

## **Kowai River – November 2018**

In response to a call from a farmer regarding a number of terns being seen on their property along Keens Road adjacent to the Kowai and Waimakariri Rivers, a visit was made to the area on 17/11/18. This involved 122km of driving.

Keens Road leads down to the Kowai River, where there has been gravel extraction in recent times. Now there is still active crushing and screening work going on. A large area of some 200 x 400m has been cleared and flattened by machinery. Downstream from there the river is braided and the clear riverbed is about 100m wide, increasing to about 250m wide where the Kowai joins, in a delta, with the Waimakariri. Upstream of Keens Rd the riverbed narrows down markedly with trees and other vegetation surrounding and within it. In fairly recent times there has been a major flood down the Kowai River, with drift weed and tree branches common. The width of the delta is currently significantly greater than is shown on the map below.

The Kowai River was traversed downstream from the Keens Rd access, as were the western gravel bars of the Waimakariri for about 1100m downstream of the Kowai junction. This part of the Kowai bed appeared to be good nesting habitat for braided river birds, as did the Waimakariri bars – although silt from the latest flooding shows that these had been submerged.

Eleven banded dotterel were seen along a 600m length of the Kowai. One nest (3 eggs) and one chick were also seen. It appeared likely that there were at least seven dotterel nests in this area. No other birds were seen along the Kowai.

Three wrybill momentarily landed at the junction of the Kowai and Waimakariri, and two pairs were seen in close proximity to each other in a shallow braid of the Waimakariri about 300m to the east of there. These birds were feeding, and it didn't seem likely that they had nests. Perhaps they have been washed out and are preparing to nest again.

On the Waimakariri only one (flying) black-fronted tern was seen, and seven black-billed gulls were seen flying upstream. Two more banded dotterel, one pied stilt and some Canada geese and a white-faced heron were also present. A large nesting colony of black-backed gulls (probably several hundred or more) is present on quite high and vegetated gravel bars from about a kilometre upstream of the Kowai confluence.

### **Conclusions**

- The black-fronted terns were previously only seen on the Keens Rd farm. They may have nested in the area, but if so, they have now moved on – perhaps they were flooded out.
- There is a very high density of breeding banded dotterel on the lower 600m of the Kowai River. They have found a nesting location with access to food along the Waimakariri, where they are protected from the large floods which this river is prone to. It would be interesting to inspect other such confluences.
- The black-backed gull colony is presumably known to ECan.

G. Davey, 18/11/18

