

## **Repeat of a black-billed gull national census for a second consecutive year**

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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.

With support from Birds NZ members, Environment Canterbury, Environment Southland, Birds NZ Research Fund, and the Department of Conservation, the 2026/17 census was repeated in 2023/24 using the same methods. The result was indicative of a stable population; however, due to the lack of data available to determine long-term trends for this species, annual variability, and the known movement of birds and colonies between river catchments, a second consecutive year of the national census would be highly useful. We are lucky in receiving support again from the Birds NZ Research Fund, Environment Canterbury, the Department of Conservation, and hopefully Environment Southland to be able to conduct the census once more during the 2024/25 season. As always, rivers in the Southland, Otago, Canterbury, and the West Coast regions of the South Island will be surveyed by flights and aerial photographs of colonies taken, and Marlborough/Tasman and all of the North Island will be done on the ground. We will be relying on Birds NZ members again to find colonies and report them, and we encourage as many members as possible to get involved!



Photo credit: Rebecca Bowater; NZ Birds online