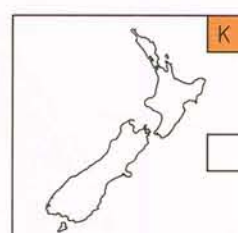


Gulls, terns and noddies are a large cosmopolitan group of mainly coastal birds. Most have short straight bills and short legs. Sexes alike. Usually grey, black or brown above, and white below in adults; juveniles usually have brown barring on back and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured but usually change with age and/or season.

WHITE TERN *Gygis alba*

Rare native

31 cm, 110 g. *Delicate pure white tern* with almost translucent wings and short forked tail; prominent eye owing to narrow black ring of feathers around eye; long straight bill, black with bluish base; legs and feet blue-grey with yellowish webs. Juvenile has smudgy brown patch behind eye and across back of head, and rusty brown flecks on back and upperwings. Flight swift and graceful; often circles over breeding areas by day. **Habitat:** Tropical seas; in NZ, breeds at Kermadecs, vagrants occasionally reach NZ mainland. **Breeding:** Oct–Mar. [Sp 253]



GULLS, TERNS and NODDIES Laridae

About 88 species (47 gulls, 37 terns and 4 noddies) worldwide: 3 gulls, 6 terns and 4 noddies breed in the New Zealand region, and 8 terns visit regularly or as rare vagrants.

Gulls are coastal or inland birds in New Zealand. Adults have white bodies and grey or black backs, and broad wings with black and white patterning at the tips. Juvenile plumage has a distinctive buff barring on the back and wings. Gulls have a strong bill with a distinctive shape, deepest about a third of the way back from the tip. They walk well on quite long legs. Gregarious; breeding in colonies and feeding and roosting in large numbers. The ground nest is a shallow cup in a low, well-formed mound of vegetation. Chicks are fed by regurgitation. Gulls feed on a wide variety of foods, including human refuse, fish, shellfish, crustaceans and other invertebrates (including earthworms and grubs exposed by ploughing) and eggs of other birds.

Terns and noddies are mostly pelagic or coastal, except some are inland on rivers or over coastal lakes. Noddies breed only in the tropics or subtropics, and sailors may have named them for their absurd-seeming nodding courtship displays. Terns are usually

white below and shades of black or grey above, while noddies are more uniformly white, grey or brown. Juvenile plumage has buff barring, especially on the back and wings. Terns and noddies are more aerial than gulls and are more delicate; their wings are narrower and more pointed and their tail is often forked, sometimes deeply. They have straight, slender, tapering bills. They shuffle or waddle along on short legs. Gregarious; breeding in colonies and feeding and roosting in tight flocks. The nest is a simple scrape or depression in sand, shingle, shell or rock, but some noddies build a small platform nest in a tree or shrub, and White Terns simply lay their egg in a depression on a tree branch. Whole small fish, caught mainly by plunging or by picking from the surface of water and held crosswise in the bill, are usually brought in courtship display and to the chicks, but some tropical terns and noddies feed by regurgitation. Chicks go on begging for months after they can fly.

Reading: Grant, P.J. 1981. *Gulls: An Identification Guide*. Calton: Poyser. Harrison, P. 1983. *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*. Beckenham: Croom Helm. Serventy, D.L. et al. 1971. *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed.

253. WHITE TERN *Gygis alba*

Plate 57

Other names: White Noddy, Fairy Tern
Size: 31 cm, 110 g

Geographical variation: Of the six subspecies, *royana* breeds in Australasia, including at the Kermadecs.

Distribution: Breed on tropical and some subtropical islands of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. The subspecies *royana* breed in large numbers on Norfolk Island and in small numbers on Lord Howe Island and on Raoul Island, Kermadecs. During breeding, they are usually seen at sea within 100 km of the main breeding islands. For several months after fledging, young birds feed with their parents during the day and return to their breeding trees to roost at night. In autumn and winter, they become more pelagic and are absent from Raoul Island in April–August. Vagrants occasionally reach the North Island of New Zealand: Waipu (1883), Bethells Beach (1960), Pakotai, inland Northland (1964), Palmerston North (1972), Otaki Beach (1986), Te Horo Beach (1988), Dargaville Beach (1990), Muriwai Beach (1990) and Taupiri, Waikato (1998). Recorded only once in the South Island: Ettrick, Otago (1945). These White Terns were recorded mainly in March–July, mostly May.
Population: Probably fewer than 10 pairs breed annually on Raoul Island.
Conservation: Protected native. The popula-

tion on Raoul Island is in a very precarious state, as birds suffer from predation by cats and perhaps rats. Moves by the Department of Conservation to eradicate these pests from Raoul Island may help to prevent the extinction of the White Tern as a breeding species in New Zealand.

Breeding: At Raoul Island, White Terns return to their breeding trees in September and eggs are laid in October–December. They particularly favour pohutukawa and Norfolk pines as breeding trees on Raoul Island, laying their single egg in a depression, slight hollow or irregularity on a bare, horizontal branch, often many metres above the ground. They lay 1 white egg (44 x 33 mm), heavily marked with brown and grey blotches. Both adults incubate for c. 28 days and, unlike other noddies, feed their chick on whole fish. The chick, which takes 60–75 days to fly, clings to the bark tenaciously with its long, sharp claws.
Behaviour: White Terns seldom associate with other noddies and terns. Their flight is fluttering and ethereal. Inquisitive and tame, they hover in front of a human intruder's face, uttering strange wheezing and twanging sounds.
Feeding: They flutter over the water surface and catch tiny fish from near the surface without submerging themselves.