

Black-Fronted Tern (Tarapirohe)

Many rivers hold only small breeding populations, however the populations have declined significantly since European settlement and are continuing to do so. They are found on or near braided channels of inland rivers and streams, often at high altitudes and on nearby farmlands. After breeding birds disperse to coastal areas roosting in sheltered harbours, estuaries and lagoons.

Identification

A medium-small blue-grey tern with a forked tail, short orange legs and bright orange pointed decurved bill. Breeding adults have pale grey body plumage, contrasting with a black cap and narrow white check stripe, non breeding adults have a mottled grey cap, a black patch around the eye and ear coverts, and a black tipped bill.

Black-fronted Terns breed in a dynamic habitat, and as a result they are threatened by a wide range of factors. Habitat loss due to hydroelectricity development, weed encroachment of braided breeding habitat and recreational use of the rivers. But the most significant impact is predation by introduced mammalian predators like rats/stoats/ferrets, feral cats and hedgehogs.

Nests are placed on shingle bands on braided rivers away from vegetation and are simple scrapes in sand or amongst river stones, lined with a few fine twigs. Laying occurs from Oct-Dec, late eggs are probably replacement clutches. 1-3 eggs are laid. Incubation is shared and lasts 25 days. Chicks leave the nest 1-3 days after hatching, often moving away from the colony. Chicks are fed on invertebrates and small fish, chicks fledge after 4 weeks and are fed by adults for at least two weeks after fledging. They first breed after two years old. Adults return to the same river to breed each year.

During the breeding season Black-fronted Terns feed on emerging nymph and subimago mayflies and stoneflies or small fish or in nearby fields or river flats on earthworms, grass grubs, larvae and skinks. After breeding most birds move to the coast where they feed in coastal waters up to 50 km from shore, taking mostly platonic crustaceans.



Emergency Hotline

Please call 0800 DOC HOT (0800 362 468) immediately if you see anyone catching, harming or killing any native wildlife)