

Birds New Zealand – OSNZ
National Wader Census
June - July 2019
November - December 2019
Summary compiled by Adrian Riegen

Winter Census 2019

A total of 108,270 waders of 20 species were counted during the June-July 2019 wader census, (Table 1), down from 112,725 waders of 20 species counted in June-July 2018. There was good national coverage with all regular sites counted except Parengarenga, Houhora and Rangaunu Harbours, the Coromandel and Porangahau Estuary. Numbers of over wintering Red Knot, 1,020 was less than half the 2018 count of 2,341 but more in line with recent years. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were also down again, continuing a worrying decline and the 2019 total of 4,864 was lower than the 2018 count of 5,216, which itself was the lowest winter count of Bar-tailed Godwits on record. Turnstone numbers showed a significant increase over the past few years with 462 being counted. South Island Pied Oystercatchers were also down again with the 67,327 being the lowest total since 2013. Wrybill numbers remain fairly stable around the mid 4,000s, with 4,420 counted this winter. Variable Oystercatchers were over 4,000 for the first time with 4,196. The increases were spread around the country and in the north of New Zealand they have benefitted particularly from the work of community groups protecting the New Zealand Dotterel breeding sites, which are also favoured by Variable Oystercatcher.

Uncommon winter waders included; 1 Great Knot, 1 Hudsonian Godwit, 3 Eastern Curlew, 3 Whimbrel and 2 Greater Sand Plovers.

Summer Census 2019

A total of 133,031 waders of 30 species were counted in the November-December 2019 wader census, (Table 2). Almost 10,000 more than the November 2018 count of 123,922. National coverage was very good with all key sites surveyed and most Coromandel sites counted, which are not done on a regular basis. Red Knot numbers were disappointingly down after two good years in 2017-2018, with 26,775, which was the lowest count since 2009. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were up for the first time since 2015 with 74,456, in part due to the very large number of juvenile godwits observed at almost all sites around the country. It will be interesting to see if the high number of juveniles is reflected in the June 2020 census. The number was also helped with 1,824 counted on the Coromandel this year. Parengarenga Harbour, which used to regularly hold 2-3,000 godwits, had only 255 in 2019. Turnstone numbers were up by almost a 1,000 at 2,468 from the 1,497 in 2018. Farewell Spit had 552, a significant increase on the usual number counted there. Red-necked Stint numbers were up again to 87 from a low of 24 in 2017 and 53 in 2018 but still well down on historic numbers. This summer 224 Pacific Golden Plover were counted, compared to 220 counted in 2018, although the census does not tell the whole story, as once again the count of six on the Firth of Thames was much lower than the usual 50+ seen around the Firth all summer. They do tend to roost in paddocks on some big tides so they could have been overlooked on census day as counts are usually conducted on large spring tides. Two species that were regulars in small numbers until the 1990s, Terek Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper have all but disappears from New Zealand and only one of each were counted in November. The last time a Terek Sandpiper was seen during the census was 2013.

Uncommon summer waders included; 3 Greater Sand Plover, 3 Sanderling, 1 Hudsonian Godwit, 1 Great Knot, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler, 1 Marsh Sandpiper, 1 Curlew Sandpiper and 1 Terek Sandpiper.

NOTE: Species listed in the following tables are arranged in the order they appear in the fourth edition of The Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand.

Table 1. Total Wader Count June - July 2019

Species	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Red Knot	1,020	2,341	1,150	1,763	1,214	947
Great Knot	1	1				
Sanderling	4		2			
Curlew Sandpiper			2			
Red-necked Stint	18	10	5	8	7	64
Eastern Curlew	3	1	1			
Whimbrel	3	3	2	10	4	3
Bar-tailed Godwit	4,864	5,216	7,033	9,997	7,781	8,816
Black-tailed Godwit		1	1			
Hudsonian Godwit	1			1		

Grey-tailed Tattler	1		3	1		
Marsh Sandpiper				1	1	1
Ruddy Turnstone	462	137	322	206	159	362
Variable Oystercatcher	4,196	3,307	3,636	3,145	3,270	3,014
South Island Pied						
Oystercatcher	67,327	69,105	73,172	77,951	77,886	79,381
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	18	6	15	3	11	20
Pied Stilt	16,764	18,621	14,181	17,841	15,506	17,282
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	17	6	21	8	17	23
New Zealand Dotterel	1,176	865	777	1,041	1,083	780
Banded Dotterel	6,041	5,100	5,334	5,993	5,482	5,860
Greater Sand Plover	2					
Lesser Sand Plover				1		
Wrybill	4,420	5,325	4,718	4,675	4,112	4,108
Black-fronted Dotterel	41	93	97	128	101	162
Shore Plover				1	3	2
Spur-winged Plover	1,891	2,587	2,683	1,970	1,696	1,975
Total	108,270	112,725	113,155	124,744	118,337	122,822

Table 2. Total Wader Count November - December 2019

Species	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Red Knot	26,775	33,563	30,947	27,338	34,226	28,940
Great Knot	1					
Sanderling	3	5	4	3	7	3
Curlew Sandpiper	1	1	2	6	9	15
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	9	15	15	16	6	3
Pectoral Sandpiper	7	3	1	2	1	3
Red-necked Stint	87	53	24	134	95	79
Broad-billed Sandpiper	1					
Far Eastern Curlew	5	2	7	7	5	3
Whimbrel	65	18	28	45	13	24
Bar-tailed Godwit	74,456	65,345	71,527	72,702	74,838	74,989
Black-tailed Godwit	8		3			
Hudsonian Godwit	1	1	2			
Wandering Tattler				1		2
Grey-tailed Tattler	1	1	2	1	1	
Marsh Sandpiper	1		2	1		2
Terek Sandpiper	1					
Ruddy Turnstone	2,468	1,497	1,934	1,712	992	1,562
Variable Oystercatcher	2,659	2,679	2,275	2,493	2,306	2,278
South Island Pied						
Oystercatcher	14,319	13,578	18,978	17,291	15,484	16,625
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	22	11	10	9	10	4
Pied Stilt	8,218	4,683	5,325	3,818	5,471	4,367
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	5	44	5	2	8	3
Pacific Golden Plover	224	220	266	112	253	75
Grey Plover		1		1	2	1
New Zealand Dotterel	568	547	497	522	649	483
Banded Dotterel	711	278	664	613	521	530
Greater Sand Plover	3	1		1	2	
Wrybill	634	348	273	102	216	141
Black-fronted Dotterel	25	27	16	18	23	7
Shore Plover	69					
Spur-winged Plover	1,696	1,001	2,073	1,286	1,880	1,206
Total	133,031	123,922	134,880	128,236	137,020	131,350

Wader Count February 2020

There was a special New Zealand wide Bar-tailed Godwit count undertaken in February 2020 as part of an international effort to estimate more accurately the population of the *baueri* subspecies. Researchers in Alaska undertook an aerial survey of all godwits on the Alaskan coast prior to their trans-Pacific migration last year. Counters in Australia and New Zealand hope to get an accurate number of the *baueri* godwits whilst they are in eastern Australia and New Zealand and prior to them migrating north again. Other waders were counted at the same time and full details of these counts will be written up separately.

Adrian Riegen
April 2020