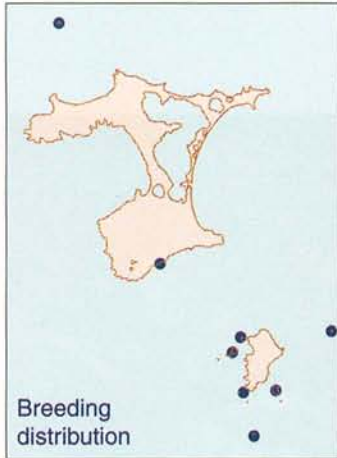


Grey-backed storm petrel
Oceanites nereis

18 cm

NEW ZEALAND NATIVE, NOT THREATENED



Grey-backed storm petrel,
Rangatira.
Photo: Colin Miskelly.

Storm petrels are the smallest seabirds, and the grey-backed storm petrel is the smallest New Zealand storm petrel. It has a dark grey head, neck, throat and upper breast, and the back, upper-wings and tail are grey, paler towards the rear. The rest of the underparts are white. The tail is square, and the bill and feet are black. At sea it is usually seen alone, darting in the wave troughs. Little is known of numbers. The main New Zealand breeding colonies are on the Chatham, Antipodes and Auckland Islands. There are possibly 10-12,000 pairs on the Chatham Islands, breeding on Rangatira, Mangere, Little Sister Island, The Pyramid, Star Keys, the Murumurus, Rabbit Island, Houruakopara and the stack and islet to the east of Houruakopara. Storm petrels are extremely vulnerable to mammalian predators, and so are restricted to rat-free sites. Grey-backed storm petrels breed over August-March, nesting on the surface under dense vegetation, and occasionally in shallow crevices.