

## Where do shorebirds live?

- Coastal wetlands.
- Sandy beaches and rocky shorelines.
- Braided riverbeds.
- Estuaries.
- Farmland.
- Lakes.
- High-country tussocklands.



## What threats do they face?

- **Tides and storm surges**  
Nests above the high-tide mark are easily lost to strong storms and very high spring tides.
- **Habitat destruction and degradation**  
Breeding habitats can be lost to land development or subsequent erosion.
- **Predation**  
Eggs and chicks can be easy prey for cats, dogs, mustelids (stoats, weasels and ferrets) and hedgehogs, as well as black-backed gulls and harrier hawks. Cats and mustelids also kill adult birds, especially when sitting on their nests.
- **Disturbance**  
Nests are easily trampled or disturbed by dogs and vehicles.



### Want to find out more?

For further information on shorebirds and how you can help, visit:

- DOC: [doc.govt.nz/sea-shore-birds](http://doc.govt.nz/sea-shore-birds)
- New Zealand Birds Online: [nzbirdsonline.org.nz](http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz)
- Miranda Shorebird Centre: [miranda-shorebird.org.nz](http://miranda-shorebird.org.nz)



Cover: Tūturīwhatu/banded dotterels. Photo: Leon Berard  
Back: Kāruhiruhi/pied shag. Photo: Shellie Evans

Published by:  
Department of Conservation  
Te Rapa Office  
5 Northway St  
Te Rapa, Hamilton 3200

November 2019

Editing and design:  
DOC Creative Services,  
Conservation House, Wellington

This publication is produced using paper sourced from well-managed, renewable and legally logged forests.

New Zealand Government

## What's that shorebird?

A guide to the shorebirds of Aotearoa/New Zealand



 Department of  
Conservation  
Te Papa Atawhai

R167010

## How can you help?



Walk and ride your horse below the high-tide mark on beaches where shorebirds are breeding.



Stay outside fenced-off areas with 'birds nesting' signs.



Keep vehicles off beaches.



Keep your dog on a leash at all times and remember that some beaches are only open for dog walking at certain times – check with your local council for details.



Join a local Coast Care group.

## How to be a birdwatcher

New Zealand is a land of birds and there are so many to see! You can spot birds in forests and parks, by lakes and rivers, at home in your garden and, of course, at the beach. To become a birdwatcher, all you need are your eyes or ears.



## Top tips for birdwatching

1. **Train your eyes** to recognise the key features of birds. Look for colouring, special marks, beak shape and body size.
2. **Train your ears** to recognise bird calls. Often you will hear a bird before you can see it and sometimes you may not see the bird at all, so knowing the calls of different types of birds can be a very handy skill. To learn different bird calls, visit [www.nzbirdsonline.org](http://www.nzbirdsonline.org).
3. **Keep a notebook** and write down what you see. What bird is it? Where did you spot it? What time of day was it? What time of year was it? What was it doing? It's exciting to come back to a place and notice any changes in bird life.
4. **Enter your observations** into eBird or use the eBird app on your phone. This app is a very handy substitute for a notebook, and your phone can capture the location, date and time of the recording. The information is also accessible for others to see and can help with research.
5. **Draw what you see** or take photos – drawing is more fun than writing lots of notes.

## Birds with bands

We encourage you to report banded birds (dead or alive) to DOC by emailing the Banding Office at [bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz](mailto:bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz) with the following details.

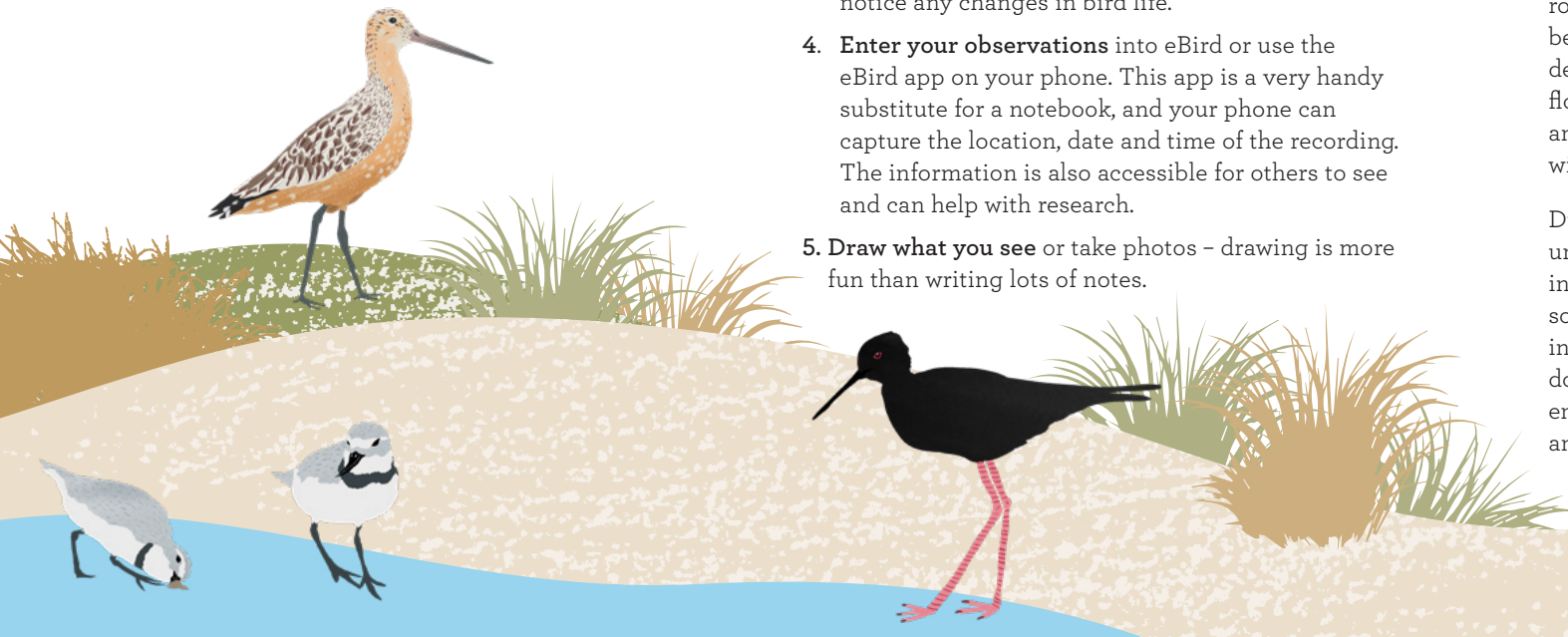
- Band number and any other text written on the band(s).
- Colour combinations in the order of left leg from top to bottom and right leg from top to bottom. Be aware that in some species bands may be on the tibia and/or the tarsus.
- How the band was obtained (eg bird found dead, killed by cat, washed up on beach, captured alive).
- Bird species (if known).
- Bird condition (dead, alive, injured, etc).
- Date found.
- Detailed locality information.
- Your contact details.



## Why are dunes so important?

Natural sand dunes play a vital role in protecting our coastline, beaches and coastal developments from erosion, flooding and storm damage and provide shelter from the wind and sea spray.

Dunes are home to a number of unique native plant communities, invertebrates, lizards and birds, some of which (eg pīngao and several species of invertebrates and birds, such as katipō spiders and dotterel) are under threat from changes to their environment as a result of introduced species and human activity.



## Tara iti/fairy tern

*Sternula nereis/davisae*

**Nationally Critical**



Photo: Glenda Rees

A small tern with pale grey upperparts and white underparts, a white rump and forked white tail. The wings have a dark grey web on the outer primary feathers and the legs are bright orange. Breeding adults have a bright yellow-orange bill and a black cap covering the crown and nape.



Length: 25 cm

## Ruddy turnstone

*Arenaria interpres*

**Migrant**



Photo: Les Feasey

A distinctive stocky bird with a short, black-brown, slightly upturned bill, a short neck and short orange-red legs. The back and upper wings are reddish-brown with blackish-brown patches, which contrasts with the white underparts. The head, neck and breast are pied black and white.



Length: 21 cm

## Tūturiwhatu/New Zealand dotterel

*Charadrius obscurus aquilonius*

*Charadrius obscurus obscurus*

**Recovering  
Nationally Critical**

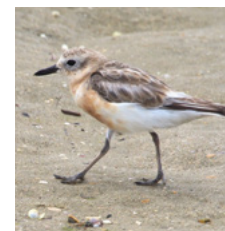


Photo: Rod Hay

A heavily built plover with a stout black bill and mid-grey legs. The brown underparts become off-white in autumn/early winter and orange-red from May onwards. Males are generally darker than females.



Length: 25 cm

## Kuaka/bar-tailed godwit

*Limosa lapponica/baueri*

**Declining**

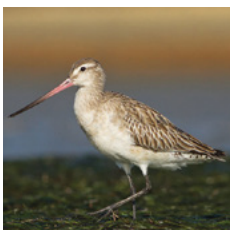


Photo: Glenda Rees

This large, long-legged bird is mostly brown above and pale below with a long, upturned pink and black bill. During the breeding season, males become bright rufous (reddish-brown) on the head, neck, breast and belly, while the less colourful females become strongly streaked, sometimes with a pale rufous wash.



Length: 39 cm

## Huahou/lesser or red knot

*Calidris canutus rogersi*

**Nationally Vulnerable**



Photo: Neil Fitzgerald

This bird has a dark, medium-length bill and legs that range from yellowish as juveniles to dark grey as adults. The rump is slightly barred white. The non-breeding plumage is plain grey above and white below, with the belly, breast and face becoming reddish during the breeding season.



Length: 24 cm

## Karoro/black-backed gull

*Larus dominicanus dominicanus*

**Not Threatened**



Photo: Oscar Thomas

A familiar gull with a white head and underparts, a black back, a yellow bill with a red spot near the tip of the lower mandible, and pale green legs. Juveniles are dark mottled brown with a black bill and legs.



Length: 60 cm

## Red-necked stint

*Calidris ruficollis*

**Migrant**



Photo: Phil Battley

A tiny, delicate bird that is pale grey-brown above and off-white below and has dark legs and a short, straight, black bill. During the breeding season, adults have a rufous 'balaclava'.



Length: 15 cm

## Tūturiwhatu/banded dotterel

*Charadrius bicinctus bicinctus*

**Nationally Vulnerable**



Photo: Jonathan Astin

A small, compact plover that is plain brown above and mainly white below. Males and females have a dark collar and a chestnut-coloured chest band, which is broader, especially in males, during the breeding season.



Length: 20 cm

## Tarāpunga/red-billed gull

*Larus novaehollandiae scopulinus*

**Declining**

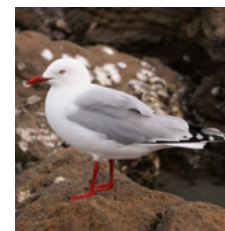


Photo: Shellie Evans

This bird is almost completely white but has a pale grey mantle, back and wing coverts, and black main flight feathers with white tips. The iris is white and the bill, eyelids and feet are scarlet, being particularly bright in the breeding season.



Length: 37 cm

## Tarāpuka/black-billed gull

*Larus bulleri*



Photo: Andrew Walmsley

A paler, slenderer bird than the red-billed gull. Breeding adults have a white head, neck, rump, tail and underparts, pale silver-grey wings and back, a black bill and legs, white eyes, red eye-rings, and a diagnostic white leading edge to the wings during flight. Non-breeding adults have a bi-coloured bill and red legs.



Length: 35 cm

**Nationally Critical**

## Tōrea/South Island pied oystercatcher

*Haematopus finschi*

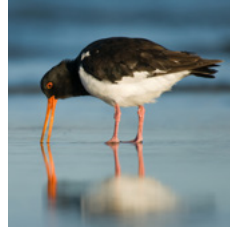


Photo: Andrew Walmsley

This solid black and white bird has a sharp border on the lower breast between the black upperparts and white underparts, a long, stout, red bill and thick, pink legs. Males and females are similar.



Length: 46 cm

**Declining**

## Kāruhiruhi/pied shag

*Phalacrocorax varius/variatus*



Photo: Bernard Spragg

Adult birds have a black crown, back of neck, mantle, rump, wings, thigh and tail, a white face, throat, sides of neck and underparts, a long, grey, hooked beak, a green iris, and black legs and feet. During the breeding season, birds develop yellow skin in front of the eyes, a pink base of the beak and blue eye-rings.



Length: 65 cm

**Recovering**

## Sharp-tailed sandpiper

*Calidris acuminata*



Photo: Tony Whitehead

A small, speckled, brown and white bird with a straight, shortish, dark bill and a reddish cap on its head. A prominent white eyebrow extends well back above the eye. The feathers on the back and wings are rich brown or chestnut with pale borders.



Length: 18 cm

**Migrant**

## Tōrea pango/variable oystercatcher

*Haematopus unicolor*

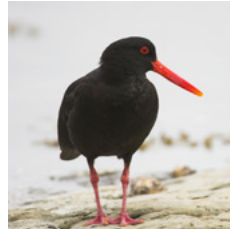


Photo: Andrew Walmsley

Adults of this large, heavily built bird have black upperparts and variable underparts, ranging from all black, through a range of 'smudgy' intermediate states to white. Other features include a bright orange bill, stout coral-pink legs, a red iris and an orange eye-ring.



Length: 48 cm

**Recovering**

## Ngutu pare/wrybill

*Anarhynchus frontalis*



Photo: Craig McKenzie

A small, pale plover with white underparts and a black upper breast band that becomes apparent during the breeding season. The upper parts and sides of the face are pale grey, and the forehead is white. The bill is long, black and curved to the right.



Length: 20 cm

**Nationally Vulnerable**

## Taranui/Caspian tern

*Hydroprogne caspia*



Photo: Les Feasey

This large tern has a wingspan of 1 m. The body is silver-grey above and white below, with dark wing tips. The tail is relatively short and slightly forked, and the large bill is bright red in adults, becoming darker near the tip with some yellow.



Length: 50 cm

**Nationally Vulnerable**

## Curlew sandpiper

*Calidris ferruginea*

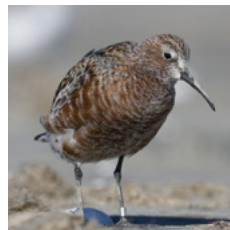


Photo: Phil Battley

This elegant bird can be distinguished from other small sandpipers by its relatively long, thin, black legs and downcurved bill and its white rump. Its plain plumage becomes dark red during the breeding season, with fine white fringes on the body feathers and a grey to black back with red spots.



Length: 19 cm

**Vagrant**

## Eastern curlew

*Numenius madagascariensis*

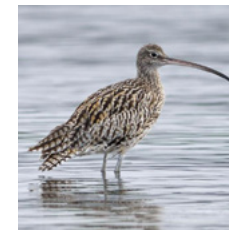


Photo: Bruce Buckman

A large wader with long legs and a very long downcurved bill. The feathers have dark brown streaks on the back, finer brown streaks on the underparts and grey-brown streaks on the pale underwings.



Length: 63 cm

**Vagrant**

## Poaka/pied stilt

*Himantopus himantopus leucocephalus*

Not Threatened

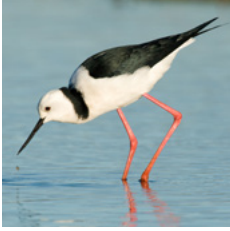


Photo: Andrew Walmsley

This medium-large bird has very long, pink legs and a long, fine, black bill. The body is mainly white with a black back and wings, and black on the back of the head and neck.



Length: 38 cm

## Kakī/black stilt

*Himantopus himantopus*

Nationally Critical



Photo: Sabine Bernert

A compact bird that is similar in appearance to the pied stilt but has entirely black plumage, shorter legs and a thicker bill.



Length: 40 cm

