



Black-billed Gull National Census Summary Report **2016/17**

Claudia Mischler
claudiamischler@gmail.com



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Due to the support of Fruzio, it was possible to carry out the first full national census of New Zealand's endemic black-billed gull. It was a huge task – deciding which rivers across the whole South Island contained suitable breeding habitat, finding colonies on the ground to determine what stage of breeding the birds were at to fly the rivers at the time when the majority of birds were incubating, to find a suitable weather window to fly all the rivers, and to follow up afterwards by counting nests on the ground to compare to aerial photograph counts.

With additional financial support from Environment Canterbury to cover the cost of flying the Canterbury region, as well as funds from Hawke's Bay Regional Council, WMIL, and Greater Wellington Regional Council to assist with surveying the North Island, the census was a success. Two key individuals, Richard Schofield and Heather Davies, volunteered countless hours of their time to help with flying and counting, and the census would not have been such a success without them.

Outcomes of the project were met, and are summarized and discussed in a scientific paper to be published in *Notornis*. The manuscript has been accepted, and is undergoing final edits before being released. The paper will provide an up-to-date national breeding population estimate, comparisons between population estimates from a survey done in 1995, an overview of breeding locations and colony sizes throughout the country, and comparisons in shifts of colony locations and sizes for certain regions over several years. Additionally, the public and key stakeholders were educated on the status of the black-billed gull where possible. For example, a presentation to regional council members, Department of Conservation staff, private consulting firms, and non-governmental organizations was given in Lincoln in June 2017. The presentation was well received with much interest and enthusiasm in protecting the black-billed gulls.

The overall result was a positive one for the gulls, with the national breeding number higher than expected.



Middle right: Heather Davies and the pilot studying the map for flying

Bottom left: An aerial photograph of a black-billed gull colony, Otago

(Photos courtesy of Richard Schofield)

