



Record spoonbill count



Royal spoonbills on the banks of the Matakana River

Sandspit welcomed the highest number of Royal Spoonbills ever recorded in the Matakana estuary. A census taken by SSOSI members for the Ornithological Society (OSNZ) national survey in August counted 15 of these elegant, white wading birds roosting in our estuary.

This uncommon species mainly breeds in the South Island and migrates to the balmier north for its autumn/winter sojourn.

They can often be seen feeding in our estuary at low tide, foraging in shallow pools and using their spoon-shaped bills to filter water for small fish, crustaceans and insects. They can also be seen roosting at high tide in the Pohutukawas on the banks of the Matakana River alongside Little Black Shags. However, they are very sensitive to disturbance.

They leave our estuary at the end of winter and return to the South Island to breed.

New species discovered at Sandspit

A new Polychaete worm has been discovered by Dr Roger Grace at the entrance to the harbour. Closely associated with sand dollars, or Snapper biscuits, this fascinating creature has yet to be named and is being further researched by Dr Grace. Various species of Polychaete worm are the favoured food of godwits.



The newly-discovered worm

Disease kills kauris

Kauri dieback disease is threatening the survival of our forest giants. Fortunately, Auckland Council says our Sandspit bush is one of the few still in a pristine condition.

To help keep it that way it's safer to observe kauris from the road than to walk amongst them, as shoes are a common vector for the fungus which attacks and kills the kauri.

Stream gets clean bill of health



Banded Kokopu in the Brick Bay stream

Although rarely glimpsed from the road the Brick Bay Drive stream is a delightful waterway bounding with life. It descends through bush and wetland reserves into our estuary. With the help of Waicare SSOSI members have been sampling its water to see just what's in there. What we've found is a remarkably healthy stream with a good chemical balance and

rich biodiversity. It's alive with insects indicative of healthy water, and Banded Kokopu - one of our famed whitebait species and endangered long finned eels. The only problem is silting from nearby hill slips. We will eventually have all Sandspit streams regularly monitored to help maintain their health.

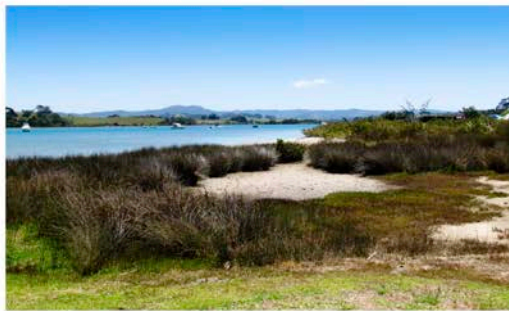
Mangrove seedling removal

Mangroves are a valuable and essential part of estuarine ecology but thanks to the heavy silt load in our estuary they are colonising shorebird feeding areas and

shellfish beds. SSOSI has Auckland Council's blessing to remove seedlings in sensitive areas. A couple of sessions have already taken place with more planned. If you're keen to help out with future weeding over the summer, let us know.

Dean's Island, a local gem

The spit's lagoons, saltmarsh and Dean's Island are the breeding habitat for the rare and cryptic Banded Rail. SSOSI has been busy re-vegetating the Island, to help provide cover for this endangered shore bird. After consultation with Auckland Council and an expert botanist we have planted over 300 plants including pohuehue as a sand binder. It also



provides cover for Banded Rails (pictured below), and is a host plant for native butterflies. Kawakawa, cabbage trees and manuka will provide bird fodder. When walking in the area it would be appreciated if you could remain on the path and keep dogs away from the island as they may disturb nesting birds.



Godwits come home



Godwits feed on the spit

The godwits will be returning to their summer home from their Arctic breeding grounds in late September. They will be tired and hungry after an eight-day non-stop flight. So their priority will be undisturbed feeding and roosting to fatten up for their successful return to the Arctic next autumn.

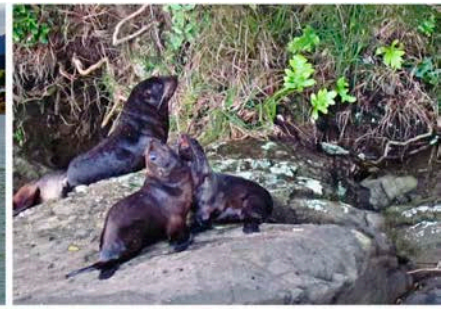
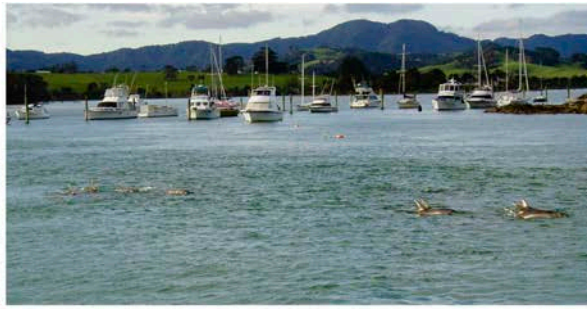
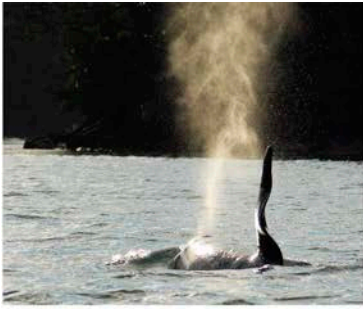
Pied Oystercatchers and Pied Stilts, in the main, have now left our estuary for their



Pied Stilts on the reserve

South Island breeding sites. They will be back in early summer. Black or Variable Oystercatchers stay here year round. Found only in New Zealand, there are only about 4,000 remaining. So we are enormously lucky to be able to see them on our own doorstep. Indeed, almost all the shorebirds that share our Sandspit home are endangered species.

Our teeming seas



Residents have been treated to a wildlife extravaganza of orcas, dolphins and seals in recent months. A pod of ten orcas hunted stingrays, cruising from Sandspit to Scandrett's Bay in July, while dolphins have been seen in the estuary. Boaters and kayakers have also spotted a family of seals – two adults, two juveniles and pups

- sunbathing on rocks beside the channel. Dr Roger Grace, who followed the orcas, says, "Anyone boating in the area should keep a sharp lookout for orca. That's particularly important for boats travelling at speed because boat strikes are one of the main causes of serious injury to orca."

Monitoring the health of our shellfish

This year sees the third year of shellfish monitoring on the beds east of the spit. We are delighted that Kaurilands School, in Titirangi, have adopted Sandspit as their monitoring site.

In October 30 schoolchildren will arrive to count and measure cockles and pipis under the supervision of Auckland Council officers and SSOSI members. The results will show any changes that occur over time.

Shellfish can be excellent biological indicators of general environmental

health. Cockles, for example, filter the water, aiding its clarity. However, they are sensitive to sediment and chemical pollutants. Cockles are also important food for shorebirds and fish such as snapper. Stingrays frequently feed on cockles while orcas eat stingrays.

Help protect our healthy, abundant cockle beds and their associated food chains by not driving over them. Cars and 'sealeg' boats crush cockles, pipis and small fish.