

Lower Hutt western hills – citizen science bird monitoring protocol

What are we trying to achieve?

We aim to establish a process for monitoring change in bird communities and species distribution over time in the Lower Hutt western hills suburbs.

Why would we do this?

Birds are a good indicator of progress towards a diverse, functioning ecosystem. They are also relatively easy to monitor. The information that we develop over time will be useful for showing how well the predator control is working, and how well any restoration efforts are progressing.

A trial protocol

When: End October/beginning November each year (in 2019 it will be between 1 November to 14 November).

Method:

5 minute bird counts, data to be made publically available through ebird.com. Note, this protocol can be adjusted to your level of comfort with identifying birds, so don't be afraid to have a go! It is a great idea to do up to 4 of these types of surveys during the designated period, but just one is also great.

1. Sign up to ebird.com and download the app if you like that kind of thing. If you don't feel comfortable using an online platform, you are welcome to use the data sheet on the next page and email it to danielle.shanahan@visitzealandia.com
2. Pick a spot to do your bird count. Your backyard would be perfectly suitable! Remember, you want this to be the same each year, so make it accessible for yourself.
3. Choose a day where the wind is moderate to mild, and it isn't raining. The goal is to hear the birds well, so if you can't hear them over rustling leaves or intense traffic noise pick another day!
4. I would recommend doing a practice count first, as you will get a clearer idea of how you might manage this.
5. Sit down in your chosen spot on your chosen day, record the start time, the date, your name and the location (this can all be done via the ebird app if you are that way inclined).
6. Wait two minutes, as the birds will have been disturbed when you arrived.
7. Begin your bird count. The objective here is to record what you see or hear. NOTE, if you are only familiar with one bird (e.g. the tui), just record that! The goal here is to be accurate, not to guess. It is OK not to record everything.
8. Try not to count the same bird twice. This sounds difficult, but there are some techniques you can use to help with this. For example, draw a circle with north, south, east and west on it. Mark out the birds you see or here on this little diagram. If you are simply hearing a call from the same location over and over, then consider it one bird. Don't guess at numbers, just put down what you see or hear.
9. After 5 minutes stop recording!
10. If you found it a bit overwhelming, take a step back and perhaps consider focusing on fewer species.

11. Submit the data via ebird.com (optional, or email Danielle).

- To do this sign in, and then select the "Submit" tab at the top of the page.
- You can create a new location (which you can then use over and over) using the "find it on a map" function. Type in Lower Hutt, and then on the next page you can search your address. Click on the place on the map where you would like the 5 minute bird count location to be, name your location (e.g. Singers Road bird counts) and then press "Continue".
- Now it will ask you to enter your observation date, and your observation type. For 5 minute bird counts select "Stationary".
- Enter your start time, and duration (5 minutes).
- Enter your party size (i.e. how many of you were actively counting birds during the survey)
- You can add observations such as the weather, or e.g. if you focused on tui only, to the "Checklist comments" section.
- When you go to the next page enter the numbers of each species you saw or heard.
- It is very important that you check the appropriate box on the lower right hand corner of the page. If you are confident you recorded everything, your checklist is complete and you should select "Yes". If you just focused on a few species or didn't feel 100% confident with some of the species select "No".
- When you select continue from this page your list will be submitted to ebird, and it will be checked by a moderator.

