

Birds New Zealand – OSNZ
National Wader Census
June - July 2023
November - December 2023
Summary compiled by Adrian Riegen

Winter Census 2023

A total of 90,663 waders of 17 species were counted during the June-July 2023 wader census, (Table 1), down from 99,553 waders of 20 species counted in June-July 2022. The lower number can be partly accounted for by some major areas not being counted, including Parengarenga, Houhora and Rangaunu Harbours in the Far North and the North Kaipara Harbour. The Hawkes Bay, Raglan and Harbours in the Waikato and Lake Wairarapa were also missed this winter. The main reasons for these not being counted, was lack of people, problems caused by Cyclone Gabrielle in January and lack of boats. Therefore, making direct comparisons with previous years is problematic.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher numbers have been declining steadily over recent years but the winter 2023 count of 45,200 was lowest on record. The 3,977 Variable Oystercatcher counted in 2023 were almost the same as the 3,792 counted in 2022. 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 down by about 10% with 9,420 compared to 10,231 in 2022. Five sites, Kaipara Harbour, Manukau Harbour, Firth of Thames, Tauranga Harbour and Farewell Spit hold around 70% of overwintering godwits each year.

The Banded Dotterel count of 5,779 was up from 4,926 in 2022. The winter strongholds were Kaipara Harbour 844, Lake Ellesmere 733, Tasman Bay 722 and Manukau Harbour 588.

Only the Southern New Zealand Dotterels that move to the South Island in the winter were counted and the 58 counted in 2023 was the best since 60 were counted in June 2019.

Red Knot numbers were even lower than the 632 in 2022 with just 525 counted in 2023 continuing the worrying downward trend. The 467 counted in the Manukau Harbour were 74% of the total count.

The Ruddy Turnstone count of 214 was 100% improvement on the 106 counted in 2022, with the majority in the Manukau Harbour, Farewell Spit and Awarua Bay, Southland.

Wrybill numbers are reasonably steady with 4,534 counted in 2023, with 2,251 on the Manukau Harbour and 1,791 on the Firth of Thames combined accounting for 92% of the total count.

Uncommon winter waders included, 5 Whimbrels, 1 Black-tailed Godwit and 1 Terek Sandpiper.

Summer Census 2023

A total of 133,994 waders of 25 species were counted during the November-December 2023 wader census, (Table 2), compared to 128,274 counted in 2022. This is an increase on the previous two summer counts. National coverage was quite good but the key Far North sites were 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. However, all key Coromandel sites were counted in November 2023.

Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were down to 79,340 compared to the 2022 count of 81,769.

The 24,935 Red Knot counted was an improvement on the 2022 count of 21,65. Strongholds for Red Knots continue to be Manukau Harbour 9,200, Kaipara Harbour 6,938, Farewell Spit 6,160, Firth of Thames 1,772 and Tasman Bay 314 which together account for 97% of all Red Knots counted.

Ruddy Turnstone numbers were up again in 2023 with 1,777 counted compared to 1,404 in 2022 and 1,309 in 2021. The strongholds for Ruddy Turnstone were, Southland 417 up from 115 in 2022, Kaipara Harbour 334, Tasman Bay 305, Manukau Harbour 280, and Farewell Spit 150, down from 415 in 2022 but 293 were counted there in February 2024.

Red-necked Stint numbers were up to 64 compare to the 2022 count of 42 but still well down on historical numbers. This summer 167 Pacific Golden Plover were counted, compared to 162 in summer 2022.

Only 19 Whimbrel were counted. The only other Arctic wader to reach double figures was Sharp-tailed Sandpiper with 15 individuals.

Uncommon summer waders included; 5 Curlew Sandpiper, 3 Eastern Curlew, 2 Greater Sand Plover, Hudsonian Godwit, Sanderling and Grey-tailed Tattler were counted and one each of Great Knot and Marsh Sandpiper.

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 2023

Species	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Variable Oystercatcher	3,977	3,792	4,439	4,238	4,196	3,307	3,636
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	45,200	56,074	56,323	68,207	67,327	69,105	73,172

(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	32	16	30	23	18	6	15
Pied Stilt	17,818	15,707	18,008	17,127	16,764	18,621	14,181
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	8	7	12	17	17	6	21
Pacific Golden Plover				5			
New Zealand Dotterel	942	861	1,151	999	1,176	865	777
Banded Dotterel	5,779	4,926	4,797	5,369	6,041	5,100	5,334
Lesser Sand Plover		2					
Greater Sand Plover			2	1	2		
Wrybill	4,534	5,147	4,100	3,571	4,420	5,325	4,718
Black-fronted Dotterel	16	66	240	78	41	93	97
Spur-winged Plover	2,177	1,980	2,954	1,589	1,891	2,587	2,683
Eastern Curlew		1	1		3	1	1
Whimbrel	5	1	1	31	3	3	2
Bar-tailed Godwit	9,420	10,231	9,859	12,813	4,864	5,216	7,033
Black-tailed Godwit	1			1		1	1
Hudsonian Godwit		1	1		1		
Ruddy Turnstone	214	106	210	410	462	137	322
Great Knot					1	1	
Red Knot	525	632	1,938	1,761	1,020	2,341	1,150
Ruff				1			
Curlew Sandpiper			1				2
Red-necked Stint	14	1	4	36	18	10	5
Sanderling		1	1	1	4		2
Terek Sandpiper	1	1	1				
Grey-tailed Tattler				1	1		3
Marsh Sandpiper							
Total	90,663	99,553	104,073	116,369	108,270	112,725	113,155

Table 2. Total Wader Count November - December 2023

Species	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Variable Oystercatcher	3,226	2,620	2,438	2,866	2,659	2,679	2,275
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	14,370	12,901	15,981	18,708	14,319	13,578	18,978
(Oystercatcher Hybrid)	13	23	23	13	22	11	10
Pied Stilt	6,847	4,838	5,999	6,519	8,218	4,683	5,325
(Black Stilt/Hybrids)	5	5	5	6	5	44	5
Pacific Golden Plover	167	175	156	122	224	220	266
Grey Plover						1	
New Zealand Dotterel	534	518	362	600	568	547	497
Banded Dotterel	420	418	546	597	711	278	664
Lesser Sand Plover				1			
Greater Sand Plover	2	2	5	3	3	1	
Wrybill	86	79	200	62	634	348	273
Black-fronted Dotterel	17	30	25	43	25	27	16
Shore Plover		1			69		
Spur-winged Plover	2,141	1,590	1,937	2,113	1,696	1,001	2,073
Eastern Curlew	3	4	4	5	5	2	7
Whimbrel	19	13	27	47	65	18	28
Bar-tailed Godwit	79,340	81,937	65,859	78,218	74,456	65,345	71,527
Black-tailed Godwit		1			8		3
Hudsonian Godwit	2	1			1	1	2
Ruddy Turnstone	1,777	1,404	1,309	1,688	2,468	1,497	1,934
Great Knot	1			1	1		
Red Knot	24,935	21,658	27,060	25,698	26,775	33,563	30,947
Broad-billed Sandpiper					1		
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	15	10	18	17	9	15	15
Curlew Sandpiper	5	1	2	4	1	1	2
Red-necked Stint	64	42	53	76	87	53	24
Sanderling	2	1	3		3	5	4
Pectoral Sandpiper		1	1	1	7	3	1

Terek Sandpiper			2		1		
Grey-tailed Tattler	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
Common Greenshank				1			
Marsh Sandpiper	1			1	1		2
Total	133,994	128,937	122,016	137,411	133,031	123,922	134,880

Wader Count February-March 2024

A total of 60,980 waders were counted in Nelson, West Coast and Southland in February 2024 and Lake Wairarapa March 2024. Comparisons are made between the November 2023 and February 2024 counts for Nelson and Southland in Tables 3 & 4.

Table 3. Nelson Region count Nov 2023 and Feb 2024

Species	Feb.24	Nov 23
Variable Oystercatcher	573	559
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	16,254	3,315
Pied Stilt	445	103
Pacific Golden Plover	26	16
Banded Dotterel	471	44
Wrybill	8	
Spur-winged Plover	7	71
Whimbrel	1	2
Bar-tailed Godwit	19,136	10,414
Ruddy Turnstone	472	455
Red Knot	9,322	6,537
Sanderling	1	1
Red-necked Stint		1
Grey-tailed Tattler	1	
Terek Sandpiper	1	
TOTAL	46,718	21,468

Table 4. Southland count Nov 2023 and Feb 2024

Species	Feb.24	Nov 23
Variable Oystercatcher	65	45
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	4,306	1,382
Pied Stilt	147	242
Pacific Golden Plover	83	
New Zealand Dotterel	6	
Banded Dotterel	739	13
Greater Sand Plover		1
Wrybill	1	
Spur-winged Plover	158	84
Eastern Curlew	2	
Whimbrel	3	
Little Whimbrel	1	
Bar-tailed Godwit	5,550	7,363
Ruddy Turnstone	242	417
Red Knot	68	167
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	9	1
Curlew Sandpiper		2
Red-necked Stint	2	15
Grey-tailed Tattler		1
TOTAL	11,382	9,734

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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