# PhD position: Braided river bird conservation on the Ashley Rakahuri River

**Overview**
We are seeking a student to undertake doctoral research investigating the role of predator management and environmental variables on **braided river bird conservation** in Canterbury, Aotearoa | New Zealand. The project will work with the Ashley Rakahuri Recovery Group, a community conservation organisation that undertakes bird surveys and predator control on the river. We anticipate a project that builds on the strong work of this group to **answer questions related to understanding the optimal interventions that community groups can take to increase populations of endemic braided river birds**. There is some scope for the student to develop their own research questions within this broader research focus.

The student will be be enrolled in Te Kura Pūtaiao Koiora |The School of Biological Sciences at Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha | University of Canterbury (UC) in Christchurch. Tenure is for three years, and is entirely research-focused, with no required coursework. The scholarship provides a tax-free stipend of $32,650 per year and also covers all tuition fees, for three years.

**Project Background**
Braided rivers in New Zealand are breeding sites for a range of endemic birds, some of which are declining. The Ashley River/Rakahuri is a smaller braided river which has several rare or declining species (including black fronted tern and wrybill). It is close to Christchurch, and has a community group ARRG (Ashley Rakahuri Recovery Group) which has been doing pest control and nest monitoring since 2004. However, while the trapping effort has increased, bird nest success on the Ashley has declined.

The overall aim is to determine the most successful interventions for the conservation of braided river birds in the Ashley River/Rakahuri.
Research questions that could be addressed by this PhD include:

- What are the key factors determining nest success in selected bird species (including flooding, riverbed island dynamics, weed control, exotic mammalian predators, and native bird predators)?
- How effectively can numbers of key pests be reduced (trap types, numbers and locations, use of dogs etc)?
- Is the balance of predator species changing and is that affected by pest control?
- What is the most effective method for nest monitoring?
- How important is reproduction (relative to adult survival) in bird population trends?

The exact focus of the PhD would depend on the skills and interests of the selected student who will work with our supervisory team and ARRG representatives to develop research objectives that best complement the student's interests, previous experiences, and aspirations.

**Who you are**
We are looking for a confident, independent, capable, and motivated student with a strong interest in avian conservation. We seek someone curious, enthusiastic, and eager to contribute

to innovative research. You should be able to engage productively with external parties - such as community groups - and have strong communication skills. You should have experience working independently in the field, ideally with experience monitoring birds and/or with vertebrate pest control. A good grounding in ecological statistics is highly desirable. Additional skills, such as GIS, mist-netting, nest monitoring, and/or handling of wild birds would be advantageous but are not essential.

These characteristics will be demonstrated by your previous research experience, training, interests and other activities, and underpinned by either a Masters degree or a Bachelors degree with Honours (a 4-year degree with a senior thesis may satisfy this), in ecology or a related field. The ideal candidate will have had some research experience (demonstrated by associated outputs like a publication or thesis). We particularly welcome applications from individuals from under-represented groups.

A valid New Zealand driver's license and ability to drive safely in New Zealand conditions (a mix of urban and country roads) will be required.

Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements of the University of Canterbury, and must be available to begin study by March 2026.

To apply, please provide:

1. A cover letter that outlines your motivation, interests and experience.

2. A curriculum vitae and copies of your academic transcripts (unofficial copies are fine at this stage).

3. Contact information for two referees able to comment on your academic and other achievements.

Applications should be emailed as a single pdf file with your name in the file name to Sara Kross (sara.kross@canterbury.ac.nz) with "PhD Scholarship on braided river birds" in the subject line. The position is open until filled, but we recommend submitting applications by 15 October for full consideration. Please feel free to get in touch if you have any questions.