

Black billed gull observations 2020/21 at Strathearn Farm

14 November – Observed a few birds nesting between the two effluent ponds (a solid settling pond with a crust and liquid effluent pond)

20 November – Large number of birds observed on gravel pile between the effluent ponds and cowshed area. Nests formed but no chicks





30 November – Gull numbers appear static. No chicks



2 December – Edith Smith visited. No chicks observed. Traps received. Edith estimated 1500-2000 birds present















3 December – “Emerald” (feral cat) caught in live trap at roadside hedge. Clusters of birds observed away from main nesting site.



4 December – 3 chicks observed at nesting site. Chicks are very small and not moving from the nest. Birds seem to move around behind the cows gathering food (at Strathearn farm and neighbours). Cows at Strathearn farm paddock have a diet comprised of grass and barley grain. Birds are very noisy at night and often observed busy just before dusk.



5 December – Hailstorm, briefly heavy. Birds observed on nests and appeared unaffected.

10 December – Chicks observed moving to foot of gravel pile and in ponded water area. Multiple chicks of varying sizes. Chicks between effluent ponds much larger (still downy grey). Birds observed copulating.











14 December – Many chicks of varying sizes observed. Rat caught in trap. Birds observed hunting (?) at neighbours irrigation ponds and ALIL pond (up to 4km away).

19 December – Nesting site observed with pivot passing over / just passed over and cows in paddock. Birds appeared unaffected and continuing to forage behind cows in. Some chicks now showing white in their plumage – assume older chicks. Some gulls and chicks observed on the solids pond and appeared to be feeding on small insects.







26 December – a number (approx. 5) dead gulls in 2 paddocks surrounding nesting site. No visible injuries. Some individual birds appear almost sleepy and reluctant to move.

27 December – a few more dead birds observed in area surrounding nesting site. Very large number of birds observed foraging in a paddock cows had been in (5.30am)





6 January – gulls and family in the paper 😊 <https://www.odt.co.nz/star-news/star-districts/star-mid-canterbury/endangered-gulls%E2%80%99-new-home-land-locked-farm>

22 January – Grant Davey visited Strathearn Farm and made following comments with images:

I was really too late to count anything properly - the birds were scattered and moving a lot, I can't see small chicks or distinguish fledglings from adults on the photographs and even the nests cannot be counted with any accuracy as some have been destroyed, others overgrown with vegetation. I did count the nests I could see on the gravel - 242 - and I got some photographs (3 attached) which could be useful for a small report on what happened here. It seems to me that this is a very nice illustration of how these gulls can coexist with farming, I wish the other braided river birds were so versatile. One of the attached photographs shows gulls feeding behind an irrigator - many of these will be fledglings, there was another group of mainly fledglings parked up in the paddock closer to the ponds. I also made two photo composites - one of the area where they nested taken from 25m height, the other from 100m height of a broader area showing the buildings as well. These are Tiff or geopackage files that can be loaded directly into GIS software - the 4th image is the 100m composite with the coordinates added from QGIS. I could send these images to you, with other photos, if they are of use. They are much too big to be sent electronically. Will send some more notes, probably on Monday.

General observations until July 2021 – the gulls continue to visit Strathearn farm regularly and we have observed them in the surrounding Winchmore area on other dairy farms or worked soil. More recently (late July) they have been observed congregating near the effluent pond and former gravel pile site. The gravel pile has recently been spread in this locality.