

Birds New Zealand – OSNZ
National Wader Census
June - July 2022
November - December 2022
Summary compiled by Adrian Riegen

Winter Census 2022

A total of 99,553 waders of 20 species were counted during the June-July 2022 wader census, (Table 1), down from 104,073 waders of 21 species counted in June-July 2021. The lower number can be accounted for by some major areas not being counted, including Parengarenga, Houhora and Rangaunu Harbours in the Far North and the North Kaipara Harbour, Tauranga Harbour, Maketu in the Bay of Plenty and Raglan, Aotea and Kawhia Harbours in the Waikato. The main reasons for these not being counted, was lack of people, persistent bad weather and lack of boats. Therefore, making direct comparisons with previous years is problematic. It is hoped that favorable weather, an abundance of people and boats in 2023 will lead to better results.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher numbers have been declining steadily over recent years but the winter 2022 count of 56,074 was close to the 2021 count of 56,323 in spite of key sites not being counted. Variable Oystercatcher numbers were lower in 2022 with 3,792 counted compared to the 4,439 counted in 2021. However, this is probably accounted for by the lack of counts from the Bay of Plenty in 2022. That region counted 711 in 2021. The Variable Oystercatcher count is not a true reflection of the total population as many stay on the breeding grounds during winter and are not counted. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were up slightly at 10,231 compared to 9,859 in 2021. The number could have been about 1,000 higher if the Waikato and Bay of Plenty sites had been counted.

The Banded Dotterel count of 4,926 was close to the 2021 count of 4,797, which was the lowest since 2013. Only the Southern New Zealand Dotterels that move to the South Island in the winter were counted and the 45 counted in 2022 was one up from the 2021 count.

Red Knot numbers were the lowest recorded in winter at just 632, even though all Red Knot sites except the Far North (last counted June 2017) were counted. The Ruddy Turnstone count of 106 was the lowest since 2007 when 66 were counted.

Uncommon winter waders included, 2 Lesser Sand Plover and one each of Sanderling, Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew, Hudsonian Godwit and Terek Sandpiper.

Summer Census 2022

A total of 128,274 waders of 26 species were counted during the November-December 2022 wader census, (Table 2), compared to 122,016 counted in 2021. This was the second lowest count since full coverage was reinstated in 2006 even though national coverage was good with only the key Far North sites not counted. Coverage of some smaller areas particularly along Auckland's east coast are increasingly well 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.

The Coromandel, which is particularly good for the aforementioned species is still infrequently counted and it would be valuable if these sites were regularly counted.

Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were significantly higher in 2022 at 81,769 compared to 65,859 in 2021 and this is the highest count since 2013. Perhaps boosted by a higher number of juveniles this year.

The 632 Red Knot counted in the winter is reflected in the summer count of 21,657 and is the lowest summer count. As the key Red Knot sites have been counted every year since 1983 and some since 1960, this is a worrying trend. The only Red Knot sites not counted in 2022 were the three Far North harbours, which have not been fully counted since 2019. Strongholds for Red Knots continue to be Farewell Spit 8,105 (8,751 in 2021), Kaipara Harbour 5,935 (5,862), Manukau Harbour 3,950 (7,834), Firth of Thames 2,099 (2,850) and Tasman Bay 715 (932), which together account for 96% of all Red Knots counted.

Ruddy Turnstone numbers were up at 1,403 compared to 1,309 in 2021. The strongholds for Ruddy Turnstone were Farewell Spit with 415, Kaipara Harbour 293, Manukau Harbour 277, Tasman Bay 205 and Southland 115.

Red-necked Stint numbers were down to 42 and still well down on historical numbers. This summer slightly more Pacific Golden Plover were counted with 162, compared to 156 in summer 2021.

Only 13 Whimbrel were counted, down from 27 in 2021 and 47 in 2020. The only other Arctic wader to reach double figures was Sharp-tailed Sandpiper with 10 individuals counted.

Uncommon summer waders included; 4 Eastern Curlew, 2 Greater Sand Plover and one each of the following, Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Hudsonian Godwit and Grey-tailed Tattler.

NOTE: Species listed in the following tables follow the order they appear in the fifth edition of The Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand 2022.

Table 1. Total Wader Count June - July 2022

Species	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Variable Oystercatcher	3,792	4,439	4,238	4,196	3,307	3,636	3,145
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	56,074	56,323	68,207	67,327	69,105	73,172	77,951
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	16	30	23	18	6	15	3
Pied Stilt	15,707	18,008	17,127	16,764	18,621	14,181	17,841
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	7	12	17	17	6	21	8
Pacific Golden Plover			5				
New Zealand Dotterel	861	1,151	999	1,176	865	777	1,041
Banded Dotterel	4,926	4,797	5,369	6,041	5,100	5,334	5,993
Lesser Sand Plover	2						1
Greater Sand Plover		2	1	2			
Wrybill	5,147	4,100	3,571	4,420	5,325	4,718	4,675
Black-fronted Dotterel	66	240	78	41	93	97	128
Shore Plover							1
Spur-winged Plover	1,980	2,954	1,589	1,891	2,587	2,683	1,970
Eastern Curlew	1	1		3	1	1	
Whimbrel	1	1	31	3	3	2	10
Bar-tailed Godwit	10,231	9,859	12,813	4,864	5,216	7,033	9,997
Black-tailed Godwit			1		1	1	
Hudsonian Godwit	1	1		1			1
Ruddy Turnstone	106	210	410	462	137	322	206
Great Knot				1	1		
Red Knot	632	1,938	1,761	1,020	2,341	1,150	1,763
Ruff			1				
Curlew Sandpiper		1				2	
Red-necked Stint	1	4	36	18	10	5	8
Sanderling	1	1	1	4		2	
Terek Sandpiper	1	1					
Grey-tailed Tattler			1	1		3	1
Marsh Sandpiper							1
Total	99,553	104,073	116,369	108,270	112,725	113,155	124,744

Table 2. Total Wader Count November - December 2022

Species	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Variable Oystercatcher	2,620	2,438	2,866	2,659	2,679	2,275	2,493
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	12,901	15,981	18,708	14,319	13,578	18,978	17,291
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	23	23	13	22	11	10	9
Pied Stilt	4,838	5,999	6,519	8,218	4,683	5,325	3,818
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	5	5	6	5	44	5	2
Pacific Golden Plover	175	156	122	224	220	266	112
Grey Plover					1		1
New Zealand Dotterel	518	362	600	568	547	497	522
Banded Dotterel	418	546	597	711	278	664	613
Lesser Sand Plover			1				
Greater Sand Plover	2	5	3	3	1		1
Wrybill	79	200	62	634	348	273	102
Black-fronted Dotterel	30	25	43	25	27	16	18
Shore Plover	1			69			
Spur-winged Plover	1,590	1,937	2,113	1,696	1,001	2,073	1,286
Eastern Curlew	4	4	5	5	2	7	7
Whimbrel	13	27	47	65	18	28	45
Bar-tailed Godwit	81,937	65,859	78,218	74,456	65,345	71,527	72,702
Black-tailed Godwit	1			8		3	
Hudsonian Godwit	1			1	1	2	
Ruddy Turnstone	1,404	1,309	1,688	2,468	1,497	1,934	1,712

Great Knot			1	1			
Red Knot	21,658	27,060	25,698	26,775	33,563	30,947	27,338
Broad-billed Sandpiper				1			
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	10	18	17	9	15	15	16
Curlew Sandpiper	1	2	4	1	1	2	6
Red-necked Stint	42	53	76	87	53	24	134
Sanderling	1	3		3	5	4	3
Pectoral Sandpiper	1	1	1	7	3	1	2
Terek Sandpiper		2		1			
Grey-tailed Tattler	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Wandering Tattler							1
Common Greenshank			1				
Marsh Sandpiper			1	1		2	1
Total	128,937	122,016	137,411	133,031	123,922	134,880	128,236

Wader Count February 2023

A total of 73,392 waders were counted in Northland, Gisborne/Wairoa, and Waikato harbours, Nelson, West Coast and Southland in February 2023. Comparisons are made between the November 2022 and February 2023 counts for Nelson and Southland in Tables 3 & 4.

Table 3. Nelson Region count Nov 2022 and Feb 2023

Species	Feb.23	Nov 22
Variable Oystercatcher	728	627
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	22,742	3,234
Pied Stilt	447	60
Pacific Golden Plover	52	26
Banded Dotterel	832	28
Lesser Sand Plover	4	
Greater Sand Plover	1	1
Spur-winged Plover	12	23
Whimbrel	5	1
Bar-tailed Godwit	16,569	17,207
Ruddy Turnstone	705	624
Red Knot	8,575	8,850
TOTAL	51,785	30,681

Table 4. Southland count Nov 2022 and Feb 2023

Species	Feb.23	Nov 22
Variable Oystercatcher	166	14
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	3,413	717
Pied Stilt	686	78
Black Stilt/Hybrid	1	
Pacific Golden Plover	2	
New Zealand Dotterel	2	
Banded Dotterel	563	7
Greater Sand Plover		1
Wrybill	1	1
Spur-winged Plover	51	23
Eastern Curlew	1	1
Whimbrel	1	1
Little Whimbrel	1	
Bar-tailed Godwit	4,042	4,407
Ruddy Turnstone	136	115
Red Knot	46	43
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	6	2
Red-necked Stint		5
Grey-tailed Tattler		1
TOTAL	9,118	5,416

