

Hawksbury Lagoon update August 2020

From time to time I receive emails from people interested in the lagoon and its environs on a wide range of matters. Recently I have received several emails in relation to birds who are infrequent visitors to the lagoon. One email in particular included photos of the Marsh Crake (koitareke), so not being a bird expert, I had to go searching for relevant information.

It would appear that Marsh crakes are small (30-40gms), with brown and grey coloured plumage, red eyes and a green beak, these water birds are one of the most secretive of all NZ birds. They are rarely seen out in the open and usually only call at dawn or at dusk and through the night. They have been seen throughout NZ but appear to be more numerous in the South Island. They prefer to hang around wetland areas either on the coast (as here) or further inland. Similar species of Crakes are found throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and New Guinea.

Marsh crakes are monogamous (have one mate) and their aerial courtship displays only occur at night. They build a small cup shaped nest well hidden among rushes and reeds, with the female laying between 5-7 olive-brown eggs. Both the male and female birds share incubation of the eggs, which take between 16 - 20 days to hatch.

Threats to these small birds are mainly in relation to loss of wetland habitat and predation by cats, stoats and dogs. What I found most interesting is that “They are a potential indicator of wetland health because they are dependent on the presence of high quality and ecologically diverse habitats and rich food supplies” (DOC website). Maybe I am just being overly hopeful that the sight of one Marsh crake is an indication that the lagoon is on a path towards recovery!

Another unusual visitor in recent weeks has been a beautiful male pheasant patrolling the houses along the edge of the lagoon, he is very friendly and I suspect well used to humans. He is being very well fed by all and sundry.

Shirley McKewen

Chair
Hawksbury Lagoon



Marsh Crake (May 2020)