

## Upper Hakatere / Ashburton River Annual River Bird Survey 2021

Date: Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021

Surveyors: Nine surveyors took part including Don Geddes, Dan Symonds, Lynn Adams, Stu Cockburn, Cameron van Merino, Philip Grove, Jean Jack, John R Waugh and Don Goodale.

The 2021 river bird survey on the upper reach of the Hakatere / Ashburton River between Buicks Bridge and Blowing Point was undertaken on November 6<sup>th</sup>. Flows at the Mt Somers gauge was 12cumeecs and the weather initially cool, calm, and overcast, turned warm and clear. The nine surveyors covered the initial 4km, while three surveyors continued to complete the almost 8km stretch. This number of surveyors, similar to 2020 (10) were unable to cover the entire upper width of river bird habitat of the first three kilometers (Figure 1). It is likely that further birds would be found within the floodplain of the river east of the surveyed area. As in 2020 counts were recorded against a set of predetermined kilometre markers.

Table 1 presents total river bird counts made during the survey and Figure 2 provides a summary of total counts of banded dotterel, SI oystercatcher, black-fronted tern and wrybill since 1981. Waders included (in order of abundance) banded dotterel, South Island pied oystercatchers, spur-winged plover and wrybill. Notably, no pied stilt were recorded. As in previous years river birds were concentrated in the upper half of the reach with only a handful of birds observed past the fourth kilometre marker where the river narrows, and habitat quality deteriorates – although recent flood events have improved the habitat. Counts of banded dotterel and black-fronted tern were lower than recent years, while more oystercatchers were recorded. A comparable number of wrybill (5) were observed to recent years (Figure 2). Dotterel chicks were frequently encountered and one wrybill nest with two eggs was found.

The riverbed remains relatively weed free, with recent high flows increasing the area of clear gravels throughout the site. Locations of the odd grey willow and lupin above the bluff were noted and sent to DOC Geraldine staff who, alongside Forest & Bird, LINZ and ECan, continue to address weed issues of the site.



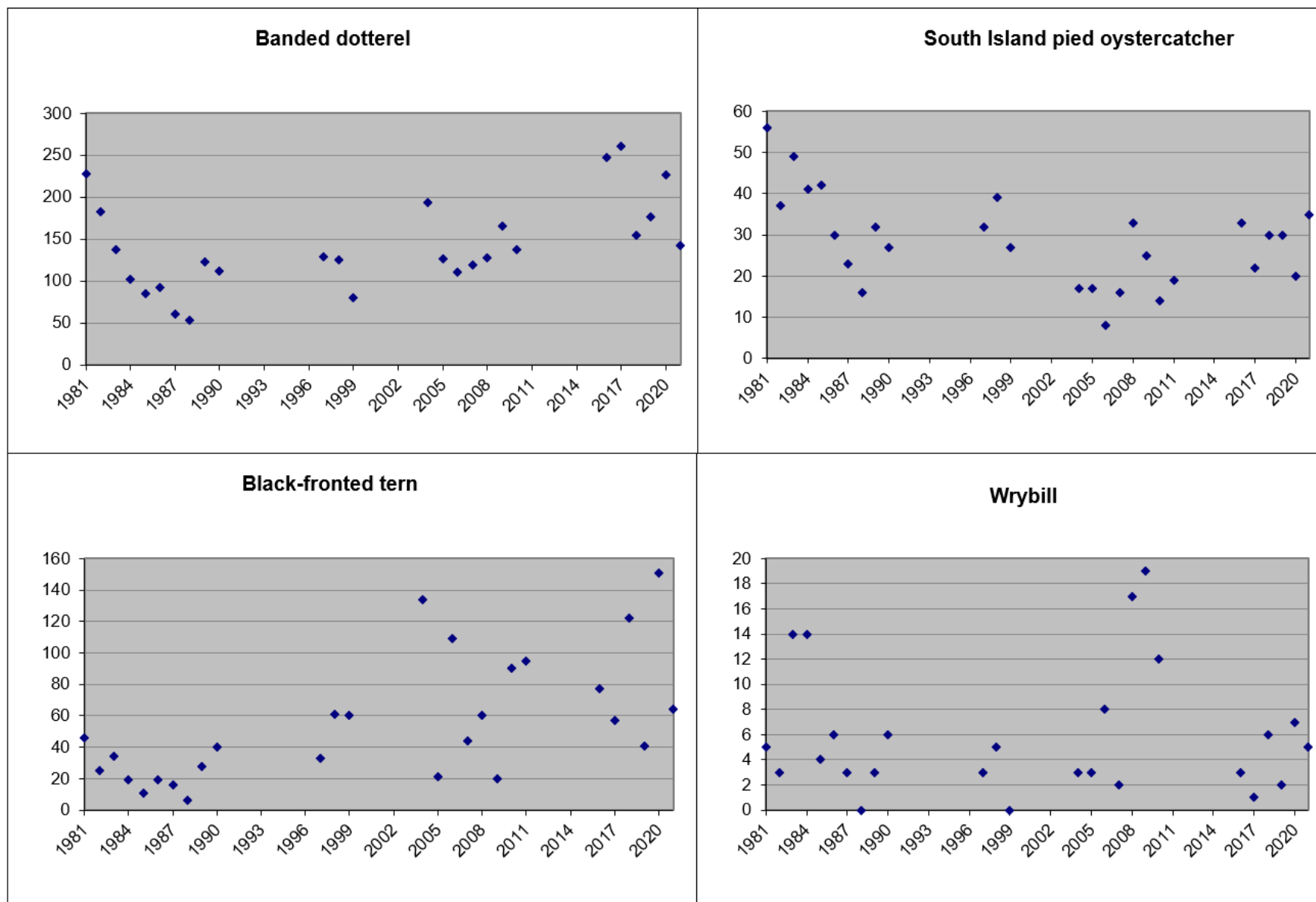
**Above** (Clockwise from top left): 1) Stu Cockburn and others striding out around KM2 of the survey. 2) Looking upstream near KM3. 3) Native mat plants flowering on clear gravel beds. 4) The survey team: From left - Don Goodale, Stu Cockburn, Lynn Adams, Don Geddes, Dan Symonds, Philip Grove and Cam van Merino (surveyors absent from image: John R Waugh & Jean Jack). 5) Recent high flows have cleared areas of riverbed vegetation leaving suitable river bird habitat.



**Figure 1** The reach surveyed between Buick and Blowing Point bridges during the 2021 river bird survey with kilometre markers used for the data collation of counts. The track log from Jean Jack shows the far true left extent covered by the surveyors on the first three KM. It is likely that further birds would be found within the floodplain of the river east of the surveyed area.

**Table 1** Total count of river birds between Buick and Blowing Point bridges during the 2021 survey.

Species	River KM Ref								Total Count
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<i>Waders</i>									
Banded dotterel	59	36	15	28	2		2		142
SI pied oystercatcher	18	2	5	5	5				35
Wrybill	3		2						5
Pied stilt									0
Spur-winged plover	1	1	2	2	1				7
<i>Gulls and terns</i>									
Black-fronted tern	6	47	8	2				1	64
Black-backed gull			2			1	2		5
Black-billed gull		2							2
<i>Waterfowl</i>									
Canada goose			2	2					4
Mallard/Hybrid					2	3	2		7
Paradise shelduck		1	4	9	6				20
<i>Other</i>									
Black cormorant		1		1					2
NZ pipit	8		1	2	1	1	1		14
White-faced heron	1	1					1		3



**Figure 2** Counts of banded dotterel, SI oystercatcher, black-fronted tern and wrybill since 1981 from the Upper Hakatere reach.