

Kowai (Leithfield) – November 2018

The Kowai is a small North Canterbury river with two branches. The main (southern) branch drains much of the eastern part of Ashley Forest whilst the north branch rises in the area of Mt Grey. The two branches meet just west of Leithfield and the river flows just north of Leithfield into a small estuary and then to the sea.

The south branch has a braided channel which appears potentially wide enough for birds such as the banded dotterel to nest for most of the distance from west of Balcairn – Amberley Road to the sea. The three kilometres of this distance closest to the sea was traversed on 23/11/18. This area was visited as part of a small BRaid project the aims of which were to assess the bird populations during breeding time of smaller rivers which aren't usually surveyed.

The braided bed of the river in the area traversed varies from less than 20m to more than 100m wide – with maximum width to the east of State Highway One. The river was actively flowing, mainly in just one channel. However, in the summer months it is usually dry. Few weeds were present in the river.

This section of the river is wide open to vehicle traffic – with the most commonly used access points being on both sides of the SH1 bridge. There are many 4wd tracks along the riverbed and a mountain bike track crosses the river just upstream of Leithfield.

Birds Observed

Banded dotterels – three were seen, including a quite large chick and one with behaviour indicating a nest or chick nearby. These were all east of Leithfield.

Pied Stilts – two pairs were seen, one just west of Leithfield, the other at the western edge of the estuary. The latter pair may have been nesting.

Black-fronted dotterels – three were seen, a pair just west of the estuary, and a single bird near the confluence of the north and south branches of the river. There was nothing to suggest that they were nesting in the area.

