



The wintering population of Oystercatchers in Iceland



Böðvar Þórisson¹, Verónica Méndez^{1,2}, José Alves^{1,3}, Kristinn H. Skarphéðinsson⁴, Svenja Auhaug⁴, Sölvi Rúnar Vignisson⁵, Brynjúlfur Brynjólfsson⁶, Cristian Gallo⁷, Páll Leifsson⁸, Jennifer A. Gill² & Tómas Grétar Gunnarsson¹

Introduction

Many species of birds are so called partial migrants, where a part of the population is sedentary, remaining on or near the breeding grounds year-round, whereas another part of the population migrates. Icelandic oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) is a partial migrant with the majority of individuals thought to migrate to coastal Europe during the winter. Integrated in a wider project which compares demographic parameters between migrant and resident oystercatchers, we undertook the first total census of the Icelandic wintering population. Previous estimates suggested that the wintering population may be around 5-6.000 individuals (Christmas counts^b and other known winter sites^a).

Results

The preliminary estimate of the wintering population of Icelandic oystercatchers was around 11 thousand individuals which were mostly found on coastal areas in SW- and W-Iceland with smaller numbers elsewhere, particularly in SE-Iceland (figure 1, table 1). Close to 6.000 purple sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) were counted, 102 redshanks (*Tringa totanus*), 95 turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) and 69 curlew (*Numenius arquata*) (table 1). Other wader species were found in smaller numbers: 7 knots (*Calidris canutus*), four Golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), three Bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), one grey plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) and one dunlin (*Calidris alpina*).

Conclusion

From 2002 to 2016 average of 2.700 oystercatchers have been counted in the Christmas wintering bird counts (max 4.466). Löngufjörur, Mýrar and Breiðafjörður in W Iceland have not been included in the Christmas counts but they had 3.900 oystercatchers in total which was the largest addition to known wintering sites. The breeding population of oystercatchers is estimated at 13.000 pairs^c. It thus seems likely that the total population is between 30-40.000 individuals, and there of 1/3 (11.000) winter in Iceland.

Methods

The ground census took place between 28.01-3.02.2017 and an aerial survey was on the 16th of February. The census was based on total counts on known and potential wintering sites of the species around Iceland. The aerial census covered the Breiðafjörður Bay which has many islands and northern part of the fjord.

Table 1. Winter counts in Iceland 2017. Some sites have been combined to one area.

Region	Area	Oystercatcher	Purple Sandpiper	Redshank	Turnstone	Curlew
E Ice	Norðfjörður		13			
E Ice	Reyðarfjörður		16	7	2	
E Ice	Fáskrúðsfjörður			9		
SE Ice	Berufjörður	14	15	10		
SE Ice	Hamarsfjörður	128	100	4		9
SE Ice	Horna-/Skarösfjörður	437	606	5	4	25
SW Ice	Reykjanes	100	50	15	12	12
SW Ice	Vatnsleysuströnd	1	21		40	
SW Ice	Hafnafjörður-Álftanes	56	2	2		
SW Ice	Reykjavík-Garðabær	340	284	33	5	
SW Ice	Kjalarnes	102	27		1	
SW Ice	Hvalfjörður	505			3	
W Ice	Grunnafjörður	1.229	30			23
W Ice	Borgarfjörður	866				
W Ice	Álftanesvogur	40				
W Ice	Straumfjörður	90	540		1	
W Ice	Álftarós	340	28			
W Ice	Traðir-Helgrindur	42				
W Ice	Akrarós	1.170	660		2	
W Ice	Kaldarós	870				
W Ice	Hraunsós	32				
W Ice	Syðra-Skógarnes	1.298	280		2	
W Ice	Snæfellsnes North	1.576	573	7	23	
W Ice	Hvammfjörður	370	107			
NW Ice	Breiðafjörður North	1.012	548			
NW Ice	Breiðafjörður, Islands	389	1.135			
NW Ice	Tálknafjörður		46			
NW Ice	Patreksfjörður		60			
NW Ice	Dýrafjörður	26	60			
NW Ice	Skutulsfjörður	34		10		
NW Ice	Steingrímsfjörður	2	517			
NW Ice	Kollafjörður	2	98			
NW Ice	Þitrufjörður		121			
NW Ice	Hrútafjörður	20	10			
N Ice	Kópasker		37			
Total		11.091	5.984	102	95	69

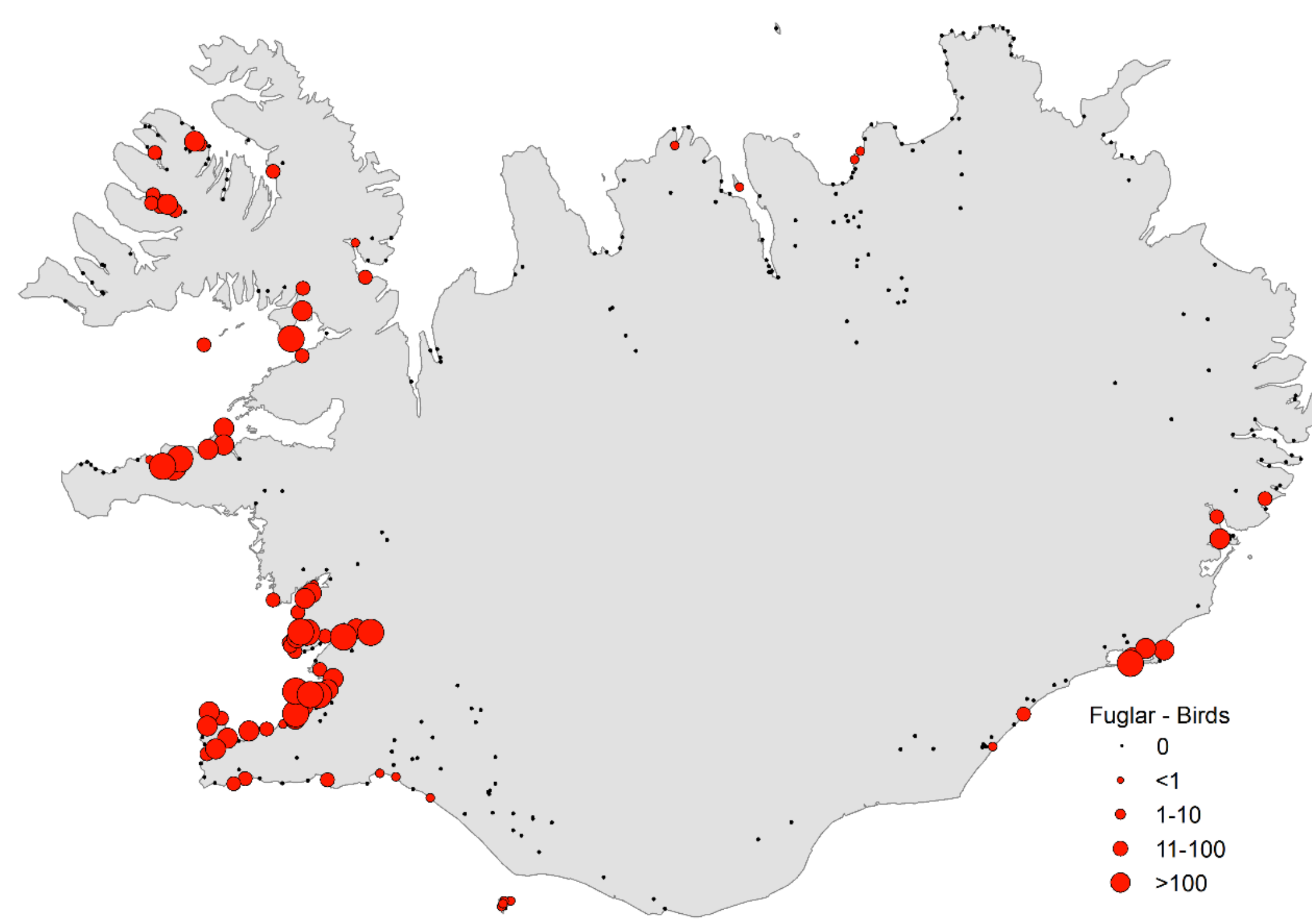


Figure 1. Wintering numbers of oystercatchers in annual Christmas bird counts. Mean (1952-2014) number of individuals per 10 km of coastline.

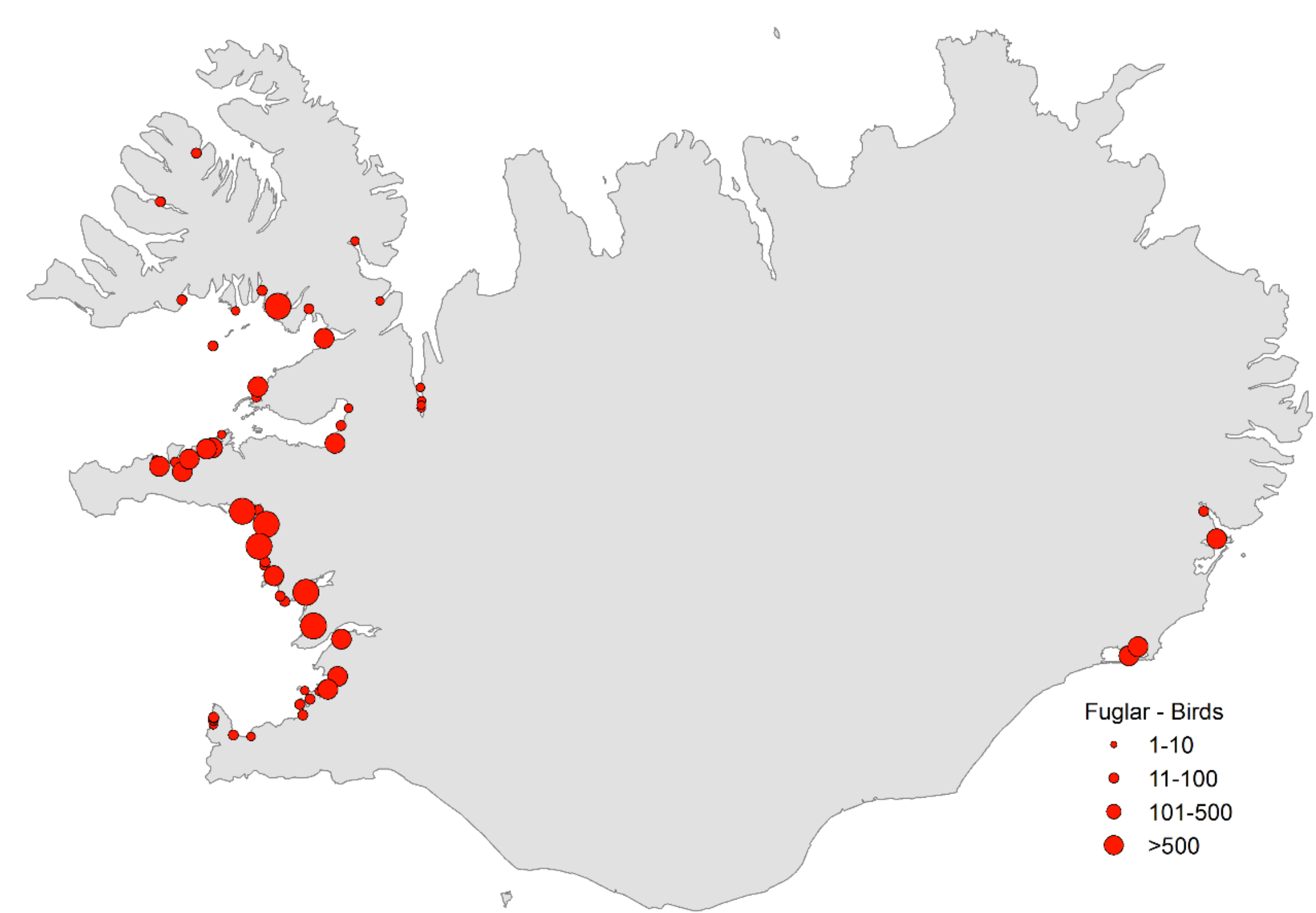


Figure 2. Distribution and numbers of oystercatchers 28.01-16.02.2017. The number recorded was 11.000.

Thanks

Observers: Guðmundur Örn Benediktsson, Gunnar Þór Hallgrímsson, Hallgrímur Gunnarsson, Margrét Thorsteinsson, Petrína F. Sigurðardóttir, Sigurjón Stefánsson, Sindri Gíslason og Yann Kolbeinsson.

Reference

- ^a J.R.Wilson and R.I.G. Morrison. 1981. Primary moult in Oystercatchers in Iceland. *Ornis Scandinavica* 12:211-215.
^b Náttúrufræðistofnun Íslands. Vetrarfuglatalningar 2002-2016. Óbirt gögn. Sótt 21.04.2017 á ni.is
^c Náttúrufræðistofnun Íslands. Mikilvæg fuglasvæði á Íslandi. Í prentun.