

Lou Gurr and Fred Kinskey published a review of known colonies of red-billed gulls in 1965, compiled from data that went in part back to 1887 and included data as recent as 1961. The Far North sites were plotted on a Google Earth map by Peter Frost. As part of a nationwide survey of red-billed gulls, Far North OSNZ members visited these Far North sites and other known breeding sites, and submitted a report excluding the Three Kings Islands to Peter Frost and Graeme Taylor, convenors of the current study, in December 2014.

Inclement weather and inaccessibility prevented reporting on the Three Kings Islands and northern locations N1-N9 until 18 December 2014. Gurr and Kinskey suggested that there were tens of thousands of red-billed gulls nesting there, so it was clearly a very important site. When the weather cleared briefly, and a fixed wing aircraft and funds to hire the aircraft became available from the Department of Conservation, Birds NZ Projects and Assistance Fund, and Far North members Les Feasey, Kevin and Lisa Mathews and Carol Davies, we raced to organize a flight. Members of DoC (Kaitaia) and Ngati Kuri Iwi were invited to participate as guests but were unable to do so, due in part to the rapidity with which the flight arrangements were made. The flight left Kaitaia about 11:15am on 18 December 2014.

The flight took us over Scott's Point, (N8) out to the Three Kings Islands (N1-N6) for a circumnavigation of the Islands, and back over North Cape (N9) then down the East Coast to Kaitaia Airport.

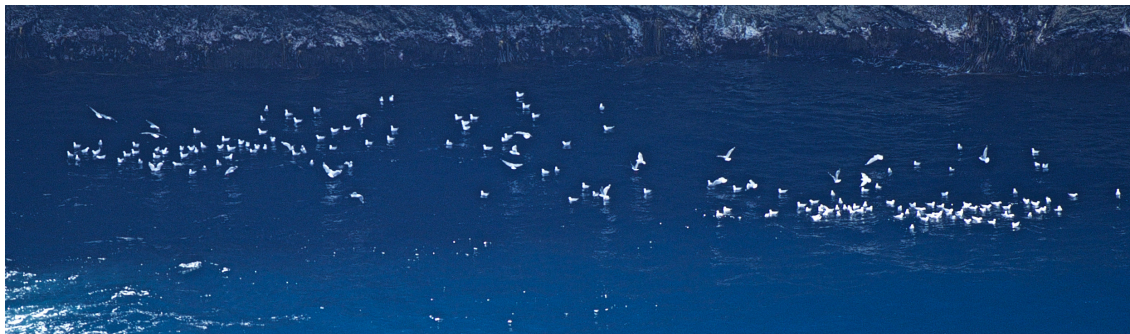


The plane used was a 7 seater Piper Navajo operated very efficiently by Great Barrier Airlines (GBA). GBA runs a regular charter service for Doctors from Whangarei to Kaitaia, and by piggybacking on that service we were able to fly and return to Kaitaia at a considerable saving.

The document Peter Frost recommended by Moore and Powlesland of DoC on the use of aerial photography was useful, but the full import of some of their suggestions relating to using GPS didn't have an immediate impact, which, in retrospect, created more work in determining locations. Camera equipment was a Nikon D4 with a 400mm f2.8, a Nikon D810 with a 200-400mm f4, and a Canon EOS

600D with a 70-300mm f4-f5.6. Over 1500 photos were taken, and these were individually examined and graded for red-billed gull presence and activity. Initial examination suggested about 1000 birds and 4-6 nesting sites. After well over 100 hours of photo examination 174 photos were deemed significant. 44 of these photos showed red-billed gulls presence and produced the following results:

- 3500 – 4200 red-billed gulls visible – more projected;
- 17 or more nesting sites of which 4 had over 100 birds, although 10 sites had fewer than 20 birds, and further photo examination may reveal others;
- 10 sites where there were more than 100 birds feeding on the water:



N1 West Island - locations under review  
N2 Great Island- locations under review  
N3 Great Island- locations under review  
N4 Great Island- locations under review  
N5 South West Island- locations under review  
N6 Princes Island - locations under review  
N7 North Cape – no RBG seen  
N8 Scott Point – no RBG seen  
Matapia – no RBG seen

Further photo examination is turning up additional nesting and roosting locations. Kevin, Carol and I expect that it will take quite a bit more work to place the major nesting locations with some reliability, and the number of red-billed gulls at Three Kings Islands with some certainty. We are continuing this work.

Les Feasey, Kevin Mathews, Carol Davies.

Moore, P. and Powlesland, R. 2012. *Birds: complete counts—airial photo counts, Version 1.0*. Inventory and monitoring toolbox: birds (DOCDM-308974). Wellington, New Zealand: Department of Conservation

<http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/science-and-technical/inventory-monitoring/im-toolbox-birds-complete-aerial-photo-counts.pdf>

