BAR-TAILED GODWIT

**Family** Scolopacidae  
**Species** *Limosa lapponica*  
**Common names** Bar-tailed Godwit, Kuaka  
**Status** Migrant  
**Abundance** New Zealand’s most common migrant wader.  
**Size** 390 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Black-tailed Godwit 390 mm)  
**Habitat** A bird of large muddy harbours and estuaries. It is less numerous on sandy harbours but often present.  
**Worldwide range** Breeds in both Siberia and the western Arctic regions of North America and migrates to Australia and New Zealand. It arrives in large numbers from September onwards, reaching a peak in December.  
**New Zealand range** Found throughout New Zealand and to Stewart Island.
Description – non-breeding plumage (above)

**Upperparts** Greyish, streaked with brown. **Underparts** Whitish. **Rump and tail** Barred white and brown. **Bill** Brownish pink with a black tip and curved upwards. **Legs** Greyish.

**Description – breeding plumage – male birds (below)**

**Head** Brick red with whitish stripe above the eye. **Upperparts** Dark brown with buff edges to feathers. **Neck and underparts** Chestnut. **Underwings** Whitish. **Tail** Brown barred with white. **Bill** Brownish-pink.

**Description – breeding plumage – female birds**

**Upperparts** Greyish, streaked with brown. **Breast** Buffy tinge of various amounts. **Underparts** Whitish, with fine barring on edges of abdomen.

**Conspicuous features**
- A large greyish-brown wading bird.
- Female bird slightly larger than male.
- Bill long and up-curved.
- Female has longer bill than male.

**Conspicuous characteristics**
- Fly in loose straggly skeins.
- Congregate in large numbers on high-tide roosts.
- Feeds busily once the tide recedes.
- Digs bill deeply into the mud so often seen with a muddy face.
- Male birds develop rufous tonings towards the end of summer.
- Auckland birds are often seen changing harbours in straggly skeins

**Call** A soft “kit kit kit” or a “kew kew” call, is heard from flying birds. Just prior to departure, birds become very excited and noisy when on roosts.

**Arrival dates** From mid-September.

**Departure dates** Birds congregate in northern harbours from late-January onwards in places like Manukau Harbour and the Firth of Thames and start leaving from mid-March.

**Overwintering birds** At any time of year including winter godwits in small numbers, often in breeding plumage, can be seen in many harbours.

**Where to find – North Island**

**North Auckland** – All harbours are worth investigating for godwits.

**Auckland** – Tahuna Torea is an excellent viewing place for this bird. P. 298.

**Auckland** – Sandy Bay, Bayswater. P. 297.

**Auckland** – Howick and Clifton Beach. P. 300.

**South Auckland** – Manukau Harbour at the Mangere Sewage Plant. P. 298.

**South Auckland** – Clarks Beach. P. 301.

**South Auckland** – Kawakawa Bay past Clevedon. P. 302.

**South Auckland** – Miranda. P. 302.

**Coromandel Harbours** – Colville, Coromandel, Tairua, Wharekawa and
Whangamata.

**Bay of Plenty** – Tauranga Harbour, Maketu and Ohiwa Harbours. P.

**Where to find – South Island**

**Marlborough** – Nelson at the Waimea Estuary. P. 344.

**Marlborough** – Motueka estuary at the sandspit. P. 344.

**Canterbury** – Lake Ellesmere at various places. P. 351.

**Southland** – Waituna Lagoon, Awarua Bay and Oreti. P. 364.