



Time	Speakers	Topic
8.45am	Nick Ledgard	Introduction, housekeeping
9.00am	Amy-Grace McIlraith & Shaun McCracken	Embracing the Braid – Evolution of Flood Protection in Canterbury
9.25am	Dr Philip Grove, Dr Jean Jack Niall Muga & Andrew Crossland	Developments in the use of ecological surveys to manage potential adverse effects of gravel extraction
9.50am	Jen Schori & Sam Turner	All the diversity that you haven't seen yet in the Upper Waitaki Basin
10.15am	Dr. Anne Schlesselmann	The braided river bird count database: the value of long-term monitoring
10.40am	All speakers	20-minute Q&A
11.00am	Morning tea	
11.35am	Greg Stanley	Waimakariri River birds
Midday	Alisa Howard	Banded Dotterels
12.25pm	Dr. Colin O'Donnell	The potential effects of photovoltaic solar farms on water birds in Aotearoa
12.50pm	Dr. Sarah Edwards & Dr. Sze-Wing Yiu	Managing feral cats on the Ashley Rakahuri River
1.15pm	All speakers	20-minute Q&A
1.35pm	Lunch	
2.35pm	Grant Morriss	Testing the welfare performance of kill traps
3.00pm	Dr. Vikki Smith	What's for dinner? Monitoring invertebrate availability in braided river ecosystems
3.25pm	Ted Howard	Lessons learned from using a thermal camera in both braided rivers and elsewhere.
3.38pm	Grant Davey & Emily Wium	The little/German owl—another braided river bird predator
3.48pm	Grant Davey	Case studies of AI by the Ashley Rakahuri Rivercare Group
3.58pm	Nick Ledgard	Developing best practice guidelines for the conservation of the black-fronted tern tarapirohe in Aotearoa New Zealand
4.10pm	All speakers	20-minute Q&A + close
4.30–5.15pm	Afternoon tea	

12.15pm: The potential effects of photovoltaic solar farms on water birds in Aotearoa

Mortality of birds associated with the construction and operation of photovoltaic solar farms (PVSFs) is a recognised problem globally with some overseas studies estimating cumulative quanta of tens or hundreds of thousands of bird deaths/yr associated with PVSFs. Collisions are associated with panels, transmission lines, fences, buildings and vehicles and include disproportionately large numbers of waterbirds. Given the dramatic increase in the size and number of planned PVSFs in Aotearoa, especially near sensitive braided river and wetland bird habitats, it is important that the potential impacts on birds are assessed and accounted for. However, we have a conundrum. There has been no monitoring of effects of PVSFs in Aotearoa to base risk assessments on and the level of inference from overseas studies achievable for situations in Aotearoa is unknown. Thus, the ability of the solar industry to assess and mitigate risks is uncertain. Compared with overseas, Aotearoa's waterbird faunas contain a high proportion of the Threatened and At-Risk species, so loss of individual breeding birds could have disproportionate negative effects on some species. The reasons why collisions occur at PVSFs are unknown, though hypotheses include birds mistaking PV panels as water or mobile birds becoming disorientated when detecting polarised light from panels. The uncertainties about potential impacts and effective mitigation techniques need resolving urgently. Until we have this knowledge, it would be prudent to apply the precautionary principle to consenting PVSFs by not building them on or next to significant braided rivers and wetlands or along waterbird movement flyways.

About the speaker:

Dr. Colin O'Donnell (Department of Conservation) is a Principal Science Advisor for DOC based in Ōtautahi. He's been working on braided river wildlife since the late 1970s, particularly on fauna surveys and habitat use studies of river birds. He maintains a number of long-term monitoring databases for braided river bird populations. Colin's research focuses on threatened species and threatened ecosystems, especially the ecology of rainforest bats and birds, developing predator control techniques for forests, wetlands, braided rivers, and alpine ecosystems, and developing monitoring methods for lizards and invertebrates.

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12.50pm: Managing feral cats on the Ashley Rakahuri River

Domestic cats (*Felis catus*) are the dominant introduced predator in Aotearoa New Zealand's ecosystems, and can decimate vulnerable populations of native species, including native birds that nest on Waitaha Canterbury's braided rivers. Feral cats have recently been included as target species under Predator Free 2050 initiatives. However, effective and socially acceptable feral cat management in peri-urban landscapes remains challenging, as companion, stray, and feral cats can all be found in these environments. Our interdisciplinary research explores the social and ecological factors that influence feral cat management in these complex environments, with a specific focus on the Ashley Rakahuri River.

Partnering with the Ashley Rakahuri Rivercare Group, we conducted a baseline study using trail cameras between November 2025 and March 2026 to monitor and understand the activities of individual cats along the river. We also conducted qualitative interviews with key informants (local government staff, conservation volunteers, and community cat carers) to understand the socio-political challenges associated with feral cat management in this area. Our findings highlight the presence of problematic cats, ecological factors influencing cat abundance and movement across braided river systems, and the social factors that influence different approaches to feral cat management. Drawing on our findings, we outline recommendations for feral cat population management through statutory and non-statutory methods, and options for targeting individual feral cats through management interventions. We also introduce a non-lethal deterrent, developed from our previous research, that could be deployed to enhance management effectiveness and social acceptability in complex peri-urban environments.

About the speakers:

Dr. Sarah Edwards (Bioeconomy Science Institute: BSI) is an environmental social scientist in the interdisciplinary field of environmental management. Her research has focused on a range of complex environmental management issues, including the risk management of GMO research, food resilience, social licence to farm, and biosecurity technologies. In recent years, Sarah has been exploring the complexities of cat management in Aotearoa New Zealand, ensuring that social science research is integrated with ecological research to influence regional conservation issues and broader national-level conversations surrounding cat management.

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Dr. Sze-Wing Yiu (Bioeconomy Science Institute: BSI) is a wildlife ecologist whose research focuses on applied science for invasive species management. Her work spans a broad range of topics, from improving monitoring methods to manipulating animal behaviour to enhance management outcomes. In recent years, her research has focused on developing non-lethal deterrents for cats, as well as understanding feral cat population density and detectability. She also has a growing interest in the human dimensions of wildlife management, recognising that many conservation challenges are fundamentally complex social ("wicked") problems.

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