

Birds New Zealand – OSNZ  
National Wader Census  
June - July 2020  
November - December 2020  
Summary compiled by Adrian Riegen

**Winter Census 2020**

A total of 116,369 waders of 21 species were counted during the June-July 2020 wader census, (Table 1), up from 108,270 waders of 21 species counted in June-July 2019. There was lower than usual national coverage with Parengarenga, Houhora and Rangaunu Harbours in the Far North, the Coromandel and Porangahau Estuary, Aotea and Kawhia Harbours and Lake Wairarapa not counted for various reasons but predominantly bad weather the main issue.

The number of over wintering Red Knot, 1,761 was 700 higher than the 2019 count. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were well up from 4,864 in 2019 to 12,813 in 2020. The large increase was expected as unusually high numbers of juveniles had been sighted around the country in 2019 spring.

Turnstone numbers with 410 in 2020 were similar to the 462 counted in 2019.

South Island Pied Oystercatchers were up slightly from 67,327 in 2019 to 68,207 in 2020. This number would have been higher if there had been better coverage in the Far North and Waikato.

Variable Oystercatchers numbers were over 4,000 for the second time with 4,326. They continue to benefit in northern New Zealand from community groups, local councils and Department of Conservation, putting huge efforts into protecting the New Zealand Dotterel breeding sites, which are also favoured by Variable Oystercatchers.

Only 3,571 Wrybill were counted, down almost 1,000 birds on previous years. It is hoped this was due to birds moving within the Auckland region and so being missed on one or more censuses.

Uncommon winter waders included; 1 Greater Sand Plover, 1 Black-tailed Godwit, 1 Sanderling, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler and 1 Ruff, which was seen on the Firth of Thames.

**Summer Census 2020**

A total of 137,411 waders of 26 species were counted in the November-December 2020 wader census, (Table 2). Almost 4,000 more than the November 2019 count of 133,062. National coverage was good with all key sites surveyed except Parengarenga and Houhora Harbours in the Far North. Most of the Coromandel sites were counted, which doesn't happen very often. Red Knot numbers were disappointedly down again from 33,575 in 2018, 26,775 in 2019 to 25,698 in November-December 2020, which was the lowest count but the total may have been closer to the 2019 count had Parengarenga sand Houhora been counted.

Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were up again to 78,218, in part due to the very large number of juvenile godwits observed at almost all sites around the country last year. 1,550 were counted on the Coromandel in November 2020, showing the importance of those sites for godwits.

Turnstone numbers were down again from 2,468 in 2019 to 1,688 in November 2020. With the Far North not covered that will account for a drop of several hundred and shows the importance of trying to get those tricky sites covered each year. The strongholds for Turnstone are Farewell Spit with 515, Southland, 346, Kaipara Harbour, 326, Manukau Harbour, 237 and Tasman Bay 196.

Red-necked Stint numbers were steady at 76 but still well down on historical numbers. This summer only 122 Pacific Golden Plover were counted, compared to 224 in summer 2019, although the census does not tell the whole story, as once again the regular 30-50+ seen on the Firth of Thames eluded the counters on census day when on seven where counted.

Only 47 Whimbrel were counted and no other Arctic waders reached more that 17 individuals.

Uncommon summer waders included; 3 Greater Sand Plover, 1 Lesser Sand Plover, 1 Great Knot, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler, 1 Common Greenshank and 1 Marsh 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 2010.

**Table 1. Total Wader Count June - July 2020**

Species	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Red Knot	1,761	1,020	2,341	1,150	1,763	1,214	947
Great Knot		1	1				
Sanderling	1	4		2			
Curlew Sandpiper				2			

Red-necked Stint	<b>36</b>	18	10	5	8	7	64
Ruff	<b>1</b>						
Eastern Curlew		3	1	1			
Whimbrel	<b>31</b>	3	3	2	10	4	3
Bar-tailed Godwit	<b>12,813</b>	4,864	5,216	7,033	9,997	7,781	8,816
Black-tailed Godwit	<b>1</b>		1	1			
Hudsonian Godwit		1			1		
Grey-tailed Tattler	<b>1</b>	1		3	1		
Marsh Sandpiper					1	1	1
Ruddy Turnstone	<b>410</b>	462	137	322	206	159	362
Variable Oystercatcher	<b>4,238</b>	4,196	3,307	3,636	3,145	3,270	3,014
South Island Pied							
Oystercatcher	<b>68,207</b>	67,327	69,105	73,172	77,951	77,886	79,381
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	<b>23</b>	18	6	15	3	11	20
Pied Stilt	<b>17,127</b>	16,764	18,621	14,181	17,841	15,506	17,282
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	<b>17</b>	17	6	21	8	17	23
New Zealand Dotterel	<b>999</b>	1,176	865	777	1,041	1,083	780
Banded Dotterel	<b>5,369</b>	6,041	5,100	5,334	5,993	5,482	5,860
Greater Sand Plover	<b>1</b>	2					
Lesser Sand Plover					1		
Wrybill	<b>3,571</b>	4,420	5,325	4,718	4,675	4,112	4,108
Black-fronted Dotterel	<b>78</b>	41	93	97	128	101	162
Pacific Golden Plover	<b>5</b>						
Shore Plover					1	3	2
Spur-winged Plover	<b>1,589</b>	1,891	2,587	2,683	1,970	1,696	1,975
<b>Total</b>	<b>116,369</b>	108,270	112,725	113,155	124,744	118,337	122,822

**Table 2. Total Wader Count November - December 2020**

Species	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Red Knot	<b>25,698</b>	26,775	33,563	30,947	27,338	34,226	28,940
Great Knot	<b>1</b>	1					
Sanderling		3	5	4	3	7	3
Curlew Sandpiper	<b>4</b>	1	1	2	6	9	15
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	<b>17</b>	9	15	15	16	6	3
Pectoral Sandpiper	<b>1</b>	7	3	1	2	1	3
Red-necked Stint	<b>76</b>	87	53	24	134	95	79
Broad-billed Sandpiper		1					
Eastern Curlew	<b>5</b>	5	2	7	7	5	3
Whimbrel	<b>47</b>	65	18	28	45	13	24
Bar-tailed Godwit	<b>78,218</b>	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	<b>1</b>	1	1	2	1	1	
Common Greenshank	<b>1</b>						
Marsh Sandpiper	<b>1</b>	1		2	1		2
Terek Sandpiper		1					
Ruddy Turnstone	<b>1,688</b>	2,468	1,497	1,934	1,712	992	1,562
Variable Oystercatcher	<b>2,866</b>	2,659	2,679	2,275	2,493	2,306	2,278
South Island Pied							
Oystercatcher	<b>18,708</b>	14,319	13,578	18,978	17,291	15,484	16,625
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	<b>13</b>	22	11	10	9	10	4
Pied Stilt	<b>6,519</b>	8,218	4,683	5,325	3,818	5,471	4,367
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	<b>6</b>	5	44	5	2	8	3
Pacific Golden Plover	<b>122</b>	224	220	266	112	253	75
Grey Plover			1		1	2	1
New Zealand Dotterel	<b>600</b>	568	547	497	522	649	483
Banded Dotterel	<b>597</b>	711	278	664	613	521	530

Greater Sand Plover	3	3	1		1	2	
Lesser Sand Plover	1						
Wrybill	62	634	348	273	102	216	141
Black-fronted Dotterel	43	25	27	16	18	23	7
Shore Plover		69					
Spur-winged Plover	2,113	1,696	1,001	2,073	1,286	1,880	1,206
<b>Total</b>	<b>137,411</b>	133,031	123,922	134,880	128,236	137,020	131,350

### Wader Count February 2021

A total of 85,146 waders were counted in the Waikato harbours, Nelson region, Canterbury, West Coast and Southland in January-February 2021. Comparative number between November-December 2020 and January-February 2021 are shown in Table 3.

Full analysis of the wader counts 2005-2019 can be found in Wader Studies in New Zealand, *Notornis* Vol 67 Part 4, December 2020.

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May 2021

(See table 3 next page)

**Table 3. Total Wader Count November - December 2020 and January-February 2021 for regions that conducted two counts**

	Aotea Harbour	Aotea Harbour	Kawhia Harbour	Kawhia Harbour	Raglan Harbour	Raglan Harbour	Tasman Bay	Tasman Bay	Golden Bay	Golden Bay	Farewell Spit	Farewell Spit	Kaikoura/Marlborough	Kaikoura/Marlborough	Canterbury Region	Canterbury Region	Avon-Heathcote Est	Avon-Heathcote Est	Lake Ellesmere	Lake Ellesmere	West Coast	West Coast	Southland	Southland
	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb	Nov	Feb
<b>Site &amp; Overall Total &gt;&gt;</b>	26	2401	2468	6818	537	1979	7142	12760	3544	9557	19079	27652	55	94	2164	3854	2277	3547	3106	8945	159	561	4959	6978
Red Knot							855	925	41	3	7682	10331	1		5		1		14	36			30	260
Great Knot													1											
Sanderling												2												1
Curlew Sandpiper																			1				3	
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper															6				1	2			2	3
Pectoral Sandpiper																				1				1
Red-necked Stint												5							48	42			20	35
Eastern Curlew																							1	2
Whimbrel				3				1																
Bar-tailed Godwit	6	1190	1650	1001	375	632	4529	4674	1820	1725	9567	10766		13	529	899	1302	891	381	494	94	64	3611	4088
Grey-tailed Tattler																			1					1
Common Greenshank																			1					
Marsh Sandpiper																				1				
Terek Sandpiper																								1
Turnstone							196	170			515	433			12	11			27	2			346	149
Variable Oystercatcher		4	35	72	17	53	249	272	169	275	114	139	2	2	114	180	64	106	17	6	27	113	63	132

South Island Pied Oystercatcher	16	1185	670	4470	107	1082	1214	6287	1509	7284	1172	5319	14	55	200	1574	809	2462	98	85	12	321	678	1977
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)															13	26								
Pied Stilt		12	98	965	22	210	56	336		67			22	16	917	755	53		1933	5408	24	51	113	232
(Black Stilt/Hybrid)			1												4	1			1	5				
Pacific Golden Plover											16	39									41		33	3
New Zealand Dotterel		1	5	21	5	2																1		4
Banded Dotterel		9		283	1		9	76	3	201	13	614	10	5	124	142			294	2523		11	7	70
Greater Sand Plover												2											1	
Wrybill				3								2			8				31	131			1	1
Black-fronted Dotterel															16	11								
Spur-winged Plover	4		9		10		34	19	2	2			5	3	216	255	48	88	258	168	2		50	18