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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Red-billed gull: pp 187-189.



### RED-BILLED GULL

**Family** Laridae

**Species** *Larus novaehollandiae*

**Common names** Red-billed Gull, Silver Gull (Australia)

**Status** Native

**Abundance** Common

**Size** 370 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Black-billed Gull 370 mm)

**Habitat** A shoreline species that sometimes ventures inland.

**Worldwide range** Found in Australia and South Africa birds having slight differences based on bill size, bill structure and the white patches (mirrors) in the black of the wing tips. Also in New Caledonia especially on the south-east coast.

**New Zealand range** Found around the coast of New Zealand and its offshore islands but also inland at Lake Taupo and Lake Rotorua.

**Discussion** Red-billed Gulls, which at times overlap with Black-billed Gulls in some New Zealand coastal wintering areas, are not grouped with Black-billed Gulls. Instead, they share a relationship with the North American Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) and the Black-headed Gull of Europe, (*Larus ridibundus*).

### **Description**

**Head, neck and underparts** White. **Wings** Grey, black tipped on upper and undersides with white markings. **Bill and legs** Red. **Eye** Iris white, with a red ring around it.

### **Description – immature birds**

**Wings** Soft grey with brownish speckles. **Bill, legs and feet** Black or brownish-black. **Iris and eye-ring** Brown.

### **Conspicuous feature**

- Bright red bill and legs of adult birds.

### **Conspicuous characteristic**

- Immature birds utter persistent, food-begging, “cheeting” cries.

**Call** Familiar “kek kek kek” associated with strident screams and “kwaar kwaar kwaar” sounds.

**Nest** A colonial nester making a mound of sticks and seaweed on a sandbank or rock ledge. Up to 2 light brown, dark brown-blotched eggs are laid. Sometimes they nest alongside Black-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns.

### **Differences between mature Red-billed Gulls and Black-billed Gulls**

- Red-billed has a red bill.
- Black-billed has black bill.
- Red-billed has a shorter and heavier bill than the Black-billed.
- Red-billed has red legs.
- Black-billed has reddish-black legs.
- Red-billed has distinctive black wing tips with a triangle of black on the end of wings and a white marking among the black.
- Red-billed has a heavier head with the eye appearing to be less well balanced within it than the Black-billed.
- Black-billed has only an edge of black on the wing tips showing much more white on the wings when in flight.
- Black-billed has a softer appearance than the Red-billed.
- Black-billed have black tail dots on the end of the upper tail.

### **Differences between immature Red-billed Gulls and Black-billed Gulls**

- Red-billed Gull has a black bill in the fledgling stage and blackish legs.
- Black-billed Gull has a reddish bill with a dark tip and dark reddish legs in the fledgling stage.

### **Ecological differences between Red-billed Gulls and Black-billed Gulls**

- Red-billed Gull takes a wide range of sea foods. It is also a recognised

scavenger well known for its rubbish tip feeding habits.

- Black-billed Gull is a specialised feeder taking estuarine fish and crustacean matter as well as worms and insects common on pastureland. It has a regular habit of following the plough in parts of the South Island.

### **Habitat differences between Red-billed Gulls and Black-billed Gulls**

- Red-billed Gull is mainly a coastal bird.
- Black-billed Gull is predominantly an inland bird.
- Red-billed Gull is a coastal nesting species.
- Black-billed Gull nests inland on the wide riverbeds of the South Island. In the North Island it is recorded nesting on sand and shell-spits.

### **Where to find**

**Nesting colonies** Common around the coast on rock stacks and cliff edges. Places such as Aroha Island, Tiri Tiri Matangi Island, Motuihe Island and Rangitoto Island all have colonies detached from the main island.