

# The Orari River

## Protecting a Living Treasure



## Summary

We started in 2003 responding to a dam proposal on the Orari. We stopped the dam and the Orari still flows - our living treasure! But the Orari is still at-risk: over-allocated for irrigation, with deteriorated water quality & flow, many invasive weeds, under pressure from intensive farming. The gorge is still fairly clean, fringed by native trees & shrubs and still great for swimming. The Orari gorge has been recognised as an area of High Naturalness – but it's a struggle to get this recognised in Zone & District plans. Endangered wildlife lives on the Orari - native Blue-gilled Bullies, Canterbury Galaxiids, rare lizard species, endangered Black-fronted Terns, Black-billed Gulls, Dotterels and Pied Stilts breed on the river. The Orari River Protection Group works to protect them from the impacts of human disturbance, predators and climate change with weed control, water testing, predator trapping & bird colony protection.

## **ORARI RIVER PROTECTION GROUP (ORPG)**

- Began in 2003 in response to a dam proposal on the Orari. We rallied great community support and were successful in stopping the dam.
- We presented the Orari gorge for recognition as an Area of High Naturalness in 2011 by Environment Canterbury as part of their Land & Water Plan. We were successful due to the clean water and native vegetation & biodiversity in the gorge.
- Worked with the community and other organisations to develop the Orari River Integrated Catchment Management Plan (ICMP) in 2008.
- We've had representation on the ECan Water Zone committee in our region since 2008, but the ICMP has not been in active use. Neither has it been clear what "High Naturalness" status actually protects.
- We continue to advocate for a healthy river, but downstream the Orari river is degraded, with water quality and quantity heavily impacted by high nitrates & over-allocation. Phormidium is present even during high flow times and is a risk to our children and animals in the lower reaches of the river in summer.
- We are in action to protect the endangered wildlife on the river, from 4 rare lizard species and native forest birds in the gorge, to the endangered Black-fronted Terns & Black-billed Gulls who come and nest in spring & summer on the river braids. Also Pied Stilts & Dotterels.
- We are working to make the Orari River predator-free, engaging with more land-holders along the river and maintaining 4 trap-lines currently along the river.

## ORPG PROJECTS:

- **BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION IN THE GORGE** – lots of weed control, both manual & helicopter work. More than 1,100 manual hours in the last 4 years.
- **QUARTERLY WATER TESTING** – using NIWA SHMAK kit. Water in the gorge usually shows a Level 1 category, but deteriorated water quality with less invertebrate bio-diversity in the lower river. We use this data to advocate for better water quality & quantity in the river.
- **PREDATOR TRAPPING** - 5km of trap-lines currently
  - Gorge trapline** -30 traps 3km (DOC200, DOC 250, Timms) plus 26 bait stations for rats/mice. Catch this year: 20 hedgehogs, 13 rats, 9 possums, 4 stoats, 1 weasel, 2 mice
  - Lower gorge trapline** – 26 traps 1.75km, catch this year: 23 hedgehogs, 10 rats, 4 mice, 3 stoats, 2 possums, 1 cat, 1 ferret
  - Vance Rd trapline –
  - Upstream of single lane bridge – New line (Timms, DOC 200) 23 traps 1.75km
- **BIRD COLONY PROTECTION** – We scout & survey the river from November to locate breeding colonies. Black-fronted Terns & Black-billed Gulls have nested on the Orari in Spring for several years now. Observations every week, maintain additional trap-lines along river bank. Collaboration with DOC, ECan river engineers, local contractors & community members to help ensure the colonies survival.



## **CHALLENGES FOR THE ORARI**

- Over-allocated for irrigation
- High nitrates & toxic phormidium present even during periods of high flow
- Downstream unsafe for swimming in summer
- Impacts on water quantity – will there be enough clean water flowing to the sea for fish & tuna to breed? Will there be enough water to protect endangered nesting Terns, Black-billed Gulls, Dotterels, Pied Stilts?
- Climate change impacts – less water from snow melt & altered rainfall patterns
- It's still a struggle to gain recognition of the Orari gorge High Naturalness Area in Zone & District plans. Possible threats to the upper river from land use changes
- Invasive weeds along the fairway & banks
- Predators along the length of the river threaten native birds lizards & nesting colonies
- Human disturbance from vehicles & dogs affect endangered colonies
- Need for more active help with river projects





































Hidden Valleys































































# ORARI RIVER

*'Our Hidden Treasure'*

Orari River Protection Group (Inc.)























































































































## CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

Braided River Birds nest in this area

CRITICALLY  
ENDANGERED



ENDANGERED



# STOP

It is **ILLEGAL** to  
disturb or kill birds

**PENALTY:** Up to \$100,000  
&/or 2 yrs. prison

CRITICALLY  
ENDANGERED

CRITICALLY  
ENDANGERED

Nests are hard to see & very vulnerable

ORARI RIVER PROTECTION GROUP  
Ph: 0210 236 9874







