

## **Black-billed Gull (Tarapuka)**

Although the Black-billed Gulls are still relatively abundant, numbers of birds throughout the South Island have rapidly declined. The Gull is found only in NZ unlike our two other common Gull species.

### Identification

A medium sized white gull with pale grey wings and a black white tipped black margins to the main flight feathers, white iris, red eye ring, black legs and a relatively long straight black bill. Non-breeding adults have a bi-coloured bill, reddish at the base with a black tip and a line through the middle.

Colonies are found on braided rivers through to single-channel rivers and streams with gravel beds. Occasionally birds resort to nesting on adjacent farmland after major flood events. The gulls are affected by a wide variety of threats including introduced predators such as cats, stoats, and ferrets which take eggs, chicks and adults. Weed encroachment on riverbeds has removed suitable breeding habitat on some rivers, and can force birds to nest closer to the waters edge making nests more vulnerable to flooding, some agricultural practices such as intensification of farming, and extensive use of herbicides/pesticides can also have an effect. Human impacts at breeding can also be significant with recreational driving of riverbeds/shooting and unleashed dogs.

Colonies are established in Aug-Sept and are abandoned at the end of the breeding season in Dec to Feb. Pairs mostly lay two eggs. Eggs are incubated for 20-24 days and chicks fledge at approx 26 days. During the breeding season birds feed at the river's edge or take insects on the wing over the river, sometimes flying tens of kilometres for food. They also like to feed on fish such as whitebait. During winter birds continue to use agricultural habitats but also feed in the coastal marine zone on fish and marine invertebrates.



### Weblinks

BirdLife factsheet

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/black-billed-gull/>