

Black-billed gull: National census

The black-billed gull is endemic to New Zealand, and was previously listed as “Threatened, Nationally Critical” in 2016 due to suspected large historical population declines. A national census was conducted in 2016/17 (funded by Birds NZ and Fruzio) where all rivers in the South Island were flown and surveyed for colonies, and sections of the North Island were flown or surveyed on the ground. The breeding pair estimate from this census was much higher than expected, and it was concluded that the population may be stable but another census in 5-10 years was strongly recommended. Black-billed gulls were re-assessed in the New Zealand Threat Classification in 2021 as “At Risk – Declining” as a result of the 2016/17 census.

Seven years have already passed since this comprehensive survey was conducted, and it is therefore time to repeat it again to gain insight into the current population numbers. Rivers in the Southland, Otago, Canterbury, and the West Coast regions of the South Island will be surveyed by flights, and Marlborough/Tasman and all of the North Island will be done on the ground. Combined with the Birds NZ Research Fund, organizations/agencies such as Environment Canterbury, the Department of Conservation, and Environment Southland are all contributing to making the flights across the South Island possible. The rest of the survey will rely heavily on Birds NZ members to go and find colonies and report them. We will be reaching out to regions for help, and it is encouraged that as many members as possible get involved! There is a lot of ground to cover.



Photo credit: Rebecca Bowater; NZ Birds online