

# Beach Patrol Scheme - 2022 Report

## 1. *A Modern New Look for the Beach Patrol Scheme*

Records of dead seabirds found on our coastlines have considerable scientific value. A unique long-term record of observations that commenced in earnest in 1951 has helped to establish the identity and to some extent the distribution and numbers of more than 115 seabird species in New Zealand coastal seas.

A new user-friendly design and a modern new look for the Beach Patrol Scheme was introduced on the Birds New Zealand website on 25 October 2022. A digital procedure now enables observers to submit records through the Birds New Zealand website from their own computer at home, or from a mobile phone. A revised “Beach Patrol Observation Form” replaces the cards and sheets that have been used for many years (70 years in the case of cards). It can be downloaded from the Society’s website and sets out the information and the procedure for submitting observations. The old card and sheet field forms are no longer used. The benefits of this improved approach are two-fold; information can be submitted by observers to the database immediately following each Beach Patrol, in contrast to much delayed submission when the old scanned card-sheet system was used, and the new digital process is much less expensive.

Information about species, numbers, stage of bird maturity, freshness and distances walked (effort) continue to be recorded but in order to increase the scientific value of observations most questions must be answered; these are termed “required fields”. In addition to noting evidence of oil polluted birds, records can also be made of birds caught on fishing lines and have been shot.

Observers can upload photographs of dead birds - helpful for confirming or for requesting identification from experts. The names of birds in the Beach Patrol database are based on the taxonomic nomenclature in the 5<sup>th</sup> Checklist of New Zealand Birds, issued in 2022.

The effective but slow and costly process used between 2015 to 2020 to construct the database by scanning Beach Patrol cards/sheets and manual double-entry of records has been discontinued. This approach served an essential purpose between 2015 and 2019 for the digitisation of card records that spanned over 65 years of effort by members but is now superseded by the more efficient – and much cheaper – direct entry of records by patrollers using home-based computers, or mobile phones. Using the new procedure nearly 300 new records were submitted by members up to 31 December 2022.

Integration of the 1951 to 2019 Beach Patrol records into the new database continues and will, from 2023, enable comprehensive analyses of data over a 70+ year period to be made.

The objectives of the Beach Patrol Scheme were amended during 2022 and an amended Role Description for the Beach Patrol Convenor was approved by Council.

A part of the Beach Patrol database proved to be an interesting dataset for study purposes during 2022 by postgraduate students studying for the Master of User Experience Design degree in the School of Design at Victoria University of Wellington. A report was published in the Birds New Zealand magazine.

The Society expresses its gratitude to Lloyd Esler who provided consistently effective support as Beach Patrol Scheme Convenor between 2007 and 2021; thank you Lloyd for a job well done.

## 2. **Notes on Beach Patrol Observations for 2022 contributed by Lloyd Esler**

Beach Patrol records in 2022 show a slight increase in bird recoveries and total distance patrolled. The dedication of Patrick Miller for his efforts in patrolling Northland beaches is acknowledged.

Four dead birds were found tangled in fishing lines – a southern black-backed gull, Australian gannet, little penguin and a light-mantled sooty albatross.

Unusual species reported were a rosella, a cattle egret, a brown booby and white-naped petrel. A Matsudaira's Storm petrel (Muriwai, 27/5/22) was a first-time Beach Patrol record.

There were two notable beach wrecks in 2022. In April and May many dead little penguins were found on Northland beaches and in July and August unusually high numbers of fluttering shearwaters were found dead on Wellington beaches.

The continued success of the Beach Patrol Scheme is due to the dedication of those hardy souls who brave all manner of weather conditions to trudge the weary miles in search of decaying corpses.

Ian Armitage

Beach Patrol Scheme Convenor