

One of the few tidal
river mouths on the
east coast of the
South Island

Ashley / Rakahuri Estuary: in Crisis



“an ecological gem”

*“It is a vital stopover site
for birds migrating up
and down the coast, and
beyond”*

*“The river and estuary are
included in a list of
wetland sites which meet
criteria prescribed to be
of **international
importance** by the
International Union for
the Conservation of
Nature (IUCN)”*



Low tide, 9 September 2022

Grant Davey,
July 2023

Braided river birds at estuary



Pied oystercatcher



Banded dotterel



Black-billed gull

Braided river birds at estuary



Wrybill



Black-fronted Tern



Pied Stilt

Wrybill gather
in large
numbers (up to
100) in the
estuary to feed
before moving
up the rivers to
breed



Estuary nesters



Variable oystercatcher & hybrids



White-fronted Tern



Caspian Tern



Red-billed Gull



Southern black-backed gull



Bar-tailed godwit



Ruddy turnstone



Sanderling



Bar-tailed godwit



Black stilt



Black shag



Sacred kingfisher



White heron



White-faced heron



Pied shag



Australasian shoveler



Spotted shag



Royal spoonbill



Black-fronted dotterel

Other estuary residents

An important mahinga kai area

People and birds fishing, oblivious to each other, a few tens of metres apart.



Variable oystercatcher



ARRG
Ashley Estuary Trap
Locations
October 2022

The area of ARRG is the Ashley River from SH1 to the Okuku junction, but we have trapped around the estuary since mid 2018.

We have done no monitoring to assess results of this



The following preempts a MSc study – with funding from the Waimakariri Zone Committee. This study was begun by ARRG so that there was some data from all of the 2022 – 2023 nesting season.

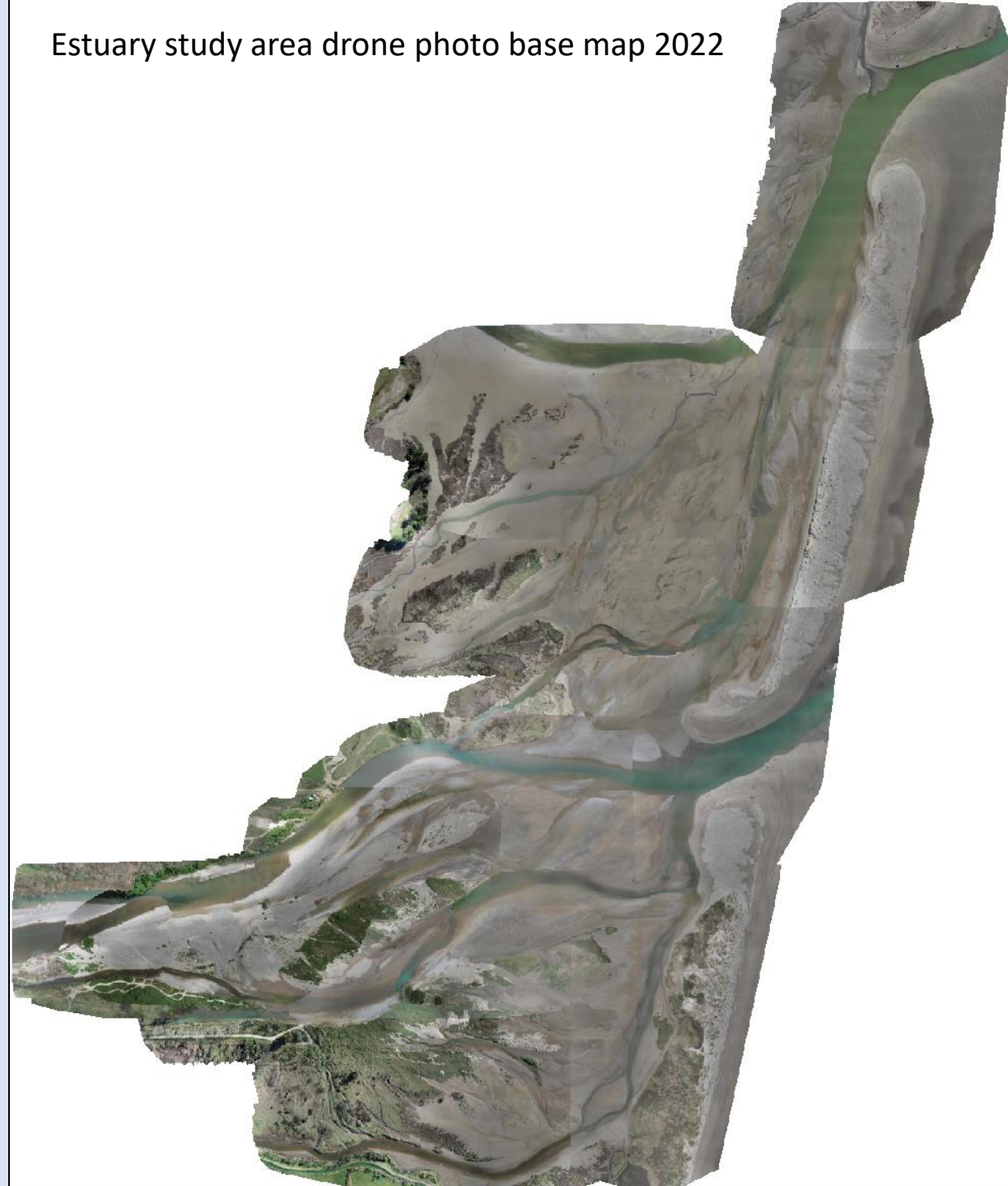
The conclusions are from preliminary work and no thorough literature review has been done. However, it seems clear that southern black-backed gulls and human disturbance are very seriously impacting on the birdlife at the estuary. This should be addressed as soon as possible.

To assess the effectiveness of trapping, and other aims -

Eleanor Gunby MSc project - scholarship paid for by the zone committee. Supervisor – Jim Briskie, Rangiora domiciled ornithologist.

- *To identify the causes of nest failure in waders and other waterbirds in the Ashley River*
- *To determine the role of local microhabitat features in nest success*
- *To assess the role of human disturbance on the foraging behaviour of waders*
- *To assess the role of black-backed gulls on the nesting behaviour of waders*

Estuary study area drone photo base map 2022



Wamakariri District Council Northern Pegasus Bylaw

Inside the red line is prohibited area for dogs, horses, drones, aircraft taking off and landing and to vehicles. These rules are routinely flouted.

ECan rangers do an excellent job, but cannot be there nearly enough to be effective

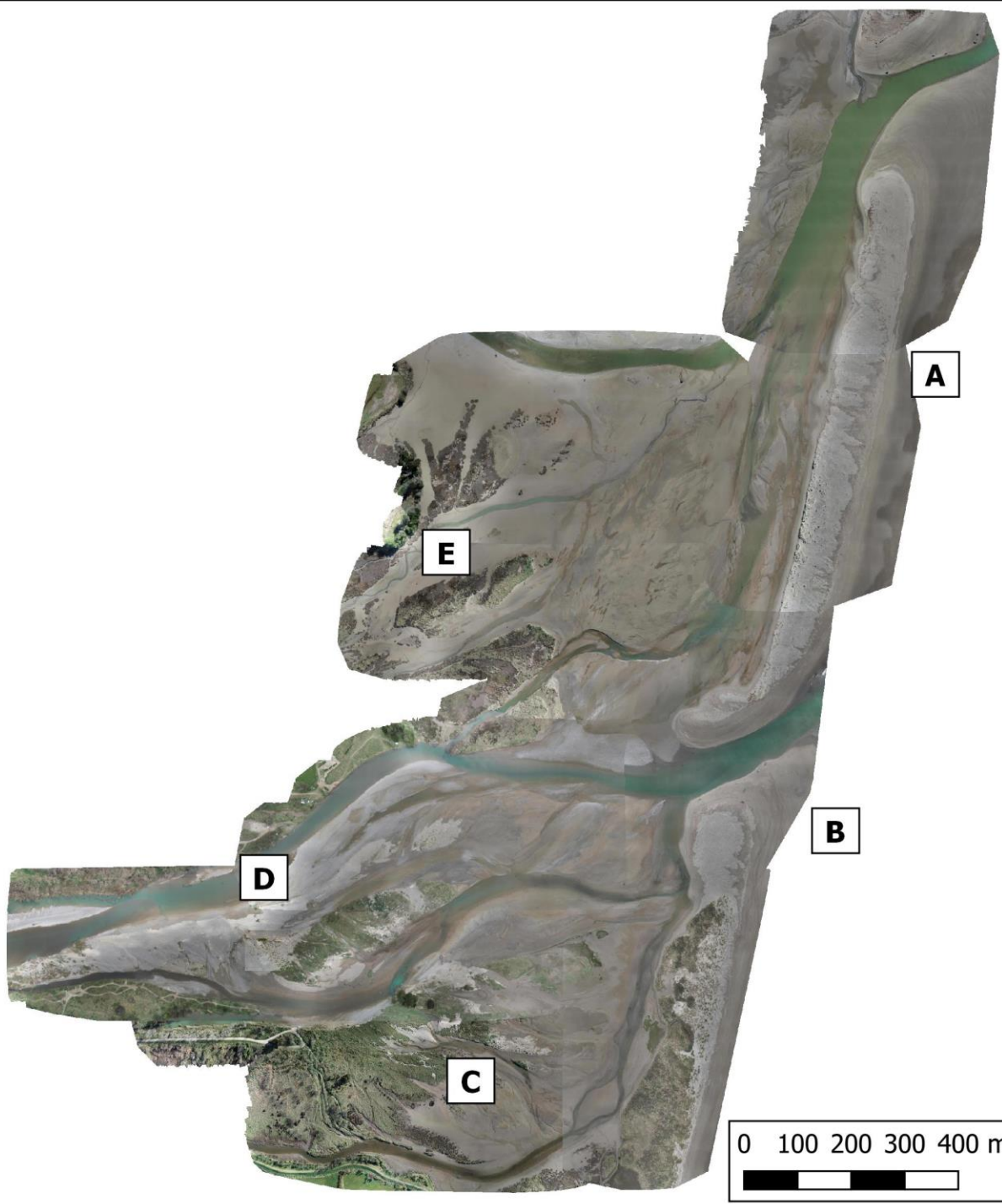


Nesting areas and expected nesting species

E. Banded dotterel
Pied stilt
Black-backed gull

D. Banded dotterel
Pied stilt
Black-billed gull
Black-fronted tern
White-fronted tern
Black-backed gull

C. Banded dotterel
Pied stilt
Black-backed gull



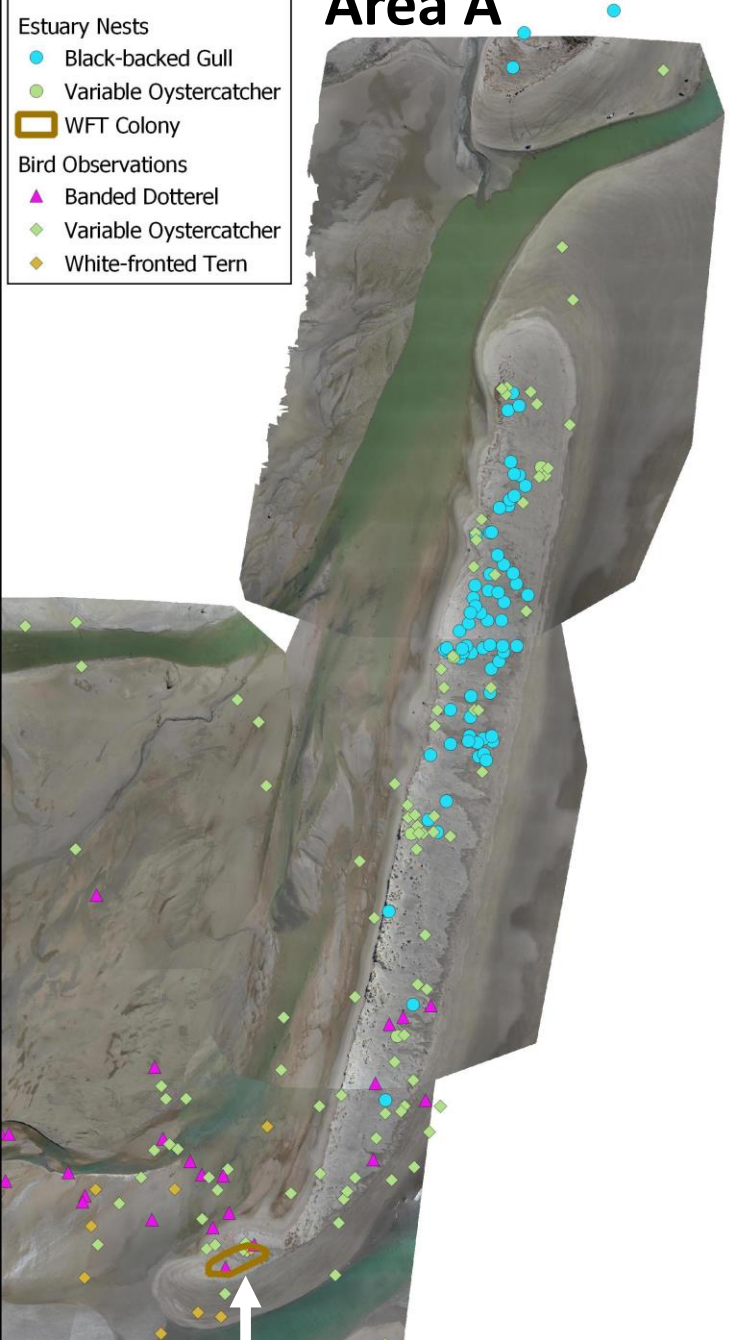
A. Banded dotterel – nests all along here in mid 1990s.

White-fronted tern
Variable oystercatcher
Black-backed gull (SBBG)

B. Banded dotterel – 33 nests in 1993

White-fronted tern
Variable oystercatcher
Black-backed gull

Area A



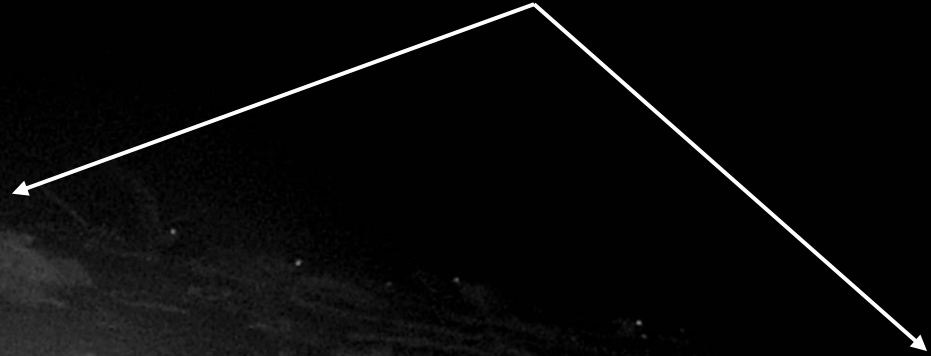
This should be an excellent nesting area with little disturbance and probably no land predators – but SBBG keep all but variable oystercatchers away.



**Approximately 1,000 white-fronted terns
nesting on 6 December**



SBBG in colony area



No nests remaining on 15 December – just SBBG tracks and broken WFT eggs. WFT did not attempt to nest again in the estuary.

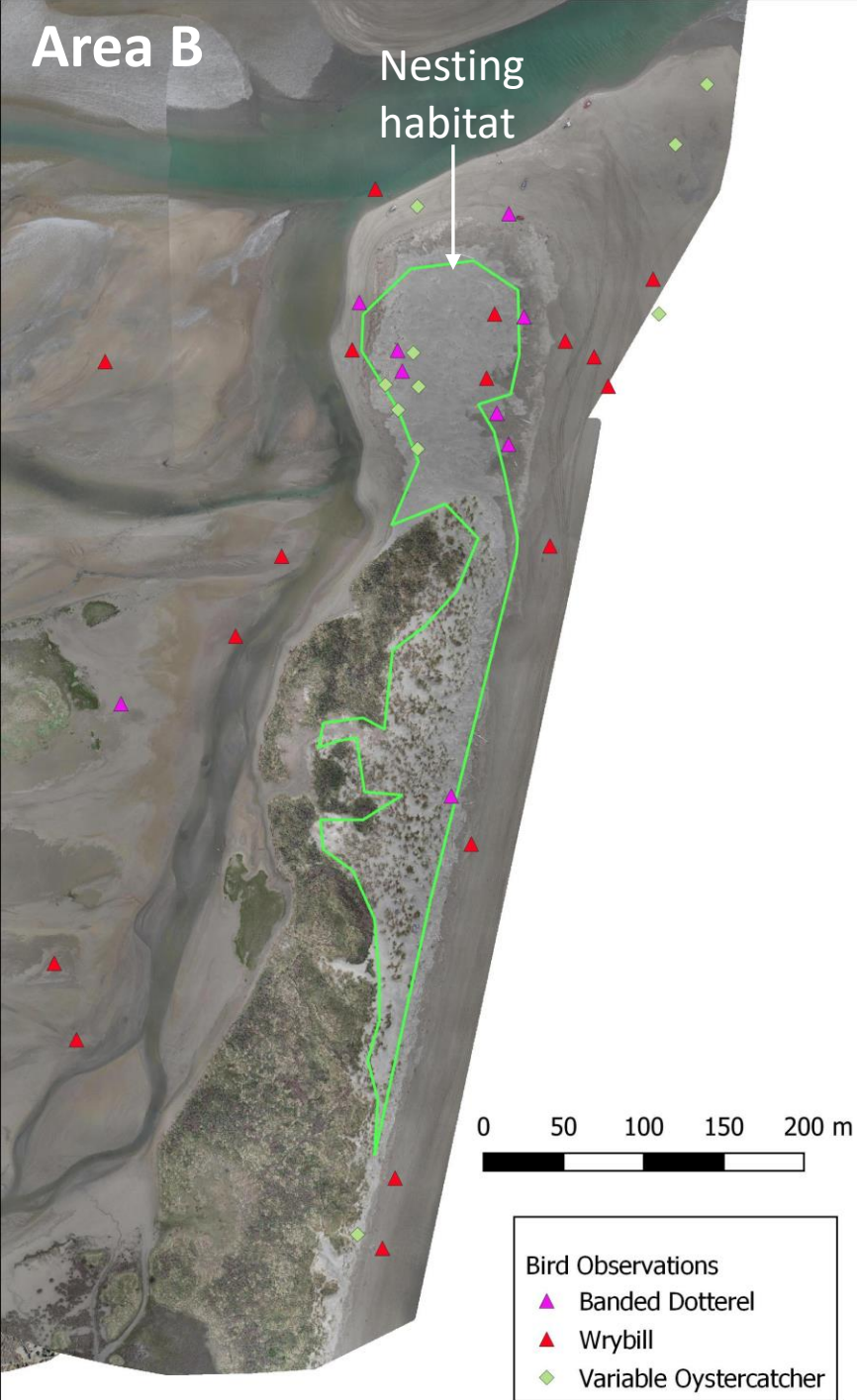




SBBG
infestation:

250 nests in
2022, at least
500 birds
resident





In 1993 - 33 BD nests. In 2022, **no prospect of any nests of any species?** No migratory bird roosting



A fun day at
the beach –
for some.

Welcome to
the South
Island.





Dogs are **routinely** seen in the estuary, despite signs forbidding them. Vehicles go along the western edge of the dunes. People all through the dunes.



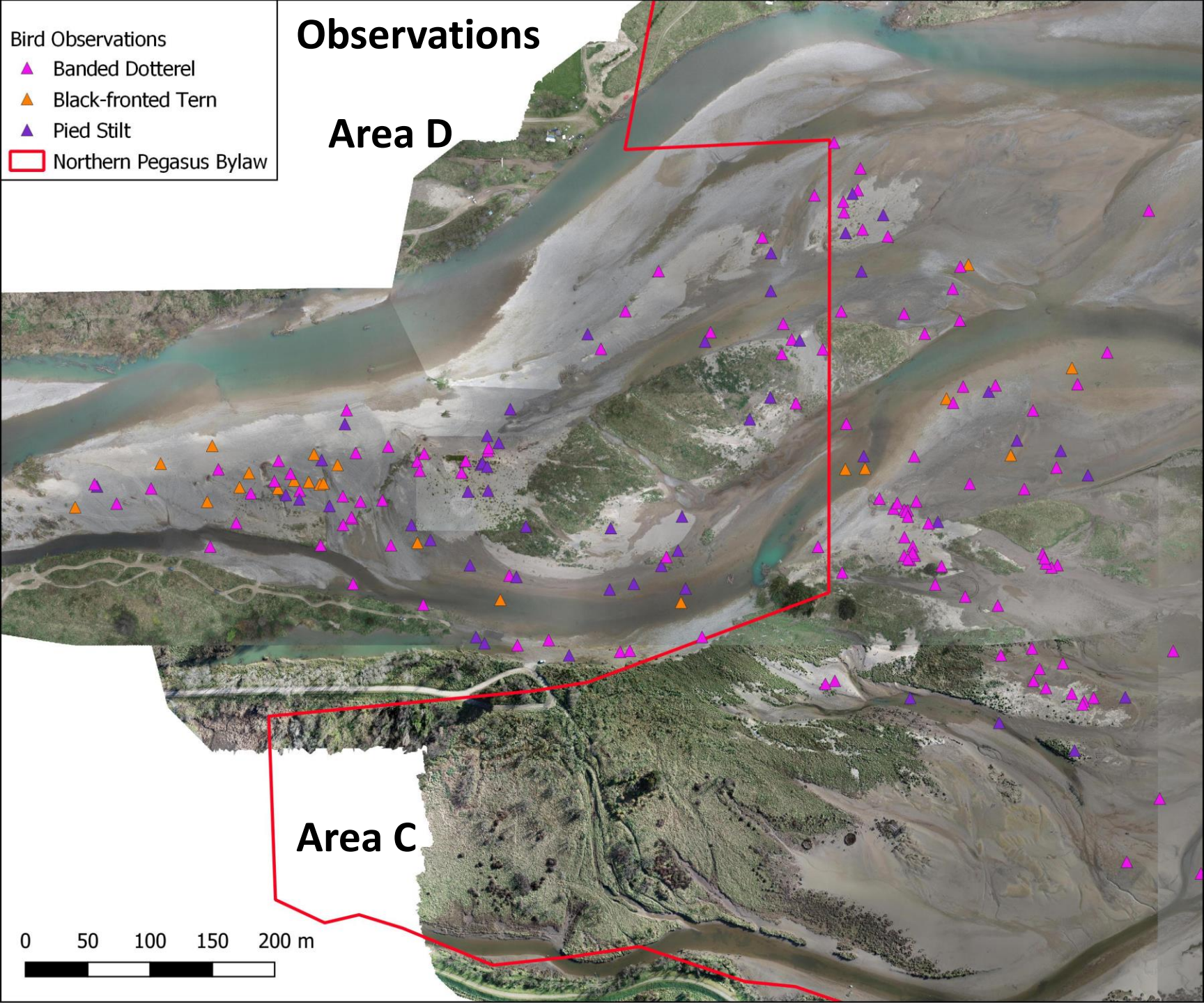
The exception – a variable oystercatcher and a hybrid variable-pied raised a chick

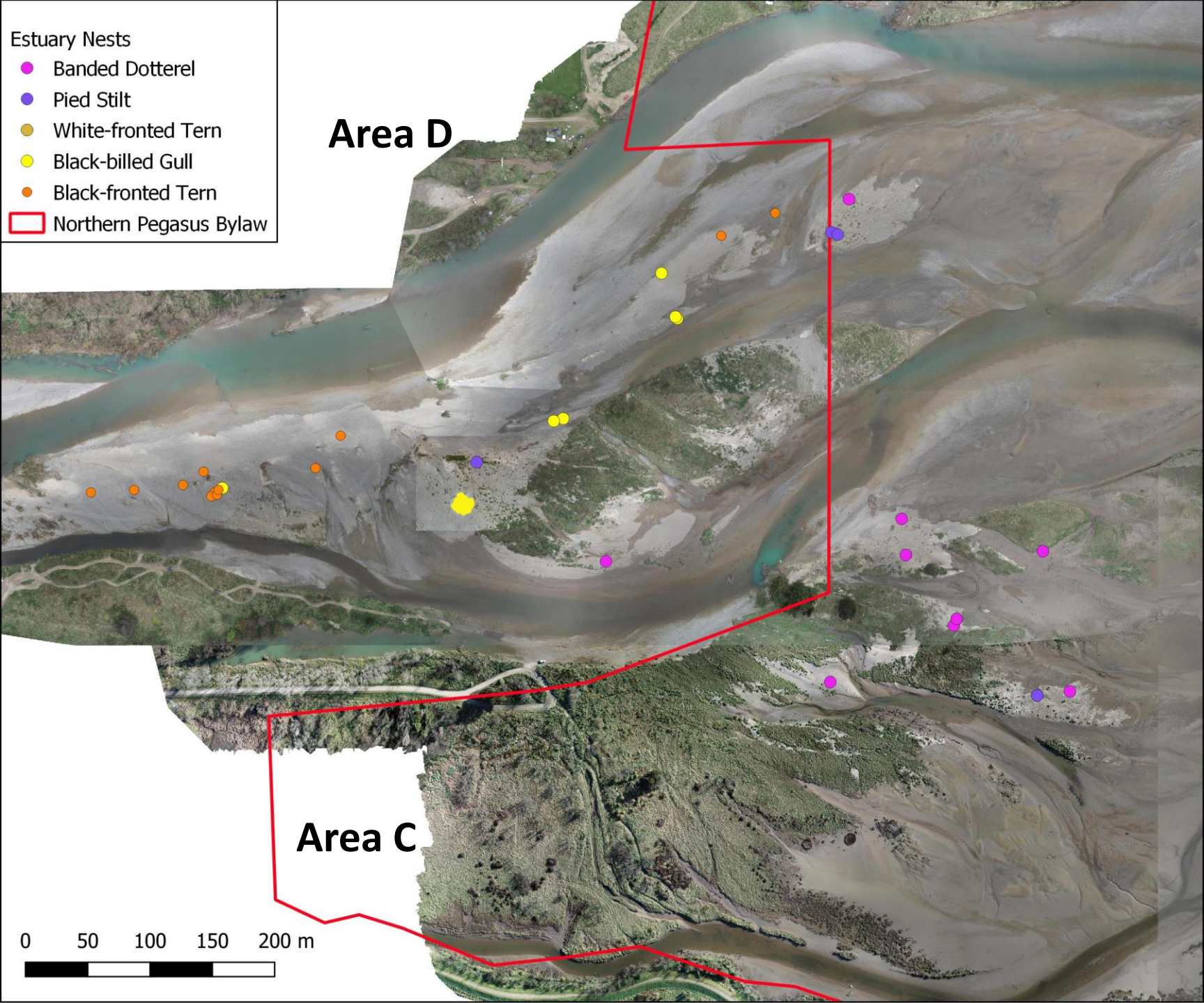
- Bird Observations**
- ▲ Banded Dotterel
 - ▲ Black-fronted Tern
 - ▲ Pied Stilt
 - Northern Pegasus Bylaw

Observations

Area D

Area C





Nests

- Two BBG nesting sites abandoned – due to disturbance? The third was successful
- About 10 BD nests found – space (at 50m intervals) for <20. Chicks seemed to survive
- Half a dozen BFT nests found in a heavily trafficked area. One fledgling seen.
- About 4 pied stilt nests found, many more existed, they are hard to find.
- Two solitary WFT nests.

Vehicle drove rapidly through the colony, turned around and came back.



MOULTRIE 71°F CAMERA 2 19 OCT 2022 10:03 am

This BBG colony was abandoned after only a few nests were made.



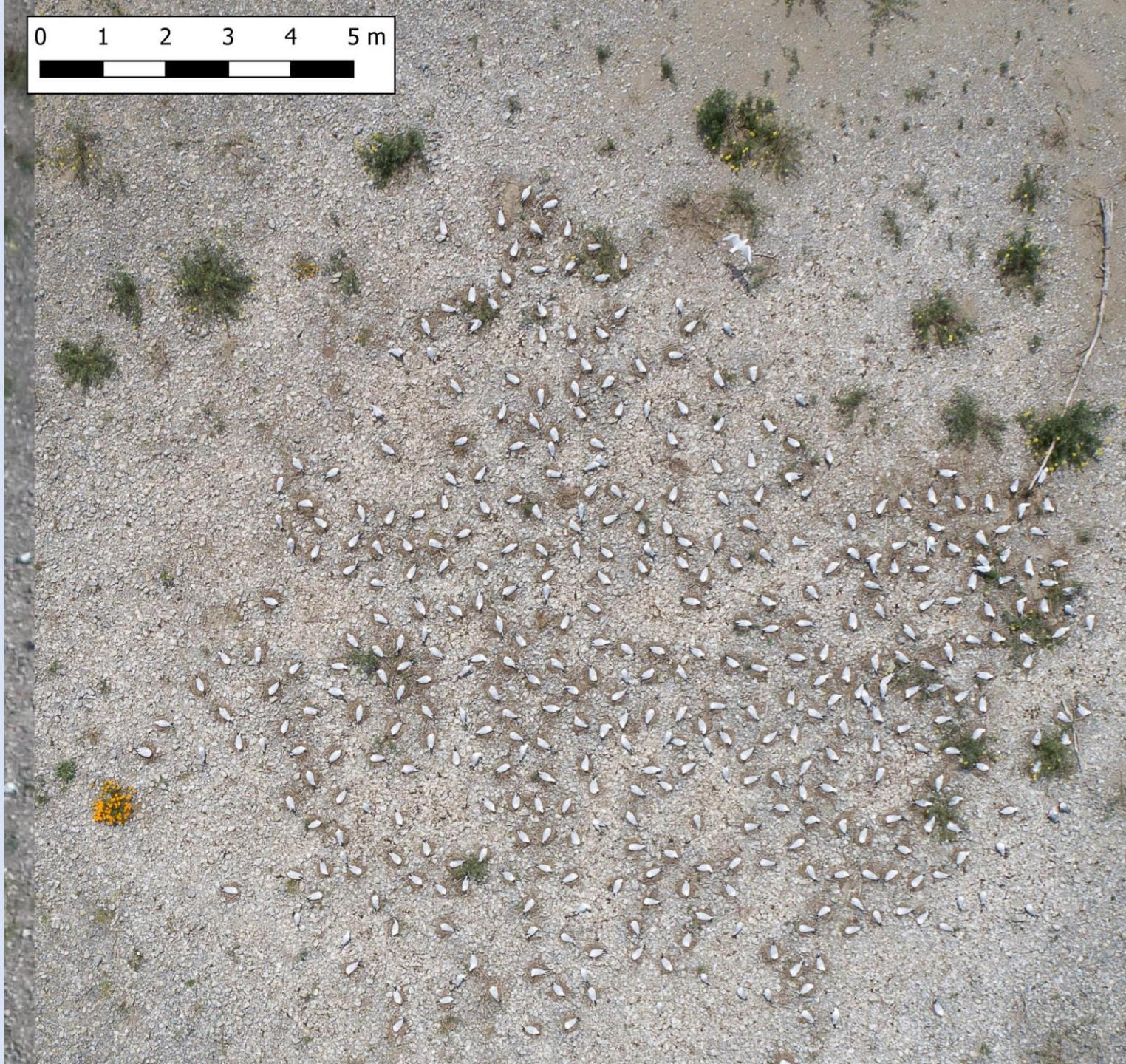
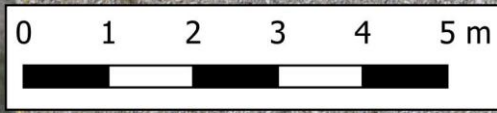
Same camera a few days earlier. There were BBG and WFT colonies in the same spot in 2021 – with disturbance reportedly much greater.

MOULTRIE 50°F CAMERA 2 15 OCT 2022 10:20 pm

Successful BBG Colony

428 gulls, 375 nests,
2.8 per sq metre

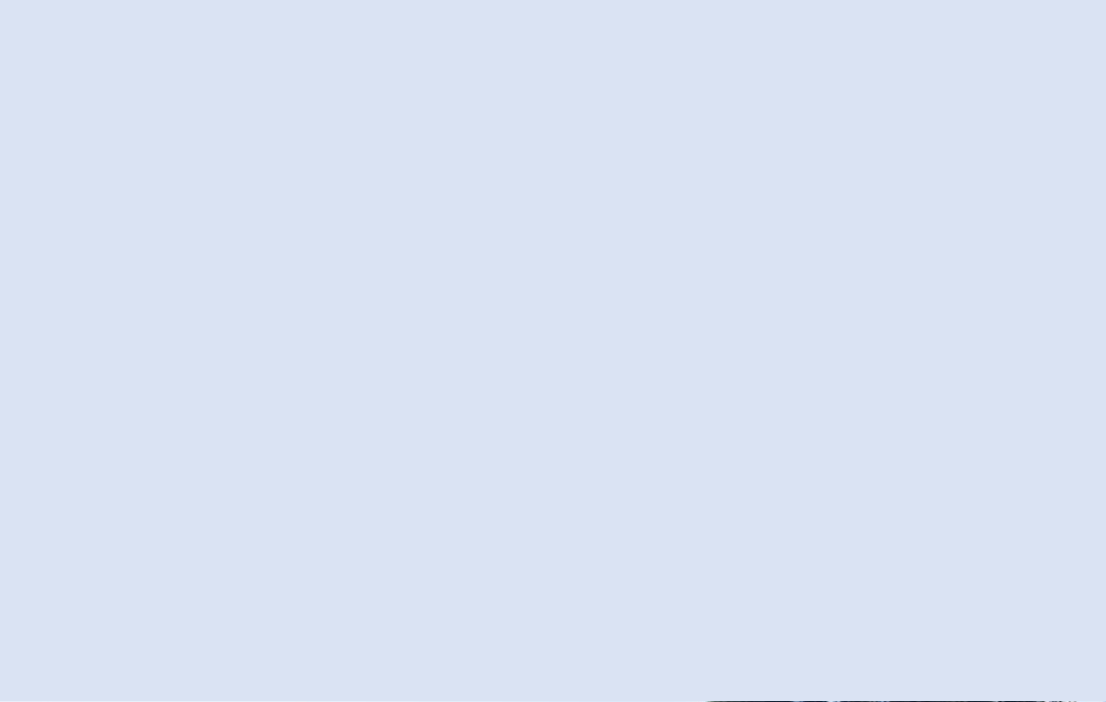
16/11/22



The hunt for the lost rottweiler –
22/12/22.

There is a
consistent lack
of respect for
the wildlife and
environment at
the estuary by
most people.





Banded dotterel on nest

MOULTRIE 33°F CAMERA 2 17 SEP 2022 02:21 am



Cheery waves driving past no vehicles signs



Banded dotterel nest

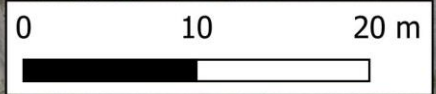
MOULTRIE 39°F CAMERA 2 18 SEP 2022 07:25 am

BFT nests in most heavily disturbed area.

Beaten tracks from whitebaiters, remainder by hoons.



BFT egg crushed by vehicle - 2021



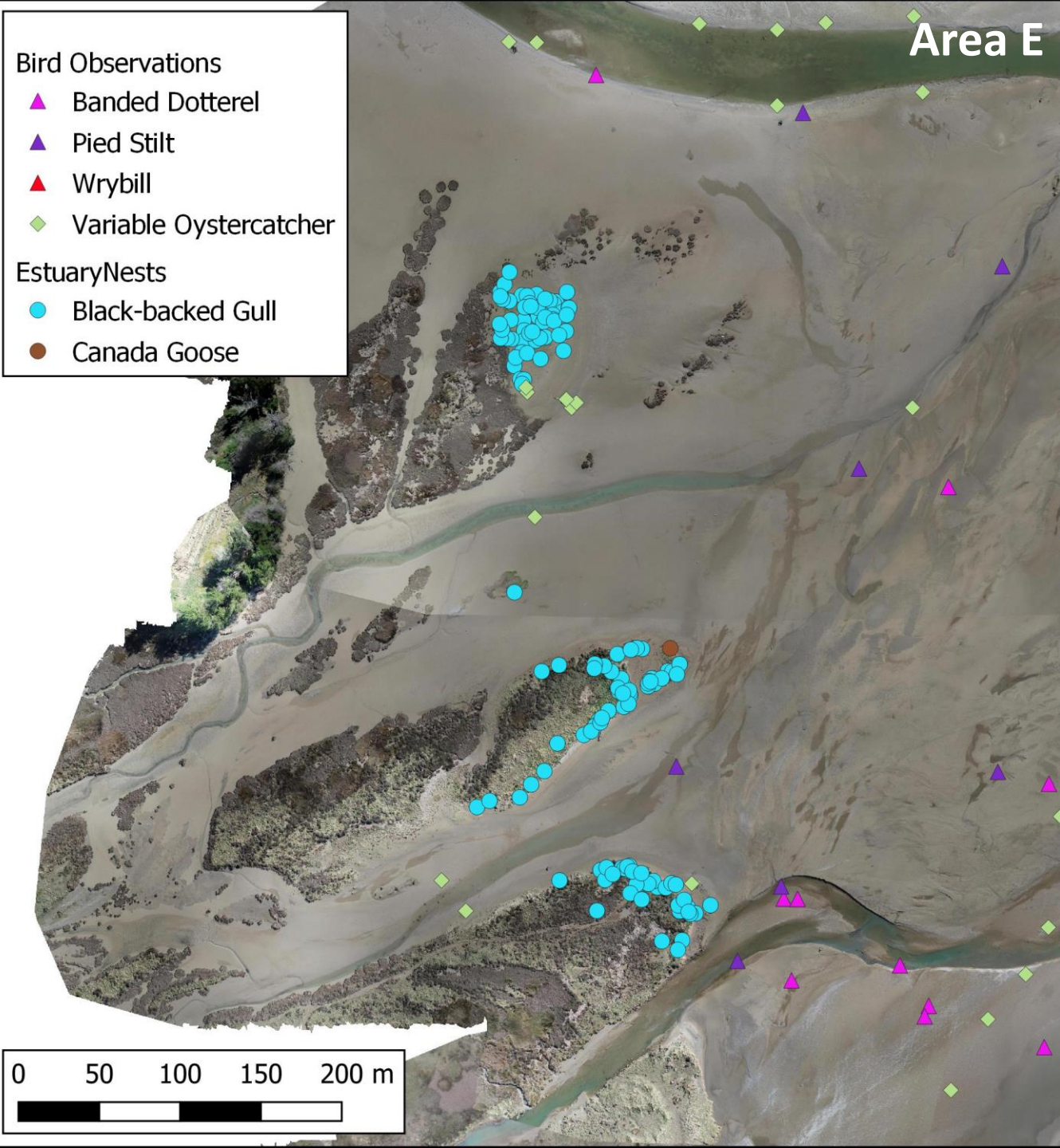
Ashley river access blocking during nesting season – ARRG and ECan.

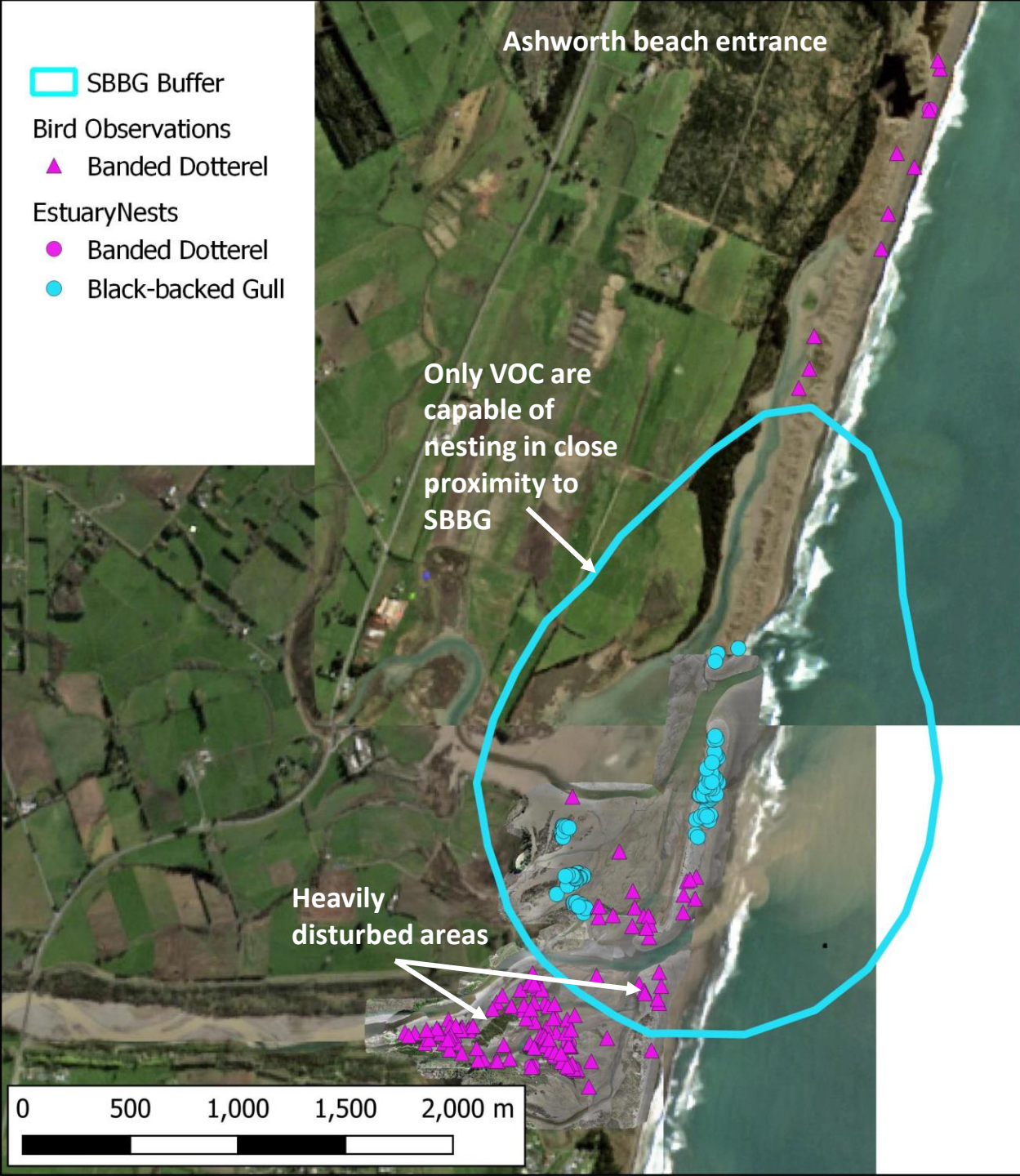
Blocking along with publicity and education has led to the biggest success we have had – vehicles haven't been a significant problem in the past few years.

Blocks not an option at the estuary, can lanes for vehicles be marked?



Only Canada goose and variable oystercatcher nesting near SBBG.





Conclusions and Recommendations

At Kaikoura work has been done for several years to allow banded dotterel to nest on the beaches. At Waikuku Beach we have lost them, did anyone even notice? There should be perhaps 100 nests along the spit near the estuary, in 2022/2023 there were **none**. SBBG wiped out a large white-fronted tern colony.

The current management isn't working.

We need:

- To inform the public of the situation and promote change
- Measures against the SBBG
- Tightened rules
- Enforcement
- **Education Education Education**

Is the Ashley / Rakahuri estuary a tiny (2 sq km) but important bird sanctuary or is it a playground for environmentally irresponsible people and a haven for dangerous avian predators?

We need to wake up to what we've got before it's gone



Large BBG and WFT colonies



Fishermen with dog on edge of colony



BBG fledglings killed by vehicle



Vehicle scattering BBG fledglings

Opihi Mouth
6 January
2023



Injured WFT chick beside vehicle track