

Beach Patrol Report for 2023

This is the first year when statistical information about birds found dead on New Zealand beaches can be reported using data extracted from the Beach Patrol management system that was installed on the Birds New Zealand website in 2022. It continues to function well; small technical improvements were made during the year. This report is intentionally full in order to provide examples of the comprehensive range of information that can be derived from the new Beach Patrol management system.

760 records were submitted in 2023. 1,369 kilometres of coastlines were patrolled by 54 members, their relatives and friends. See Table 1 for details.

Table 1: Summary of effort by Beach Patrol districts (km)

Beach Patrol districts	Distance patrolled (km)
Northland East	558
Northland West	334
Auckland East	35
Auckland West	62
Bay of Plenty	111
East Coast North Island	5
Taranaki	2
Wairarapa	3
Wellington South	5
Wellington West	104
North Coast South Island	9
Canterbury North	58
Canterbury South	4
Otago	5
Westland	6
Southland	65
Chatham Islands	5
Total distance patrolled (km)	1,369

No birds (nil entries) were reported on 69 km of the total distance patrolled (5%), mostly in Wellington West and Wellington South districts.

3,229 birds of 55 species and sub-species were counted, including land and wetland species, comprising 638 adults, 1,701 juveniles and 890 birds of unknown age. 2,868 birds (94%) were recorded amongst 21 species where 10 or more birds were counted. See Table 2 for details.

Table 2: Summary of species and maturity where 10 or more birds were counted

Species	Adults	Sub-adults	Unknown age	Totals
Australasian Gannet	74	2	1	77
Broad-billed Prion	3	0	9	12
Buller's Shearwater	16	0	45	61
Common Diving Petrel	12	0	35	47
Cook's Petrel (Northern)	0	0	71	71
Diving Petrel (Northern)	1	0	56	57
Fairy Prion	94	2	108	204
Flesh-footed Shearwater	2	1	20	23
Fluttering Shearwater	23	57	128	208

Species	Adults	Sub-adults	Unknown age	Totals
Grey-faced Petrel	11	2	69	82
Hutton's Shearwater	4	0	8	12
Little Penguin (New Zealand)	53	40	93	186
Little Shearwater (North Island)	6	0	29	35
Pied Shag	9	3	1	13
Red-billed Gull	41	12	1	54
Sooty Shearwater	9	1,544	30	1,583
Southern black-backed Gull	48	14	1	63
Spotted Shag	17	7	0	24
White-faced Storm Petrel	0	0	20	20
White-fronted Tern	12	2	3	17
White-headed Petrel	7	0	12	19
Totals	442	1,686	740	2,868

There were no major wrecks of birds in 2023. 1,583 (52%) of all birds counted was the Sooty shearwater in Southland, including 1,544 juveniles (recent fledglings). Respectively, the second and third most frequently counted species were Fluttering shearwater (208), of which 82% were found in Northland East, and Fairy prion (204), found on most North and South Island beaches. Little penguin (186) was found on many North and South Island coastlines, but mostly in Northland East, 81%.

Noteworthy seabirds recorded were Antipodean albatross (2, Northland East), Black-browed albatross (2, Northland West and Canterbury North), Blue petrel (4, Northland West and Auckland West), Fiordland crested penguin (1, Southland), Kerguelen petrel (2, Northland West) and Red-tailed tropic bird (1, Auckland East).

No dead seabirds were found to have been affected by marine oiling in 2023. One Black swan, (East Coast North Island) was found to have been shot. Eight seabirds (six species) were entangled in fishing lines in six Beach Patrol districts. Regrettably, three of the birds were three species of albatross. See Table 3 for details.

Table 3: Seabirds entangled in fishing lines

Species	BP districts & No. of Birds
Buller's Albatross (Southern)	Auckland West 1
Flesh-footed Shearwater	Bay of Plenty 1
Fluttering Shearwater	Wellington West 1
Light-mantled Sooty Albatross	Auckland West 1
Red-billed Gull	East Coast North Island 1. Northland East 2
Wandering Albatross	Otago 1

Nineteen species of land and wetland birds (44 birds) were counted, 1.4% of all dead birds counted on coastlines, the most notable being an Eastern cattle egret (Taranaki) and two North Island kaka (Northland East and Bay of Plenty).

The distances patrolled, the number of birds counted and the number of birds per kilometre for 2023 are above 10-year and 20-year averages. See Table 4 for details. A significant increase in patrolling in 2023 – the highest for 10 years – is attributed to the popularity amongst members of the new website-based Beach Patrol Scheme records submission system.

Looking broadly over all species, the number of birds found per kilometre of beaches patrolled appears to be increasing since 2010. Differences occur for individual species.

A 20-year comparison of the number of seabirds counted/kilometre (seabirds includes waders) illustrates a major 'wreck' in 2011, with smaller 'wrecks' in 2013 and 2017. Relatively short patrols between 2020 and 2022 are attributed to reduced effort during the Covid pandemic.

Table 4: 20-year comparison of patrol distances, seabirds counted & birds per kilometre

Year	No. Seabirds	Distance Patrolled (Kms)	Seabirds/Km
2003	3,354	2,779	1.2
2004	2,086	2,545	0.8
2005	1,791	2,328	0.8
2006	1,738	2,406	0.7
2007	2,222	2,224	1.0
2008	2,371	2,808	0.8
2009	3,867	4,051	1.0
2010	2,571	2,930	0.9
2011	15,426	1,592	9.7
2012	1,668	1,444	1.2
2013	4,275	1,195	3.6
2014	1,154	1,034	1.1
2015	1,362	1,043	1.3
2016	1,600	1,133	1.4
2017	3,482	880	4.0
2018	2,056	890	2.3
2019	813	533	1.5
2020	761	438	1.7
2021	1,004	728	1.4
2022	1,964	906	2.2
2023	3,182	1,289	2.5
10 yr average	1,738	887	1.9

Percent change of 2023 data from 10-year average

	183%	145%	127%
20 yr average	2,797	1,675	2.0

Percent change of 2023 data from 20-year average

	114%	77%	126%
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