

Birds New Zealand – OSNZ
National Wader Census
June - July 2021
November - December 2021
Summary compiled by Adrian Riegen

Winter Census 2021

A total of 104,073 waders of 21 species were counted during the June-July 2021 wader census, (Table 1), down from 116,369 waders of 21 species counted in June-July 2020. The only major areas not counted were Parengarenga, Houhora and Rangaunu Harbours in the Far North and Ohiwa Harbour in the Bay of Plenty. But the Coromandel was covered this time.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher numbers continue to decline with only 56,323 counted but Variable Oystercatcher numbers continue to increase, up 201 from 2020 to 4,439. The Variable Oystercatcher count is not a true reflection of the total population as many stay on the breeding ground during winter and are not counted. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were 9,869 down from 12,813 in 2020 but this may be partly a reflection on the fact 2019 had a high number of juveniles, many of which may have attempted a first northward migration in 2021, even though they were not full adults by then.

The Banded Dotterel count of 4,797 was the lowest since 2013 and New Zealand Dotterel numbers were higher than 2020 but slightly lower than 2019. However their numbers are generally on the increase thanks to management at so many breeding sites. Only the Southern New Zealand Dotterels that move to the South Island in the winter were counted and the 44 counted in 2021 was up two from the 2020 count.

Red Knot numbers were similar to 2020 but Ruddy Turnstone numbers were almost halved with just 210 counted.

Uncommon winter waders included; 2 Greater Sand Plover, 1 Hudsonian Godwit, 1 Sanderling, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 1 Whimbrel, 1 Eastern Curlew and 1 Terek Sandpiper.

Summer Census 2021

A total of 122,016 waders of 24 species were counted during the November-December 2021 wader census, (Table 2). This was the lowest count since full coverage was reinstated in 2006 and can be mostly explained by poorer coverage than usual in certain areas, brought about by a range of reasons, including lack of personnel, Covid restrictions, weather and lack of boats. Important areas not covered included the Far North, North Kaipara and the Waikato Harbours. These areas would normally hold at least 13,000 waders between them, which would put the number more in line with the usual totals. Some smaller areas particularly along Auckland's east coast are much better covered and although numbers at each site may not be particularly high, these counts do at least show the importance of small sites for a range of wader species, particularly Bar-tailed Godwit, Pied and Variable Oystercatchers and New Zealand Dotterel.

One region not often covered is the Coromandel, which is particularly good for the aforementioned species and it would be good to see these sites counted more frequently.

Drawing comparisons between the summer 2021 count with the 2020 count is not helpful bearing in mind the reduced site coverage in 2021.

Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were down to 65,859 and even adding an estimated 4-5,000 missing from key uncounted sites this would still be the lowest count since 2006.

The Red Knot count of 27,060 is up from 25,698 in 2020. The only Red Knot sites not counted in 2021 were the three Far North harbours so Red Knot numbers may have stabilized a little. Strongholds for Red Knots continue to be Farewell Spit 8,751, Manukau Harbour 7,834, Kaipara Harbour 5,862, Firth of Thames 2,850 and Tasman Bay 932, which together account for 97% of all Red Knots counted.

Turnstone numbers were down again from 1,688 in 2020 to 1,309 in 2021. The strongholds for Turnstone were Kaipara Harbour 324, Manukau Harbour 305, Tasman Bay 240, Southland 194 and Farewell Spit with 158.

Red-necked Stint numbers were down to 53 and still well down on historical numbers. This summer slightly more Pacific Golden Plover were counted with 156, compared to 122 in summer 2020.

Only 27 Whimbrel were counted, down from 47 in 2020 and the only other Arctic wader to reach double figures was Red-necked Stint with 18 individuals counted.

Uncommon summer waders included; 5 Greater Sand Plover, 4 Eastern Curlew, 3 Sanderling, 2 Curlew Sandpiper, 12 Terek Sandpiper, 1 Pectoral Sandpiper and 1 Grey-tailed Tattler.

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	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
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Red Knot	1,938	1,761	1,020	2,341	1,150	1,763	1,214
Great Knot			1	1			
Sanderling	1	1	4		2		
Curlew Sandpiper	1				2		
Red-necked Stint	4	36	18	10	5	8	7
Ruff		1					
Eastern Curlew	1		3	1	1		
Whimbrel	1	31	3	3	2	10	4
Bar-tailed Godwit	9,859	12,813	4,864	5,216	7,033	9,997	7,781
Black-tailed Godwit		1		1	1		
Hudsonian Godwit	1		1			1	
Grey-tailed Tattler		1	1		3	1	
Marsh Sandpiper						1	1
Terek Sandpiper	1						
Ruddy Turnstone	210	410	462	137	322	206	159
Variable Oystercatcher	4,439	4,238	4,196	3,307	3,636	3,145	3,270
South Island Pied							
Oystercatcher	56,323	68,207	67,327	69,105	73,172	77,951	77,886
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	30	23	18	6	15	3	11
Pied Stilt	18,008	17,127	16,764	18,621	14,181	17,841	15,506
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	12	17	17	6	21	8	17
New Zealand Dotterel	1,151	999	1,176	865	777	1,041	1,083
Banded Dotterel	4,797	5,369	6,041	5,100	5,334	5,993	5,482
Greater Sand Plover	2	1	2				
Lesser Sand Plover						1	
Wrybill	4,100	3,571	4,420	5,325	4,718	4,675	4,112
Black-fronted Dotterel	240	78	41	93	97	128	101
Pacific Golden Plover		5					
Shore Plover						1	3
Spur-winged Plover	2,954	1,589	1,891	2,587	2,683	1,970	1,696
Total	104,073	116,369	108,270	112,725	113,155	124,744	118,337

Table 2. Total Wader Count November - December 2021

Species	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Red Knot	27,060	25,698	26,775	33,563	30,947	27,338	34,226
Great Knot		1	1				
Sanderling	3		3	5	4	3	7
Curlew Sandpiper	2	4	1	1	2	6	9
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	18	17	9	15	15	16	6
Pectoral Sandpiper	1	1	7	3	1	2	1
Red-necked Stint	53	76	87	53	24	134	95
Broad-billed Sandpiper			1				
Eastern Curlew	4	5	5	2	7	7	5
Whimbrel	27	47	65	18	28	45	13
Bar-tailed Godwit	65,859	78,218	74,456	65,345	71,527	72,702	74,838
Black-tailed Godwit			8		3		
Hudsonian Godwit			1	1	2		
Wandering Tattler						1	
Grey-tailed Tattler	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
Common Greenshank		1					
Marsh Sandpiper		1	1		2	1	
Terek Sandpiper	2		1				
Ruddy Turnstone	1,309	1,688	2,468	1,497	1,934	1,712	992
Variable Oystercatcher	2,438	2,866	2,659	2,679	2,275	2,493	2,306
South Island Pied							
Oystercatcher	15,981	18,708	14,319	13,578	18,978	17,291	15,484
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	23	13	22	11	10	9	10
Pied Stilt	5,999	6,519	8,218	4,683	5,325	3,818	5,471
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	5	6	5	44	5	2	8
Pacific Golden Plover	156	122	224	220	266	112	253
Grey Plover				1		1	2
New Zealand Dotterel	362	600	568	547	497	522	649

Banded Dotterel	546	597	711	278	664	613	521
Greater Sand Plover	5	3	3	1		1	2
Lesser Sand Plover		1					
Wrybill	200	62	634	348	273	102	216
Black-fronted Dotterel	25	43	25	27	16	18	23
Shore Plover			69				
Spur-winged Plover	1,937	2,113	1,696	1,001	2,073	1,286	1,880
Total	122,016	137,411	133,031	123,922	134,880	128,236	137,020

Wader Count February 2022

A total of 26,515 waders were counted in Northland, Waikato harbours, West Coast and Southland in February 2022. This year the Nelson and Canterbury regions were not counted as usual so comparisons between February 2021 and February 2022 and not particularly meaningful. These data will however, still be important in long-term data analysis.

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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