati Huirapa Runanga ki Puketeraki applied for a taiapure (local fishery) on the East Otago coastline. Taiapure were, at the time, the only tool available for hapu to manage their customary fisheries. Kaumatua of Kati Huirapa ki Puketeraki were concerned over depleting paua stocks within their rohe and wanted a way to be able to reassert their rangatiratanga for their present and future generations to ensure the maintenance of health and well-being.

The application resulted in a backlash from a number of sectors in the East Otago community and angry locals expressed their displeasure, particularly through Letters to the Editor, in the Otago Daily Times. The letters reflected a view that Maori would be locking people out of the fisheries and decisions were being made along "racial lines" that pitted people "Iwi versus Kiwi". Literally overnight, the taiapure application divided the community.

After a long drawn-out process of over seven years, which included a Maori Land hearing, numerous hui, public meetings and national political changes, the East Otago Taiapure was gazetted in 1999. And the management committee established formally in 2001. Two series of regulations have been passed by the East Otago Taiapure Management Committee (EOTMC): the first for set netting on 1 October 2007 and the second for a temporary closure and reduction in bag limits for finfish and shellfish on 1 October 2010.

The current members of the EOTMC are Brendan Flack, Alan Anderson, Kathy Coombes, Leanne Simon, Greg Kerr, Patti Vanderburg, Chris Hepburn and Neville Everett. We acknowledge the hard work of all past and present committee members and supporters.

One particular issue the EOTMC and supporters have worked tirelessly on is the Port Otago dredging programme called "Project Next Generation". The aim of Project Next Generation is to widen and deepen the Otago Harbour. The EOTMC were opposed to the impact the volume of dredged spoil would have on Te Tai o Arai Te Uru. After another long drawn-out process in December 2012 the EOTMC were successful in tightening the restrictions on the Project Next Generation.

2012 New Years Eve Raft Race



Wallace Robertsons Memories of the River

I first started coming to Karitane as a teenager in the mid 1940s. I was learning furniture making in Dunedin but on weekends and holidays I came out on the bus or the train with a couple of friends, and our dogs and ferrets, and we went rabbiting. We stayed in a hut by Puketeraki Station and when the train came through the cutting, the driver would stop and throw off lumps of coal for us in exchange for dressed rabbit. The



station master lived just down the road and his children would come up with big bags of vegetables and we gave them rabbits for their mother to pot roast. When that hut was demolished, we moved to another one by Apes Rd. There were rabbits everywhere and we went right over to the Merton flats with our dogs. From the south end of the beach to Parata Ave the bank was honeycombed with rabbit burrows under the lupins. I had exceptionally fast dogs and they used to catch the rabbits on the beach before they even got into their burrows. I sold the carcasses to one of the butchers in Dunedin and they went like hot cakes. I sold the skins to the skin merchant - winter bucks were selling for 3 shillings per skin and I thought I was going to get rich very early in life!



Although I did a lot of hunting, I think I had an affinity with animals too. I sometimes found injured birds and looked after them until they could fend for themselves again. I sometimes saw penguins on the beach and there were seals too, but my dogs gave them a wide berth as they wouldn't hesitate to have a go at them. I never did any fishing myself but I used to gather paua off the rocks at the end of the beach. My friend used to catch blue cod down there with a surf casting rod. The river water was crystal clear and we could stand on the railway bridge and count hundreds of fish - these days you would be lucky to catch one sea-run salmon up there. I can remember seals coming up the river chasing the fish and they went right up as far as the picnic area on the main road.

There were 26 fishing boats working out of Karitane then but the river wasn't silted up like it is today. From the Hall right back up towards Bucklands Crossing, the river banks were covered with flax and willow on both sides. These were removed by the River catchment board over many years in the hope of improving the flow of water. But that didn't happen because, in the meantime, farmers had cleared away a lot of the bush from their land so there was much more run off. The land around Karitane used to be covered with Broadleaf and Manuka and a lot of it wasn't farmed but, after the war, it was starting to be brought into production and some returned soldiers were allocated land by ballot on the condition that they farm it to its full capacity. The river starts up at Nenthorn and is similar to the Taieri in that there isn't a great fall from the headwaters to the mouth. Even a small increase in drop would make a big difference.

After my apprenticeship, I worked all over NZ, mainly in forestry and butchering but when I retired I came back here permanently - I had a lot of happy memories of the place and I knew it like the back of my hand. I could remember the fine weather - not much rain, just beautiful days. I have done a lot of whitebaiting - the best catch I had was 82lb in the late 1980s, but usually it was about 30lb in a season. The best winds to catch whitebait are NE, N and E. SW is no good and I've never known whitebait run in a south easterly. Algae have become established in the river. When there is an exceptionally high tide it comes rolling up and if you are white baiting you may as well pack up and go home. Eels come up the river when there is an R in the month and I have trapped them near Bucklands Crossing - they taste better where the river has a stony bed and fast running water. I smoked them in my smokehouse at home after gutting them and hanging them out on the clothes line to dry - flies will never go near the eel.

The amount of super and lime that's put on the land has caused pollution in the river, as has the diesel from all the fishing boats. It's still there to this day - it doesn't break down and you can see it on a high tide. For a long time I wouldn't touch any sea food because of the pollution. It hasn't been that long since they put in the sewerage here. When there were only septic tanks there used to be seepage into the river. You could smell it - you could almost taste it - and your boots used to get stuck in it.

Then and Now—Ara ki te Araroa and Marama I te Whata



The rocks at the north end of Karitane beach. Pre-war and 2013

DONATIONS or to become a Friend of the River and Estuary Care: Waikouaiti—Karitane

Should any friends or supporters wish to make a donation or to become a Friend of the River and Estuary Care: Waikouaiti—Karitane. Details available from Brad – 03 4658334, brad126@xtra.co.nz or post donation to 1333 Coast Rd Karitane

River-Estuary Care Waikouaiti - Karitane

Active since 1999 – Incorporated in 2001

Coastal Otago Conservation Award for 2005

Objectives

- To restore balance to Papatuanuku (Mother Earth).
- To have a well informed community about our river and estuary.
- To have our community participating in sustainable resource practices.
- To have a healthy, productive river and estuary eco-system (fishing, biodiversity, general health).
- To promote an understanding of the interrelatedness of our river and estuary ecosystem with adjacent ecosystems.

Anyone interested in supporting the above objectives may join!

Would you like to help with a project this year?

- Newsletter – Hilary Yeoman ph 465 7687.
- Revegetation Project – contact Andy Barratt ph 021 890 048.
- Education, Information and Advocacy Project – contact Patti Vanderburg ph 465 8113.
- Birdwatching – contact current convener Brad, phone 465 8334.

Produced with assistance from the Otago Regional Council

