



Note on a failed Waipara River black-fronted tern colony – November 2019

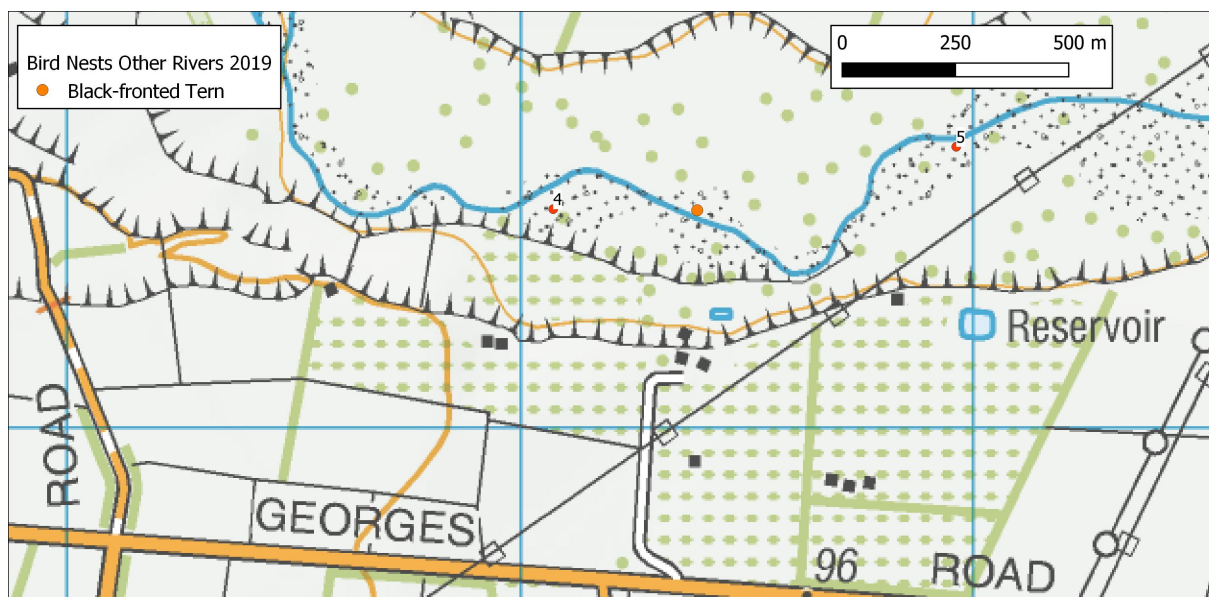
During an Environment Canterbury bird survey of the Waipara river on 17/10/19 (lead by Jean Jack) a developing black-fronted tern colony was found midway between kilometres 4 and 5 at 1576388 E, 5231483 N. About 12 terns were on the ground and 1 nest was found with 1 egg in it. There was no time to locate more nests, but the impression was that this was an early stage colony. It appeared that not all the birds on site had nested as yet. This was the only tern colony found along the river.

The area was revisited on 8/11/19, with access from a vineyard to the south. No terns were in residence, the elapsed time wouldn't have been enough for chicks to have hatched and moved on. One adult tern was seen hawking along the river, no more were seen for several hundred metres upstream and downstream of the site.

This was a good site for a colony – within bare gravel and located about a metre above normal water level. However nowhere along the Waipara in the area traversed are there sites more than a few tens of metres from vegetation – which provides plenty of cover for predators. There are many 4wd tracks along this part of the river, with a very well beaten one about 25m away. There are also old “hooning” tracks on the map of India-shaped nesting area (see drone photo) and downstream from it.

If this was not just a capricious attempt at nesting, it would seem possible that it failed due to predation or human disturbance.

This area does however seem to be a more successful nesting site for pied stilts. On 17 October there were 6 stilts feeding in the river, and 2 displaying “broken wing” behaviour. On 8 November there were 7 stilts, some still indicating that they had nests or chicks.



Tern colony location



Drone photo of failed colony site – red marks nest site

Grant Davey, 11/11/19