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Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Bar-tailed godwit: pp 175-176.



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.

