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Fluttering shearwater: pp 37-39.



FLUTTERING SHEARWATER

Family Procellariidae

Species *Puffinus gavia*

Common name Fluttering Shearwater

Status Endemic

Abundance Common

Size 330 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Sooty Shearwater 430 mm)

Breeding islands close to New Zealand Breeds on islands from the Three Kings Islands in the north to islands in Cook Strait.

Breeding months September to February. 1 white egg is laid in a burrow.

Range worldwide Around New Zealand and to the south-west coast of Australia.

New Zealand range Particularly common in northern waters. This is one of the best known shearwaters among fisherman, due to its autumn flocking close in to the shoreline.

Discussion Some authorities believe the Fluttering Shearwater (*P. gavia*), Huttons Shearwater (*P. huttoni*) and the Manx Shearwater (*P. puffinus*), of the northern hemisphere, to be the same species. At sea they all look very similar

and are difficult to separate. New Zealand authorities, however, separate all three and regard Fluttering Shearwater and Huttons Shearwater as distinct species.

Description

Upperparts Dark brown. **Underparts** White. **Bill** Dark grey. **Feet** Brownish marked with white.

Conspicuous features

- A small shearwater.
- The very white underparts are noticeable.
- Look for the fine dark grey bill.
- Feet protrude slightly behind the tail in flight.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Birds have a habit of rapidly fluttering their wings as they take off from the sea. Accompanying the rapid wing beats the feet also assist with take off.
- Through the months of mid-December, January and February, Fluttering Shearwaters come together in communal flocks and sit on the water in rafts. These rafts can be approached by small boats. Sometimes rafts will form just off the coastline.
- Flocks of Fluttering Shearwater will follow schooling fish and will join in the melee for these fish along with gannets, White-fronted Terns and gulls. Usually Arctic Skuas will also be close by. In such situations Fluttering Shearwaters often adopt the diving characteristics of Diving Petrels.
- The usual flight pattern of a Fluttering Shearwater is four to five wing beats and then a short glide.
- Occasionally Fluttering Shearwaters get caught on fishermen's hooks.

Call Very noisy near their breeding colonies where they make a "ka – haa ka – haa – kehek", type call.

Differences between Fluttering and Huttons Shearwaters

- Fluttering Shearwaters are smaller in size than Huttons.
- Fluttering Shearwaters have shorter bills by 4 mm, than Huttons.
- Fluttering Shearwaters have lighter feather colouration and are whiter under the wing.
- Fluttering Shearwaters have different breeding habitats, nesting on small predator-free islands from the Three Kings to Marlborough Sounds in the south. Most Fluttering Shearwater burrows are at low altitudes.
- Huttons Shearwaters breed on the mainland of the South Island high in the Kaikoura Ranges above 1200 metres.
- Fluttering Shearwaters start breeding in mid-September (egg dates late

September and to mid-October).

- Huttons Shearwaters start breeding mid-October (egg dates November).
- Huttons Shearwater is a bird of the open seas rather than of the waters around sheltered offshore islands and bays. However, in the breeding season it will flock to about 1 km off the shoreline at dusk.

Where to find

Northland – Bay of Islands.

North Auckland – Kawau Island and to Tiri Tiri Matangi Island, will usually locate Fluttering Shearwaters. Over the summer months, flocks can be seen from Northland and Coromandel beaches. Regularly seen on the boat trip to Tiri Tiri Island. P. 292.

Auckland Harbour – From Auckland to Waiheke Island ferry during summer months.

Wellington – Wellington Harbour sitting in rafts and from Cook Strait ferry.

Marlborough Sounds – Near the Chetwode Islands.