

RECORD OF BLACK-BILLED GULL COLONY ON ORARI RIVER NEAR STOCK WATER INTAKE NOV 2019 – JAN 2020

SUMMARY:

First week of Nov - Colony of 600-700 Black-billed gulls gathered & built about 200 nests with eggs laid early Nov. Noticed the nests were not as large as last season. We saw the first chick on the 27th Nov.

The flood event of 6th Dec brought 136 cumecs into the Orari, which left about 60 nests. Ten days after the flood 600-700 adult birds returned to the site with approx 50 nests and approx 50 chicks, gathering in creches and starting to grow feathers.

By the end of December the colony had 150 new nests and 132 chicks gathering in a large creche of 100 with mixed ages, and 2 smaller creches of 15 older chicks and 17 younger chicks. The older chicks all had feathers.

On 3rd Jan approx 300-400 Black-billed gulls had 70 nests, some with 4 eggs, most had 2 eggs, and 20% had just one egg. The first chick of the second nesting had hatched, and 40 near-fledged juveniles were seen swimming across fast water to an adjoining braid. 100 near-fledged juveniles were on another island nearby, with a total of 140 fledging juveniles.

A week into Jan saw approx 400 Black-billed gulls with 60 nests on 2 islands and 12 young chicks just starting to gather into small crèches. Approx 200 fledging juveniles were counted, with most appearing to fly and land again, with nearly all the birds airborne at one stage.

In the next week we observed more flying practice of 150-200 fledging juveniles.

By the 18th Jan all fledging birds had gone. There were 48 adult Black-billed gulls with 17 chicks mobile & tended by adults.

We think predators are getting the young chicks, most likely Black-backed gulls or harriers, as Black-backed gulls have attended the colony during most observations, and there were often harriers also signs of pigs active nearby. We've checked the colony for footprints but there were none around the colony. Also no sign of broken egg-shells, but 3 dead chicks were present.

Our trapping efforts caught: 7 hedgehogs, 4 rats, 3 stoats, 1 weasel and a mouse.

10 people helped with observing & trapping at the colony (including one 13-year old).

RAW DATA/OBSERVATIONS:

Date:	Time:	Weather:	Location: BBGulls below	Observer/s:	River level:
3-11-19	10am		water intake	Tony Doy	6 cumecs
Observations: Emptied the trapline south of the gorge this morning and from Hermann's view got a lovely view of about 300 BBilled Gulls on the riverbed about opposite the intake. 6 S Black Backed Gulls loitering nearby, like they were waiting for takeaway. The location of the colony is great because on the unbraided true right of the colony it's protected by the line of traps I've been servicing all winter. The true left of the colony has, for the time being, a decent, hedgehog drowning braid. I'd be interested in moving more traps into the area if the braid dries. The colony may get to chick stage as early as the end of this month.					

Date:	Time:	Weather:	Location: BBGulls	Observer/s:	River level:
9-11-19	7pm	Cloudy, nor-west wind	below water intake	Tony Doy	5.5 cumecs
Observations: Saw about 400 birds there, saw 200 nests with about 50% containing 1 egg and the other 50% with 2 eggs - approx 300 eggs. Saw 3 black backed gulls, a pair of stilts and 2 pair of spur wings. No BF Terns which is a pity. One hawk skirted the colony & lots of sign of pigs along the bank. Thinking of putting a second line of traps through the bush, about half way between the current line and the river/ colony. Wanted to set a camera up overnight but it would have been sand blasted in this NWER. Will go up tomorrow night if it's calmer and put it out. Collect it early Monday morning before work. The water course on the TR of the colony is actually 3 smallish braids, one more than ankle deep, so I'm optimistic as the river is running at a puny 5.5 cumecs today. TL braid is running bonza. Photo taken by Tony – below:					



Date: 17-11-19	Time:	Weather:	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Tony & Kerri Doy	River level: 9.9 cumecs
Observations:					
<p>We got a second line of 5 traps through the scrub alongside the gull colony this morning. The TR of the colony now has a line of 8 200s and 3 timms along the road (hidden, out of sight) we've been emptying varmintns out of those all winter. Then today, set back about 20m from the river, we have a line of 5 200s. Coordinates for the second line are</p> <p>Trap 1 upstream of the colony 1455444.04 5132306.5 Trap 2 upstream of the colony 1455518.07 5132209.6 Trap 3 alongside the colony 1455538.78 5132122.77 Trap 4 downstream of the colony 1455542.29 5132053.22 Trap 5 downstream of the colony 1455559.18 5131916.26</p> <p>The braids on the TR are looking a bit feeble but the TL is still good. Gulls didn't give a hoot that 2 of us were chopping out a track about 50m away from their colony for about 10mins. No sign of chicks yet, though I didn't look real close.</p> <p>I'm hoping to nip up there tomorrow pm after the survey to rebait the road side traps, put more blaze tape out on both lines and stick a couple of signs up at the kayak pull out, maybe put a camera in.</p>					

Date: 18-11-19	Time: 2pm	Weather:	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Tony & Bryan	River level: 9.6 cumecs
Observations:					
<p>Annual Bird Survey today on the Orari. Tony & Bryan checked traps & installed a monitoring camera near the colony. Not much of interest caught in the camera.</p> <p>Trap results: 1 hedgehog</p>					

Date: 24-11-19	Time: 1pm	Weather: hot	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Adele & Bryan	River level: 6.24 cumecs
Observations:					
<p>Bryan & Adele checked traps. Still about 400 birds sitting on mostly quite thinly-built nests. Couldn't see any chicks yet.</p> <p>Trap results: 2 hedgehogs</p>					

Date: 25-11-19	Time: 9am	Weather: warm	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Adele & Paul	River level: 6 cumecs
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Observations:

Observed while Chris (driver for Rooney) channelled more water down the TR of the BB Gull colony in 3 gradual stages. Walked close to the birds to observe the impact of more water & turbulent water. The birds were fine, no sign of distress. Approx 400 adults nesting or fishing in the small braid. Took photos of the work done (before & after).

Date: 27-11-19	Time: 6pm	Weather:	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Tony	River level: 8.9 cumecs
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Observations:

Spent a couple of hours at Hermann's view this evening. The gulls are fine, new braid is ideal, long may it last. I saw 1 chick, must've been at least a week old; it was quite big. Surprising that I couldn't see others... they are very cryptic amongst greywacke.... hope they're not being predated!

Also there's 1 tern nest about 100m downstream of the colony. Possibly there was or is about to be a pied stilt nest as a pair were flying about, I'd guess they have an established territory. 1 oystercatcher... I bet there's another sitting on eggs - I just couldn't see it. Photo taken by Tony:



Date: 30-11-19	Time: 9am	Weather:	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Adele, Drew & Alistair	River level: 4.85 cumecs
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Observations:

Counted approx 400-500 Black-billed gulls, sitting on nests or fishing in the small braid. Saw 2 Black-backed gulls circling, calling, coming low and being chased off by BB gulls in the air. Alistair took photos and counted the birds later from photos, looks more like 700 birds in the colony. Counted at least 100 nests, probably another 100 we can't see as behind other birds. We took a ladder to get up higher but couldn't see any chicks. Saw 2 terns.

Trap results: 1 stoat near the colony; 1 hedgehog in older trap-line further back from the river.

Date: 5-12-19	Time: 1pm	Weather: Fine, windy	Location: Hermann's lookout	Observer/s: Chris then later Drew	River level: 17 cumecs after flood of 42 cumecs
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Observations: Colony is okay and now a real island at this level (photo taken by Drew):



Date: 7-12-19	Time: 2pm	Weather: Warm, strong nor-west wind	Location: Hermanns' view & below	Observer/s: Ken, Karen, Adele	River level: 108 cumecs after flood of 136 cumecs
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Observations:

Went to check the BB Gulls after a flood event of 90 cumecs overnight, which peaked late morning at 136 cumecs. The river was flowing swift with flood debris, and the islands were diminished in size. The gulls are still there, we counted about 500 birds sitting, with about 50 more flying. The islands were being carved away by flood-water as we watched (heart-breaking), and many gulls were still sitting in shallow water. We saw one harrier nearby, being harried by a magpie. We noticed some BB gulls were sitting on another island upstream that was higher, immediately opposite the water intake. Photo taken by Adele.

Trapping results: No access to 5 traps near the colony, but trapline further back 1 hedgehog and a mouse.



Date: 9-12-19	Time: 7pm	Weather: Cool, cloudy, light SE wind	Location: Hermann's lookout	Observer/s: Adele & Carlos	River level: 30 cumecs (after big flood event)
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Observations:

We counted about 200 gulls on one small island remaining after the floods, and flying. Estimated at that distance approx 60 birds sitting on nests. No birds on the lower 2 islands where they were sitting at last observation, so these islands must have been flooded. We weren't close enough to see any chicks. No sign of any harriers or Black-backed Gulls. Photo taken by Adele:



Date: 16-12-19	Time: 10am	Weather: Overcast & cloudy, no wind	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Hilary & Bryan	River level: ?
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Observations:

Saw 6 black-fronted terns, 3 black backed gulls, 600-700+ Black-billed gulls. We were not viewing all the birds as the main bank slopes away out of site. At least 40 birds were still sitting tight and another 15 over on the next island down-stream. Lots and lots of fluffy babies wandering about well over 40. 1 creche of about 15/16. One or 2 of the babies starting to get feathers - photo below. One photo shows 3 babies in a nest. Most seemed to have pairs. I took some photos in sequence along the colony which could be put together to get an over-all picture if you wanted. Fingers crossed no more big rain events happen although it is raining steadily now!

Photos taken by Hilary.

Trap results: Bryan checked the traps - 1 weasel, 1 hedgehog, 1 rat. Moved 2 traps closer to the colony.



Date: 19-12-19	Time: 10am	Weather: Warm, calm, overcast	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Bryan Clearwater	River level: 15 cumecs
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Observations:

300-400 Black-billed gulls with 4 Black-backed gulls in attendance. 6 Black-fronted terns. 1 harrier. Counted 50 nests, estimate 150 in total. Saw 20 chicks in a crèche on the upstream island. The chicks are near fledging. No photos taken.

Trap results: no catch. Saw a dead gull beside the willow tree observation point.

Date: 27-12-19	Time: 2pm-5pm	Weather: Sunny, nor-west wind	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Bryan Clearwater	River level: 13 cumecs
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Observations:

Saw 50 birds sitting on nests on the upstream island, and 27 sitting on downstream island.

3 Black-backed gulls present.

Counted 132 chicks, all had feathers, dappled in colour, with yellow beaks. Approx 100 chicks have formed a crèche of mixed ages on the upstream island. There are 2 creches on the downstream island; one of 15 older chicks, and one of 17 younger chicks. No photos taken.

Trap results: no catch. Saw 5 piles of feathers from dead gulls near the willow.

Date: 3-1-2020	Time: 12 noon	Weather: Overcast, mod easterly wind.	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Bryan Clearwater, Jim & Mary Powell	River level: 9.1 cumecs
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Observations:

Saw approx 300-400 Black-billed gulls. Counted 44 nests on the upstream island and 26 on downstream island. 1 nest had 4 eggs, most had 2 eggs, and 20% had just one egg. Saw 3 Black-backed gulls present.

Saw 1 young chick present (first hatch of second sitting).

Saw 40 near-fledged juveniles toward the upstream end of the island. They swam across fast water to the adjoining braid. Counted 100 near-fledged juveniles on the upstream island. Total of 140 fledged juveniles. They were tended by adults.

Photos taken. **Trap results:** B2 Hedgehog, B9 stoat, DOC 250 rat.

Date: 6-1-2020	Time: 12 noon	Weather: Overcast, mod easterly wind.	Location: BBGulls below water intake	Observer/s: Hilary Iles	River level: 9.1 cumecs
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Observations:

Lots of birds regularly taking to the air and landing again (practicing flying!).

Some birds sitting on nests and a couple of big juvenile clusters. First photo below shows the birds squashed together looking a bit of a loose end (RH side) – are these the juveniles?

A large pig grunt on the bank as I made my way in (had noticed the footprints) shouted at it and went away.

Photos taken by Hilary. **Trap results:** 2 rats, one stoat.



Date: 10-1-2020	Time: 3pm-6pm	Weather: Overcast, southerly breeze.	Location: BBGull colony below water intake	Observer/s: Bryan Clearwater	River level: 7.6 cumecs
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Observations:

Observed from 100m distance. Saw approx 400 Black-billed gulls. Counted 40 nests on the upstream island and 20 on downstream island. 1 nest had 4 eggs, most had 2 eggs, and 20% had just one egg. One Black-backed gull present.

Saw 8 chicks on upstream island & 4 on downstream island; possibly a crèche of 4 chicks on upstream island.

Saw approx 100 near-fledged juveniles on upstream island, & approx 100 on downstream island. They all appeared to fly and land again. Nearly all the birds were airborne at one stage.

Photos taken. **Trap results:**

Date: 18-1-2020	Time: 12 noon	Weather: Mild, light breeze, patchy clouds	Location: BBGull colony below water intake	Observer/s: Adele Coombs Bryan Clearwater next day.	River level: 4.47 cumecs
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Observations:

11 adult Black-billed gulls seen on upstream island, 37 on downstream island.

3 chicks mobile on upstream island, 12 on downstream island. Chicks not in crèche, but mobile & tended by adults. (Bryan counted 4 chicks on upstream island & 13 on downstream island the next day).

One black-backed gull hovering close, making unusual low-pitched call.

Signs of pigs present nearby.

I think predators are getting the young chicks, most likely Black-backed gulls or harriers, as Bryan checked the colony the next day for footprints but there were none near the colony. There was also no evidence of egg-shells, but 3 dead chicks present on the downstream island.

Photos taken by Adele with zoom. **Trap results:** 336 – hedgehog.



