

Tread carefully!

Find out how to reduce your impact on
nesting birdlife while enjoying our rivers.

Can you spot
the Wrybill egg?

Environment Canterbury offices

Christchurch
PO Box 345
Christchurch 8140
P: 03 365 3828
F: 03 365 3194

Timaru
75 Church Street
PO Box 550
Timaru 7940
0800 324 636

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Riverbed birds live on the ground

Many people think birds are songbirds that feed, roost and nest high up in the trees.

This only applies to about one in three of the bird species found in Canterbury; the other two-thirds are mainly coastal and wetland species who spend most of their time on the ground or on water.

The birds' feed, sleep, nest and raise young at ground level on shorelines, riverbanks and on waterways, making them highly vulnerable to disturbance and nest damage.

Our riverbed birds are unique

Riverbed wildlife has evolved to make the most of a stony, highly changeable environment, which can offer nesting sites and food aplenty, but can destroy a whole season's breeding effort in a single big flood.

There are more than 25 wetland bird species regularly found on some or all of Canterbury's braided riverbeds.

They include the endangered Black Stilt, Black-fronted Tern and Black-billed Gull; the threatened or vulnerable Wrybill, White-fronted Tern, Caspian Tern and Banded Dotterel. Most of these species nest as solitary pairs but others nest in colonies or loose clusters.

Recreational users can cause unintentional damage and disturbance

Many people enjoy Canterbury's rivers for a range of recreational activities. These people can unintentionally damage riverbed birds, particularly during the breeding season (August - February). Nests can be destroyed by vehicles, motorcycles or by people walking on nests or chicks.

A big problem is riverbed users not leaving the bird's territory quickly

Incubating birds respond to the approach of an intruder by getting off the nest and moving well away without being noticed, or they do the opposite and approach the intruder closely, calling and flustering about in an attempt to draw the intruder away.

If the intruder takes more than 10 minutes to leave the breeding territory, the parent bird's return to the nest will usually be too late and the eggs will chill and die. Because the nest and eggs are outwardly undamaged, the parent bird will continue incubating and thus waste a season's reproductive effort.

What you can do !

Almost all riverbed birds feed, roost, sleep, nest and raise chicks on the ground. There could be hundreds of nests around the spot where you're fishing and not a tree or shrub for miles! Common sense and a basic knowledge of where and when nesting birdlife might be present on a riverbed can go a long way to reducing the potentially negative impacts of fishermen, vehicles and dogs.

Look out for concentrations of birds sitting on the ground, particularly birds that become excitable and agitated when approached. This could signify the presence of a nesting colony, or a flocking or roosting site. Drive as far away from the river edge as possible, closer to the river banks. Raised areas are also more likely to be nesting areas as they are less likely to be washed out in floods. Disturbance to any of these sites can cause the parents to leave their nests unattended and their eggs to die.

Watch the behaviour of the birds. They may:

- loudly or agitatedly call at you, your dog or vehicle
- attempt to "dive-bomb" you (often by flying directly at your face, or by defecating over you); and/or
- feign injury such as pretending to have a broken wing or pretending to collapse on the ground exhausted;

It is important to leave the area because you are in the birds' breeding territory, with eggs and chicks somewhere on the ground, and the birds are trying to attract you away from their nest or chicks. Retreat quickly and carefully until the parent bird's aggressive behaviour subsides.

You should take care to prevent dogs chasing nesting or flocking birds, and also ensure that dogs are not permitted to seek out nests and chicks by "scent-tracing".

Look out for nesting areas and avoid disturbing them.

Please tread carefully!

White-fronted Tern



Banded Dotterel nest



Banded Dotterel



Black-billed Gull



Caspian Tern



Black Stilt



Wrybill



Black Fronted Tern



Wrybill nest

