

RECORD OF BLACK-FRONTED TERN COLONY on ORARI RIVER near Vance Rd NOV 2019 – JAN 2020

SUMMARY:

On the 18th Nov we found the Black-fronted Tern colony, spread out over a large section of river bed (at least a km) with about 170 birds. One chick had hatched already, indicating that first lay could have been around the 20th October.

A week later the colony had grown to approx 300 terns, with 100 nests. We put up signs and barrier tape as this section of riverbed is often used by vehicles. Our local gravel contractor Hobbs & Banks sponsored new signs.

By early December there were 250 terns with approx 100 nests and we counted 2 mobile chicks.

The 6th Dec flood inundated most of the nesting island, but 2 days later we counted 120 adult birds flying and 30 birds sitting on 2 small islands which survived the flood.

On the 15th Dec we counted 80 adult birds flying, and 50 nests with 2 chicks.

A week later we saw approx 350 adult terns in 2 groups, with at least 20 sitting on nests (most likely a second lay) as well as near-fledged juveniles were seen from the first lay.

In early Jan we counted 2 groups of approx 60-80 Black-fronted Terns, with only 2 birds seen sitting on nests, saw 8 chicks and 37 near-fledged juveniles in 3 creches approx 300m downstream of ford and in the middle island further downstream. Saw 1 fledged juvenile.

On 12th Jan we saw 50 Black-fronted Terns, 21 sitting on nests in the upstream group and a bigger group nesting downstream. Saw 6 chicks and approx 20 fledglings sitting in pairs.

On the 17th Jan there were approx 80 Black-fronted Terns in 2 groups, with 2 chicks seen, one very young, the other mobile further downstream. Water is drying up in the braids.

On the 23rd Jan there were 6 juvenile Black-fronted Terns seen in 2 groups. Only few small pools remaining.

On the 28th Jan there were approx 18 fledging juveniles seen right near the Vance Rd ford beside diminishing pools. Several days later they were all gone. One small wing was found, but no other sign of predation. However there were vehicle tracks through the area.

We estimate between 20 and 40 chicks from the first lay made it to fledging in spite of the floods. We estimate between 15 and 20 chicks fledged from the second lay.

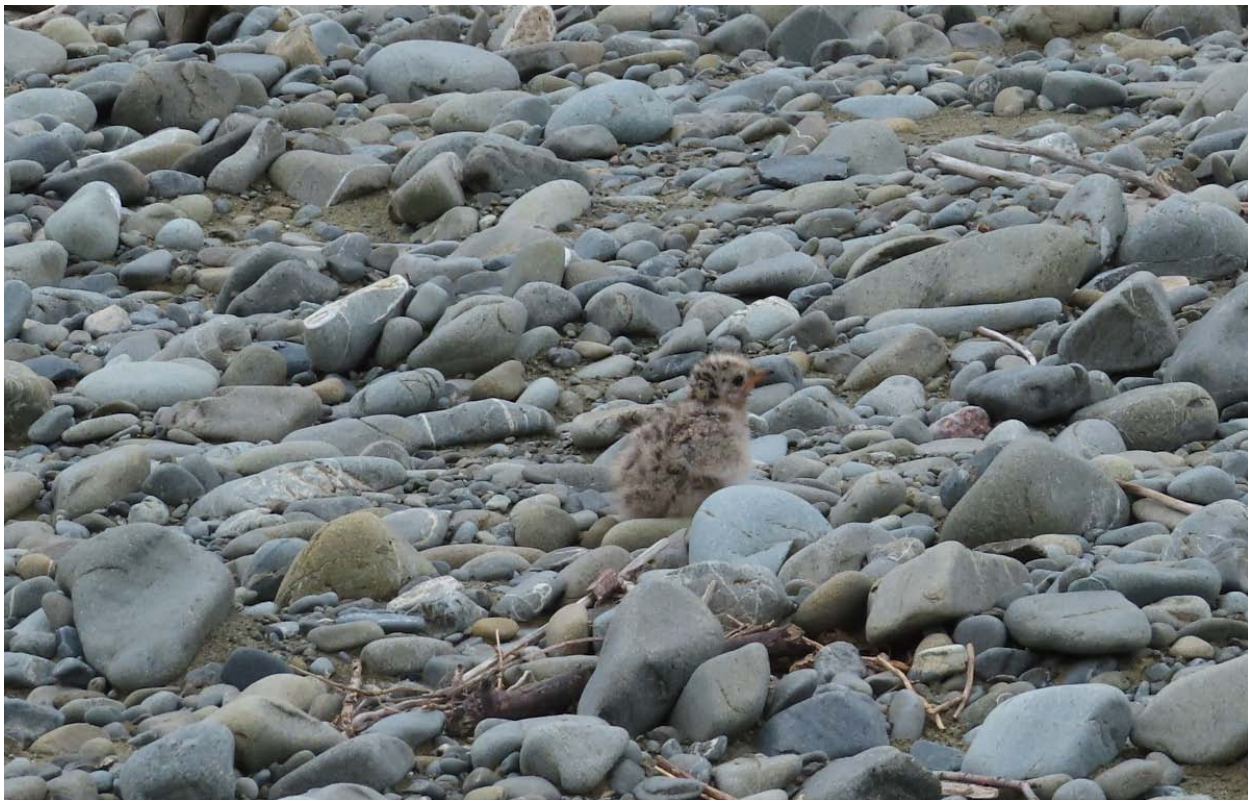
Trapping results: 9 hedgehogs, 15 stoats, 6 rats, 5 ferrets, 2 weasels & 1 kitten

12 People helped with observing & trapping.

RAW DATA/OBSERVATIONS:

Date:	Time:	Weather:	Location:	Observer/s:	River level:
18-11-19	10am	Cool, cloudy, storm blowing round	Between power Pylons & SH1 bridge	Hilary & Anya	9.6 cumecs
Observations: Hilary & Anya walked this section of the river for our bird survey and found 173 BF Terns + 1 chick in 2 colonies, spread over a large area between the pylons and SH1 bridge.					

Date:	Time:	Weather:	Location:	Observer/s:	River level:
23-11-19	10am	Light rain	Below Vance Rd	Adele & Raul, later Tony	6.5 cumecs
Observations: Raul & Adele counted approx 300 BF Terns, approx 100 nests. Saw several nests on the edge of the colony with 2 eggs. Saw 1 chick. Upstream of this, many pied Stilts were nesting (lost count) but most BF Terns are nesting below Vance Road. Tony also went to see the colony, and saw a pair of dotterels nesting about 100m below Vance Rd ford. Photos from Adele:					



Date:	Time:	Weather:	Location:	Observer/s:	River level:
25-11-19	6pm	Fine	Below Vance Rd	Adele, Bryan, Tony & Karen	5.8 cumecs
Observations: We decided to protect the colony immediately below Vance Road with traps and tape and signs, as that's where most of the birds were nesting. We put up one sign with a string & danger-tape barrier running across the river between the ford track and the nesting birds. Two nests with eggs were within a metre of the tape & track but it was the only suitable location for the barrier beside the ford crossing!					

Photos from Karen & Adele:



Date: 30-11-19	Time: 5pm	Weather: Fine, nor-west gale!	Location: Below Vance Rd	Observer/s: Karen & Callum	River level: 4.6 cumecs
Observations: Karen & Callum put out more traps nearer to Vance Rd, as most of the birds are nesting between here and "Craig's Camp". Now 10 traps along the north bank and 11 along the south bank. Saw many terns in the air and nesting (didn't count as laying out traps in severe gale). Trap results: 1 hedgehog (trap no. 3); Rat bait ½ gone (trap no. 10)					

Date: 3-12-19	Time: 8:30am	Weather: Fine, nor-west, warm	Location: Below Vance Rd	Observer/s: Adele, Paul & Jeni	River level: 6.9 cumecs
Observations: Jeni, Paul & I observed the Tern colony this morning, and we found it best to walk along the edge of the colony along the river braid on the northern side of the colony then stop for 5 mins or so, counting birds in the air, then counting birds that alight near nests (they display a characteristic hover with fluttering wings when about to settle near a nest). This gave us a clue where the nests were, and helped us to estimate how many nests there were. We watched the bird's behaviour for anything unusual, and noticed birds in the air "tracking" chicks on the ground and we found 2 chicks this way. Then we crossed the river below Craig's camp (careful that we didn't step on nests, but there weren't many terns here) and walked back to Vance Road on the other side of the river. Most of the birds are nesting between Vance Rd and Craig's camp, with just a few scattered birds nesting downstream of this area. We counted approx 250 terns, with more downstream, 52 nests (but probably double this number of nests), and 2 mobile chicks.					
Trap results: not checked					

Date: 5-12-19	Time: 5pm	Weather: Warm, windy	Location: Below Vance Rd, north bank	Observer/s: Karen & Adele	River level: 26.8cs – following height of 42cs
Observations: The river had come up to 42 cumecs overnight, so we went out for a quick check to see if the terns were still alright. Some of the nests at the edges of the colony may have been flooded, but most of the terns were still sitting. We had access to only one trap, so not sure if the others are still okay, but they probably are. Our signs are still there, but the string & tape barrier has been broken; it can be reconnected once the river level goes back down.					
Traps: not checked					

Date: 7-12-19	Time: 5pm?	Weather: Warm, windy	Location: Vance Rd ford, north bank	Observer/s: Karen	River level: -----after flood of 136 cumecs
Observations: Karen went for a quick check of the terns after significant flooding in the Orari of 136 cumecs. Most of the river was covered with water except for a small patch of gravel near Vance Rd ford. Terns were hovering above the water. 2 of our signs have been washed away (one old, one new), including the string barrier. It appeared that our traps are still okay.					
Traps: not checked					

Date: 8-12-19	Time: 9am	Weather: Fine, warm, mod NW wind	Location: Vance Rd ford, south bank; then "Craig's Camp"	Observer/s: Karen, Sarah, Callum, Ken, Reuben, Adele	River level: 67 cumecs
Observations: There are still islands below Vance Rd with vegetation on, which haven't been inundated according to Craig, who lives there. On the nearest island to Vance Rd, we counted approx 100 BF terns, with about 10 birds sitting (prob nests). We also saw several pied stilts and a pair of paradise ducks. Further downstream near Craig's Camp we saw approx 20 birds flying and about 20 terns sitting on nests on another island, which also did not go underwater.					
Trap results: 2 hedgehogs, 1 rat, one trap set off but no catch.					

Date: 15-12-19	Time: 9am	Weather: fine, light wind	Location: Vance Rd ford	Observer/s: Sarah, Tristan, Callum	River level:
Observations: Black Fronted Terns X approx 50 flying, some fishing. 30+ nests. The furthest upstream nest is almost in line with Vance Road, sitting in the v of a little ridge in the shingle. We crossed well upstream to avoid it. Saw 2 chicks, but needed to stay longer to have a really good look – my binos are not quite powerful enough. From north bank: 30+ birds flying, 20+ nests. 3 x Pied Stlt, 2 x Paradise Ducks and several white terns with pronounced black dot behind eye looking very much like White-winged Black Tern. No predators seen. Trapping results: 1 stoat, 1 hedgehog.					

Date: 22-12-19	Time: 10:15am	Weather: perfect! No wind	Location: Vance Rd ford	Observer/s: Reuben, Ken, Karen	River level: 14 cumecs
Observations: Approx 200 Black-fronted Terns, counted 20 sitting on nests. Opposite “Craig’s Camp” we saw approx 100-150 Black-fronted terns in a lower group. Counted 5 chicks, most likely many more on island. Saw 3 near-fledged juveniles between Vance Rd & Craig’s camp near the north bank. When do juvenile terns get their black heads? Also saw 2 oyster-catchers & 1 Banded Dotterel, 1 pied shag, 1 pipit, paradise ducks, and 1 Black-fronted Tern with black body. No predators seen. Photos taken Trapping results: 4 stoats, 1 rat, 1 hedgehog					

Date: 29-12-19	Time: 9:30am	Weather: Sunny, no wind	Location: Black-fronted Tern colony, downstream of Vance Rd ford	Observer/s: Jeni & Karen	River level: 9.1 cumecs
Observations: Counted 20 Black-fronted terns. Also saw Pied Stilts. No photos taken. Trapping results 26-12-19: 3 stoats, 1 hedgehog, 1 rat Trapping results 29-12-19: 2 stoats, 1 ferret, 1 weasel & 1 rat					

Date: 5-1-20	Time: 9- 10 am	Weather: Cool, overcast, no wind	Location: Vance Rd ford	Observer/s: Ken, Karen	River level: 6.6 cumecs
Observations: Counted 2 groups of approx 60-80 Black-fronted Terns, with only 2 birds seen sitting on nests. Counted 8 chicks and 7 + 22 + 8 near-fledged juveniles in groups near observation point approx 300m downstream of ford and in the middle island further downstream. Saw 1 fledged juvenile. Also saw 4 pipits, a spoonbill, 2 banded dotterels (1 adult & 1 juvenile) and 2 oyster-catchers. Photos taken. Trap results: 2 hedgehogs, 1 weasel, 1 ferret, 1 stoat, 1 rat & 1 kitten.					

Date: 12-1-20	Time: 9-10- 30am	Weather: Fine, light southerly wind	Location: Vance Rd north bank & near trap VR5	Observer/s: Ken & Reuben, Tristan & Sarah	River level: 6.6 cumecs
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Observations:

Saw 50 Black-fronted Terns, counted 21 sitting on nests in the upstream group and another group nesting near Craig's camp. Could be double this number as some were behind them. Saw 6 chicks – most likely many more chicks. Affirmed a second nesting took place after the floods, as crèche seen last week are flood survivors. Saw approx 20 fledglings sitting in pairs.

Also saw 22 pied stilts, then another group of 13 adults, 10 paradise shelducks, 1 oystercatcher & 1 banded dotterel in flight.

Photos taken.

Trapping results: 2 ferrets, 4 stoats, 1 rat, 1 hedgehog.

Date:	Time:	Weather:	Location:	Observer/s:	River level:
17-1-20	6:30pm	Sunny, 20 deg.	Vance Rd & below	Reuben, Adele, Karen	4.3 cumecs

Observations:

Counted approx 80 Black-fronted Terns in 2 groups, around 50 near Vance Rd & around 30 near Craig's Camp. 2 chicks seen, one very young (see photo below), the other mobile further downstream.

Also saw 12 stilts in a group.

The river braids are drying up with not much water flowing now, and a few pools left. The young chicks are very vulnerable now.

Photos from Adele.

Trapping results: 1 ferret





Date: 23-1-20	Time: 6pm	Weather: Mild, calm, overcast.	Location: Vance Rd ford down to 500m upstream of railway bridge	Observers: Karen & Ken	River level: 3.7 cumecs
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Tonight Ken and I saw less BFTs. River is down to 3.7 cumecs. There are still a few pools of water remaining. It was a mild calm overcast evening. Saw 5 stilts in a group.

No BFT chicks seen but protective behaviour displayed especially when a paradise duck was too close, it got a sharp shift. Much less adults flying and mostly up at the Vance Rd ford end – we counted about 13 adults. Craig commented they have diminished in the last couple of days. They appeared to be heading to the paddocks on the north bank (Belfield area) for food. Ken saw two juvenile BFTs at Vance Rd ford end, at the other end of the colony about 500m from the railway bridge we saw a small crèche of 4 fledglings.

Date: 28-1-20	Time: 9am	Weather: Light cloud, mild.	Location: Vance Rd ford	Observers: Adele	River level: 3 cumecs
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Counted approx 18 fledging juveniles right near the Vance Rd ford beside diminishing pools. Several days later they were all gone. One small wing was found, but no other sign of predation. However there were vehicle tracks through the area. Photos below show the ages of chicks last seen:





BENNETTS ROAD COLONY:

Date: 17-1-20	Time: 8:30pm	Weather: Sunny, 20 deg.	Location: Below Bennetts Rd ford	Observer/s: Adele & Karen	River level: 4.3 cumecs
Observations: Counted approx 20 Black-fronted Terns sitting on nests about 200m downstream of ford. There was no water in the river. No nests or chicks seen as we didn't want to walk through the colony with the light fading, but birds behaving protectively. Brad Edwards (DOC) has been monitoring this colony & has put up a sign.					