

## Where in Aotearoa New Zealand are our birds?

A project to collate a list of all bird taxa in Aotearoa New Zealand by region was successful in obtaining funding through Envirolink – a regional council driven funding scheme administered by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. The bird lists were part of a larger project to provide regional councils with comprehensive species lists for four taxonomic groups. This project was led by Dr Scott Jarvie (Otago Regional Council) and Dr Jo Monks (University of Otago), on behalf of the Biodiversity Working Group, Te Uru Kahika (Regional and Unitary Councils Aotearoa). The University of Otago contracted ornithologist Oscar Thomas to undertake the project for the birds.

Oscar collated an initial spreadsheet of avian taxa exported from the New Zealand Threat Classification System (NZTCS), supplemented with additional information from the 2022 Birds New Zealand checklist. A range of sources were used to help determine the status of each taxa in each region of Aotearoa New Zealand; including New Zealand Birds Online, eBird, the Birds New Zealand Unusual Bird Report database, Notornis, and the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds, supplemented with the personal knowledge of compilers and Birds New Zealand members.

The Birds New Zealand Beach Patrol Database was kindly adapted and provided for use by Covenor Ian Armitage, with support from the Council. With close to 500,000 records of beach-wrecked birds dating back to 1951, some of the only detections of a species in a given region (or indeed New Zealand) is through beach patrols, such as Newell's and Cory's Shearwaters. It is fantastic to have such a comprehensive dataset available for projects such as this. Oscar has also been an active participant of beach patrols since the age of 9, starting with Muriwai Beach walks run monthly by the Auckland Branch and the late Mel Galbraith. Fascinating finds include six or seven Prion species, Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, and Kerguelen Petrel.

This project required assumptions to be made where evidence could not be found, particularly for taxa that are cryptic, mobile, or sparsely distributed. For example, given the complexity of observing seabirds; species ecology, beach-wrecks, and records from offshore or in adjacent regions were used to inform their status in a given region as best as possible. Small regions such as Nelson and regions with low observer coverage such as Gisborne and West Coast were harder to make inferences for and thus have lower certainty. This list relied on local knowledge to become the most useful and accurate resource it can be. Updates will be vital to maintain the integrity of this list when relevant new information on the status and distributions of birds across New Zealand is made available.

The project can be accessed online via <https://www.envirolink.govt.nz/envirolink-reports/>.

