



Southern black-backed gull - control options in Canterbury

Braided Rivers Seminar June 2019, Lincoln Univ.
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The issue

- Evidence that karoro/ southern black-backed gulls (SBBG) can have a significant impacts on breeding success of braided river birds
- SBBG are native, widespread, and have adapted exceptionally well to human activities
- Are now 'super abundant'



Photo: Wildlife Management International

Not all gulls are the same!

Black-backed gulls are **common, predatory &** 60cm long up to 1 kg



Red-billed gulls are **declining** 37-38cm 300 grams



Black-billed gulls are **critically endangered** & small: 35-38cm long & weigh 230 grams



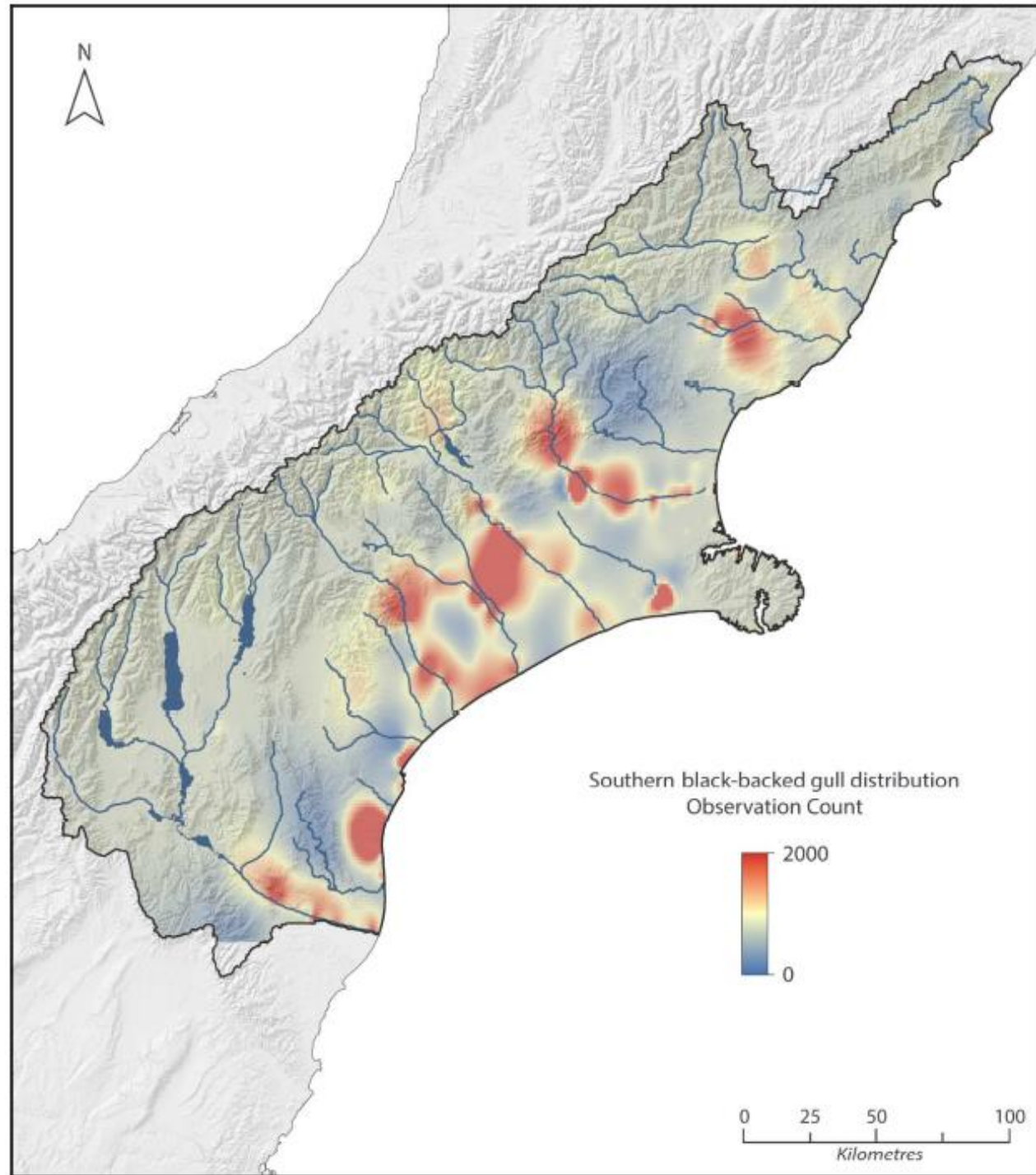
Black-billed gulls are **unique to New Zealand**. Like black-fronted terns (see over) they are plummeting **towards extinction**.

Graphic by Sonny Whitelaw, BRaid

Widespread
and common

Distribution of
SBBG based on
eBird data

Wildlife
Management
International



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zaqaPIWpOM>



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Chick predation (black- fronted tern)



<https://onedrive.live.com/?cid=D9D7B2737C92B3D4&id=D9D7B2737C92B3D4%2158290&parId=D9D7B2737C92B3D4%2158279&o=OneUp>

Also predation on black-billed gulls

- Videos of SBBG targeting black-billed gull colonies on the Wairau River – mainly chicks
- Surrounded the colonies earlier (eggs) but little predation
- As chicks started to hatch, gull predation increased rapidly
- Occurred both day and night

Wildlife Management International

Figure A. Southern Black-backed Gull/ Karoro predating Black-billed Gull colonies on the Wairau River, although most predation occurred during the day, predation also occurred at night. In the lower image predation was recorded at 2.04 AM.



Current control situation in Canterbury (of SBBG)

- Control work (for biodiversity) until recently
 - to protect breeding habitat in high value areas
 - a few locations around Canterbury
 - mainly remote high-country areas and smaller numbers
 - some evidence little or no recolonization
 - mix of methods used

Current situation

- More recently control undertaken in lower rivers, e.g.
 - Clarence River mouth
 - Hurunui programme

Clarence River mouth

- Monitoring since 2012 – mixed colonies of black-billed gull, red-billed gull, and white-fronted tern
- Very low breeding success
- Video evidence of SBBG taking chicks and causing complete failure of colony in 2014/5 and 2015/6.
- Control in 2017 of 350 SBBG nests and about 500 adults. About 90-95% reduction.



Figure B. The distribution of Southern Black-backed Gull/ Karoro nests at the Waiau Toa/ Clarence River mouth as mapped during planning of the control operation.

Current situation

- Hurunui programme
 - Hurunui-Waiau Zone Committee (Immediate Steps funding, Canterbury Water Management Strategy)
 - One of the largest operations ever undertaken
 - In conjunction with breeding islands (but no ground predator control)

Hurunui Waiau

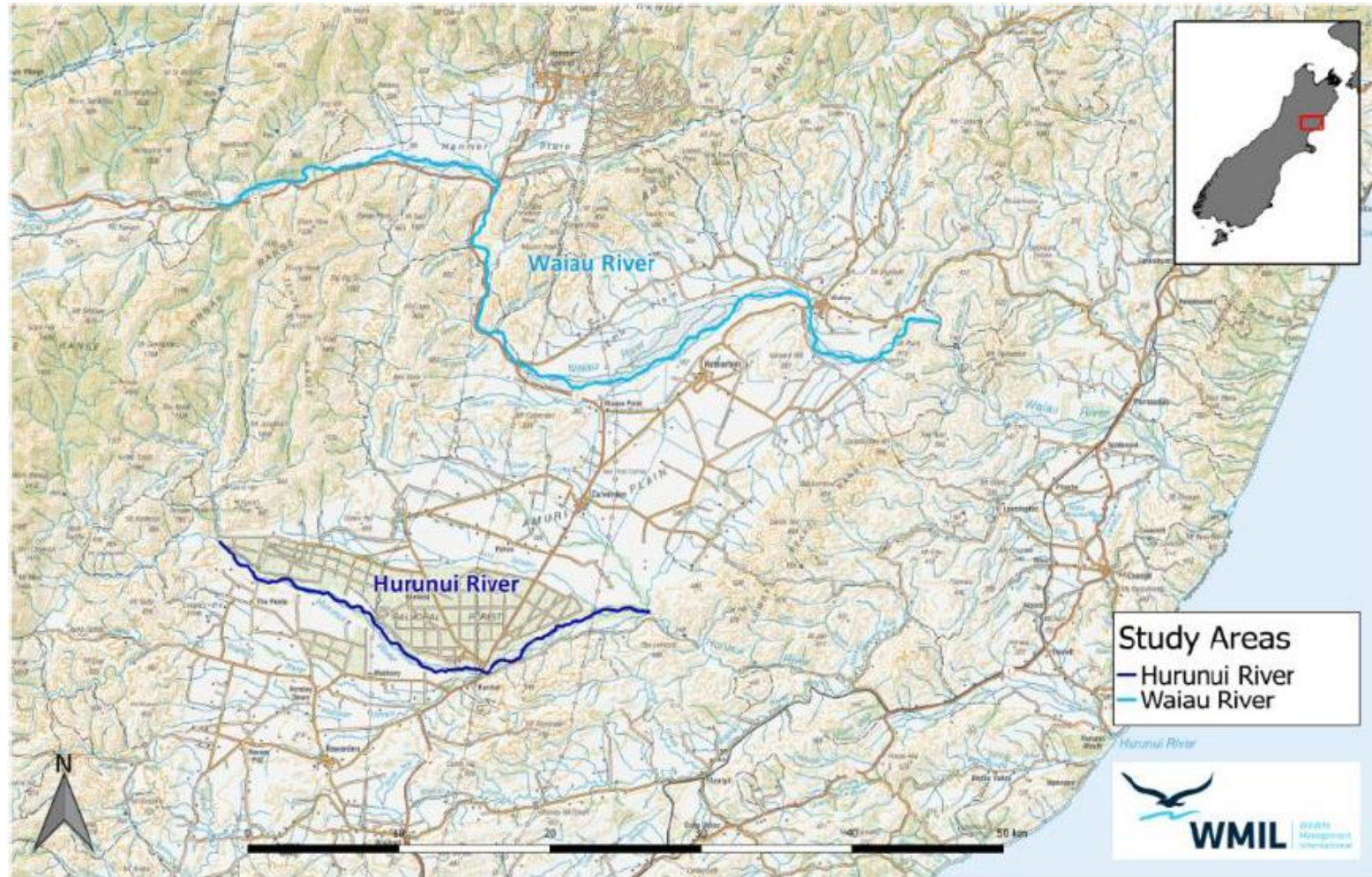


Figure 1. Location of study area on the Hurunui River (dark blue) and Waiau River (light blue), Canterbury, South Island, New Zealand.

Black-fronted tern low breeding success

Both rivers (Hurunui and Waiau Toa)

2017/8

- 384 nests, 65 hatched eggs, 11 chicks fledged.
- Predation 66%, 10% abandon, 23% flooding.

2018/9

- 358 nests, 61 hatched eggs, 11 chicks fledged.
- Predation 47%, 12% abandon, 28% flooding.

Hurunui SBBG colonies 2018/19

Control of 5 colonies (Oct – Dec 2018)

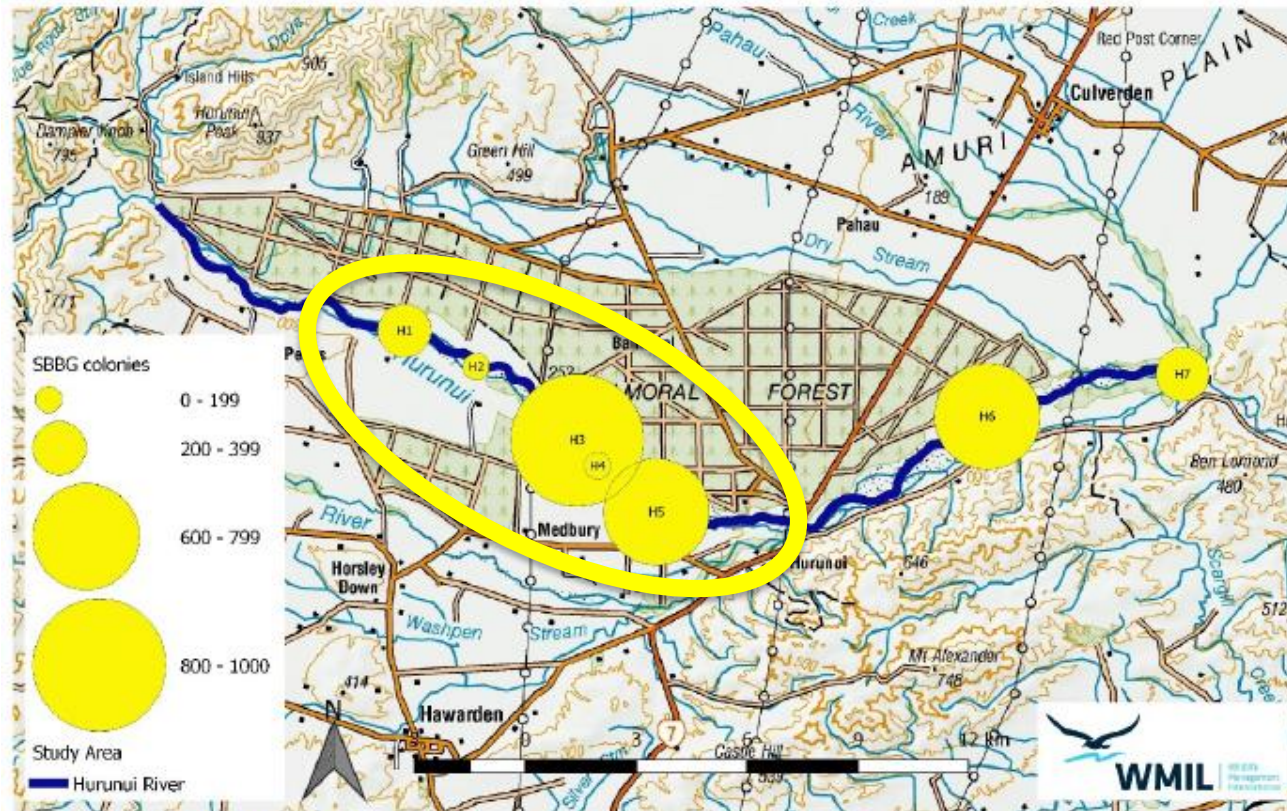


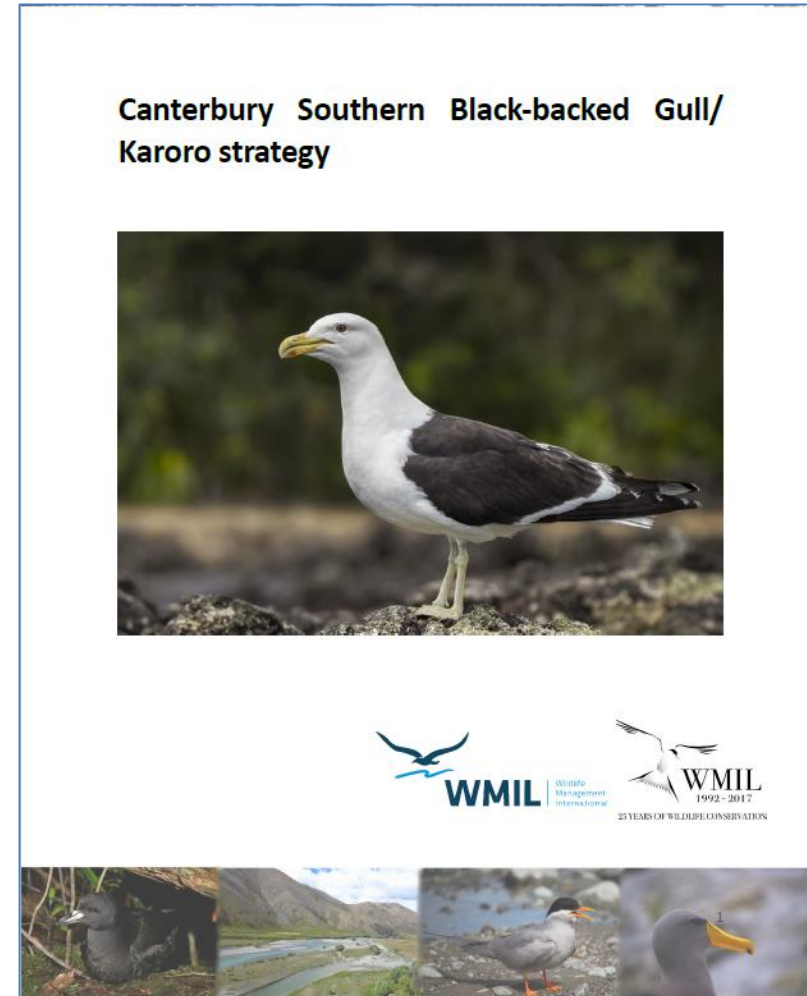
Figure 14. Location and size (number of nests) of Southern Black-backed gull colonies on the Hurunui River, 2018-2019.

Strategic options

- Control work on a project by project basis, but raises questions such as:
 - Recolonization/ movements
 - Adjacent land use/ root causes (food sources)
 - Opportunities for coordination

Strategic options report, draft completed

- Current knowledge on abundance/ populations
- Impacts of SBBG on native wildlife
- Stakeholder views about control (meetings held)
- Current management methods
- Knowledge gaps
- Strategic options for control within the region



What next?

- Final report due end of June 2019
 - Will incorporate what has been learned from Hurunui River project this last season
 - Provides the ‘why’
- Another document planned to provide the ‘how’ (i.e. methods and guidelines – the toolbox)
- Further follow-up work planned on further developing best practice and expanding the control toolbox

Interested in more information - check out the New Zealand Geographic article



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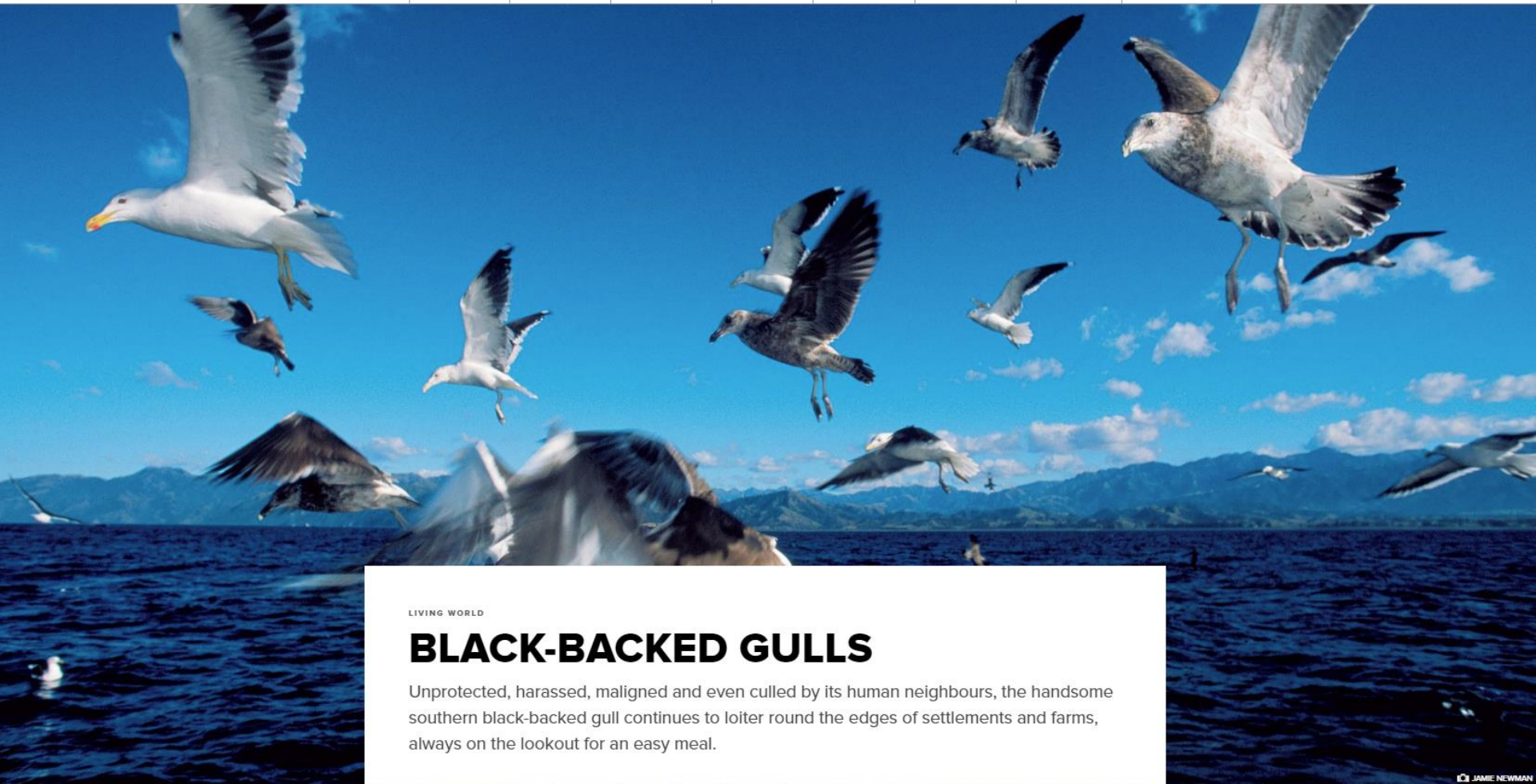
VIDEO

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BLACK-BACKED GULLS

Unprotected, harassed, maligned and even culled by its human neighbours, the handsome southern black-backed gull continues to loiter round the edges of settlements and farms, always on the lookout for an easy meal.