

# Future challenges in the Ashley-Rakahuri river

**Mission statement: Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group**

*“to protect birds & their habitat in the Ashley River / Rakahuri, while recognising essential river control works & sympathetic recreational uses.”*

Nick Ledgard

BRaid workshop, Lincoln, May, 2016



## Ashley River / Rakahuri

A smaller, foothills-fed braided river.

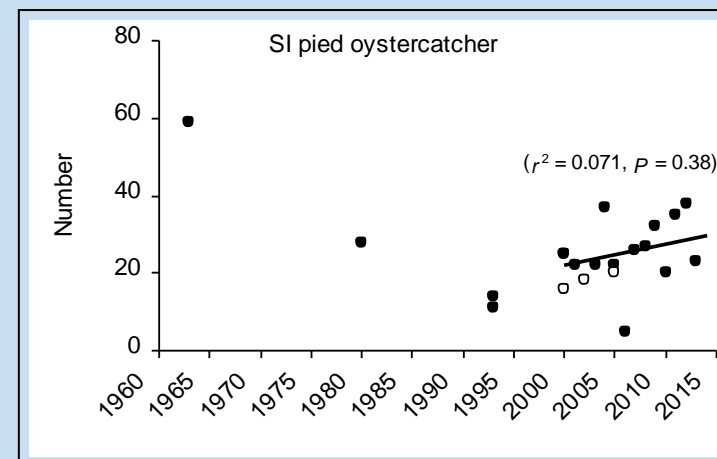
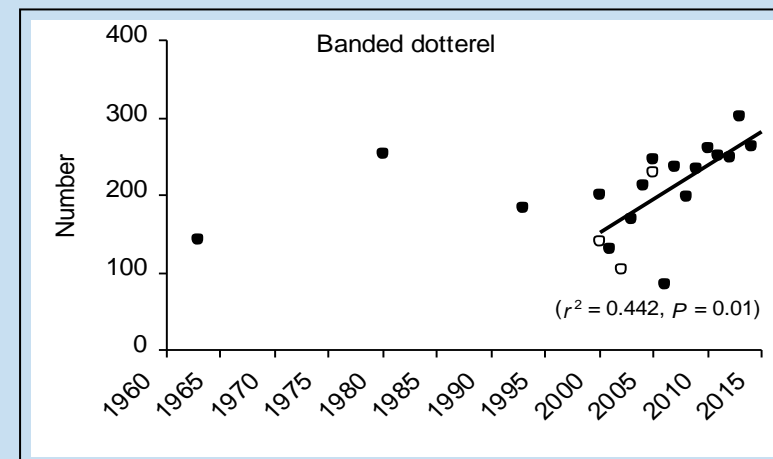
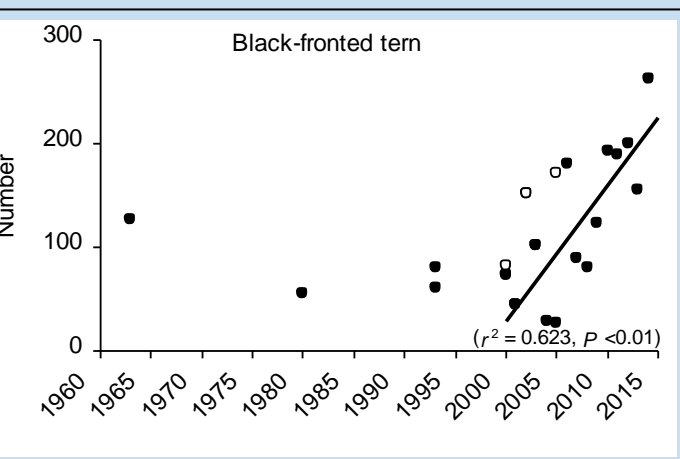
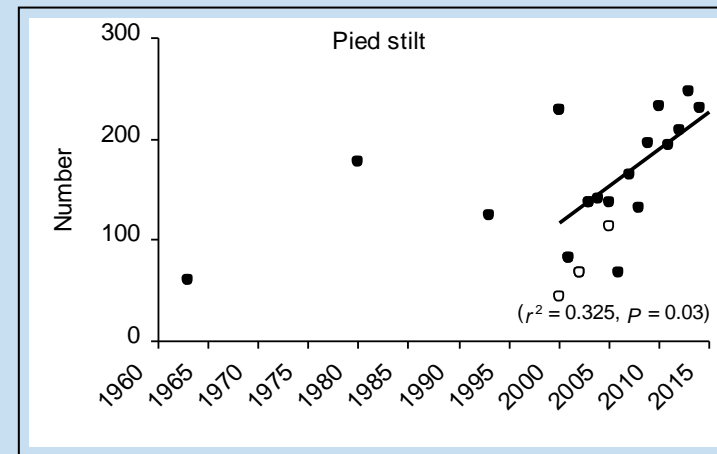
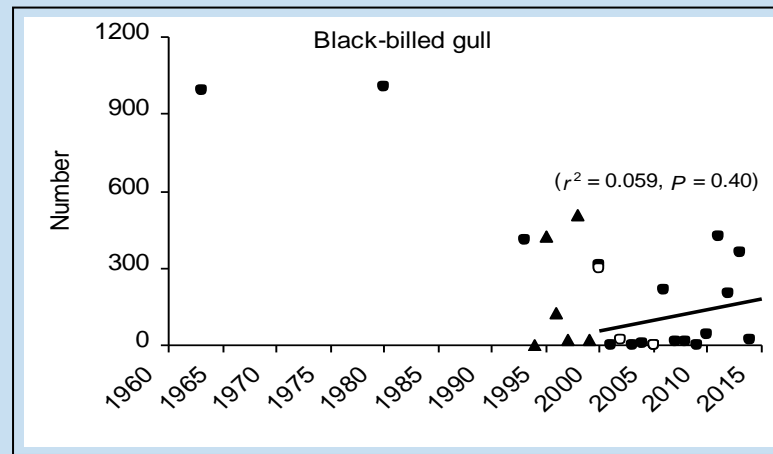
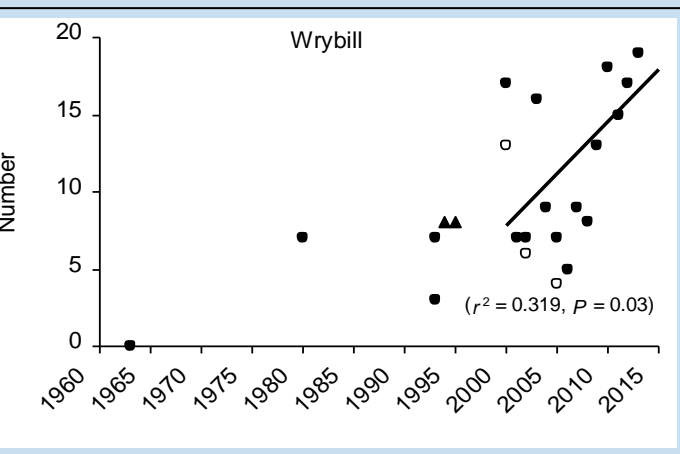
Most bird activity is in the eastern plains section (18km) running from the Okuku river junction to the coast.

The Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group was formed in 1999:

- \* Regular bird count surveys since 2004
- \* Predator trapping since 2004
- \* Monitoring of breeding since 2004

# Adult bird counts in the Ashley-Rakahuri river, 1960 – 2015

## Positive (mostly significant) increases since 2000



'... management actions have contributed to these successes ...' Spurr and Ledgard (in prep)

# Future challenges

## Weed invasion

(No major flood since May 2014)



September, 2014

The Ashley-Rakahuri river is currently as choked with weeds as it has ever been

November, 2015



# Future challenges

Habitat creation – breeding  
(Winter, 2015)



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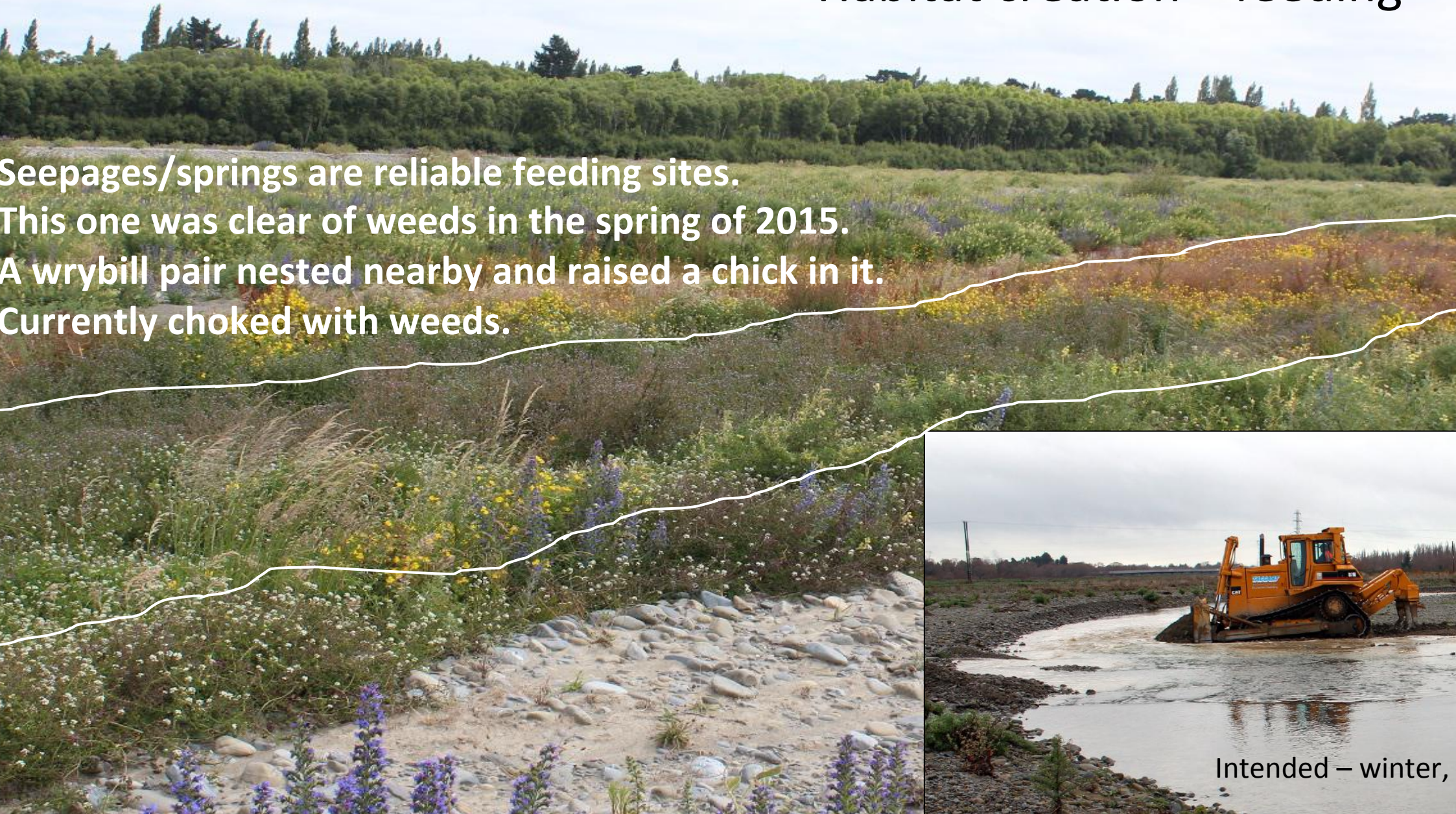
ore strategic habitat creation planned  
r 2016 – working with DOC and Ecan

After

# Future challenges

## Habitat creation – feeding

Seepages/springs are reliable feeding sites.  
This one was clear of weeds in the spring of 2015.  
A wrybill pair nested nearby and raised a chick in it.  
Currently choked with weeds.



Intended – winter,

# Future challenges

Have flows changed over the past 20 years (is the river drying up more frequently, and are we seeing fewer major floods?)

If so, why (is the cause reduced catchment rainfalls or increased water abstraction?)

How do the changed flow rates affect resident birds (is breeding success reduced?)

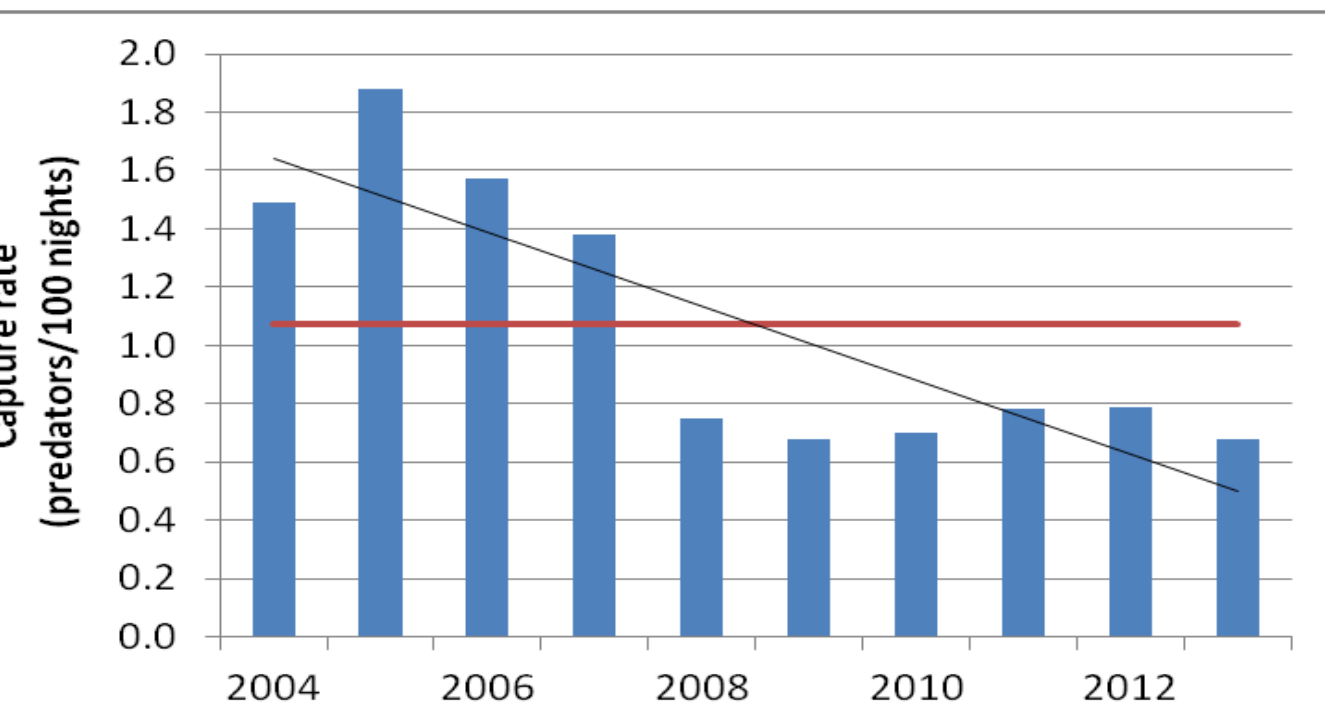
# Water flows



# Future challenges

## Predator control

predators trapped/ 100 nights (2004 - 2013)



Looks good – possibly due to very low rabbit numbers since arrival of RCD in late 1990s.

Current indications are a rising population of rabbits, and with that an increase in predator numbers (ferrets reappearing).

Include rabbit poisoning in future control plan?

# Future challenges – improving awareness



Temporary sign used at bird breeding site

# Future challenges – improving awareness

More and better permanent on-site interpretation signage

## Helping our rarest Rangiora residents – special birds of Ashley/Rakahuri R.

### Several rare endemic bird species breed on this river

This is the northernmost breeding area for wrybill/ngutu pare. Black-fronted terns/ tarapirohe and black-billed gulls are also adapted to live solely on South Island braided rivers. Other more common native birds nesting in the river are –

- banded dotterel/turiwhatu,
- South Island oystercatcher/tōrea
- pied stilt/poaka.

Marker signs are used during the breeding season, August to January, to indicate active nesting and predator-trapping areas. If you see these signs, please go no further, or move quickly through – watching where you tread and keeping dogs on a lead.

### Birds in danger

Numbers of these rare and endangered birds continue to decline steadily. In the 2002 breeding season there were fewer than six pairs of wrybill whilst the few remaining tern and gull colonies seldom contain more than twelve pairs. Frequently only a handful of these pairs manage to fledge chicks. All these birds prefer open areas for breeding.

Threats are –

- habitat loss through weed infestations
- predation by pests, mainly ferrets, stoats, hedgehogs and cats
- disturbance by humans and dogs keeping adults off their nests

### What can we do to protect the birds?

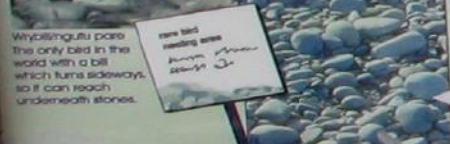
The Ashley/Rakahuri Rivercare Group has been formed. It works on –

- creating weed-free areas
  - predator trapping during breeding season
- Eventually it is hoped that selected islands can be kept permanently free of weeds and predators.

For more information contact:  
Department of Conservation - phone: 03 371 3700  
Waimakariri District Council - phone: 03 313 6136



Whylingutu pare  
The only bird in the world with a bill which turns sideways, so it can reach underneath stones.



Can you spot the two eggs in this wrybill nest? Why do you think they are so well-hidden?



watch for these signs on the riverbed

February - birds not breeding & most have moved away to over-wintering feeding areas  
March -  
April -  
May -  
June -  
July - birds return to river & look for nest sites  
August - birds lay eggs.  
September - hatch chicks & chicks  
October -  
November -  
December -  
January - fledge to independence



Ashley/Rakahuri Rivercare Group

Sign in picnic area by Ashley River



# Future challenges

## Reducing human disturbance

ARRG has an agreement with the Combined 4WD Club – no riverbed access during bird breeding season.



\$1800 spent on blocking  
ways for 2015-16 season



## Future challenge

Year 2030. A phone call to Jim from an off-shore visitor:

Visitor: “Can you show me the birds of the Ashley river?”

Jim’s reply:

ner:

no problem – see you Tuesday week”

Or:

“OK. But there are no black-fronted terns left – and the last wrybill was seen 3 years ago.”