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 back on and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured but usually change with age and/or season.

**COMMON TERN Sterna hirundo**

**Rare Arctic migrant**

- 36 cm, 14 in. Like small dark white-fronted tern, but bill shorter and flatter; legs rather long. At rest, deeply forked tail even with or slightly shorter than wings. Breeding adult has black cap sloping down to black bill with dull red base; pearl-grey underparts. In flight, sooty-grey 3-4 dark grey primaries (outer with grey and more prominent rufous, which appear as a freckled patch against the light, duller trailing edge to tip of underwings); dark outer edge to rufous-black legs. In non-breeding plumage, black cap replaces to levels of eye and underparts white; legs mostly black. Immature similar, but primaries dark, and tertials often have brownish tips. Flies more buoyantly/‘bubbleshop’ than other terns. On sea, frequently plunges frequently dives. Calls a short ‘kit’ and a raucous ‘keer’. Habitat: Breeds subantarctic. Migrates to temperate oceans. Only a few identified in NZ; mainly from North I coasts or coastal lakes. (Fig 247)

**GULLS, TERNS AND NODDIES**

About 88 species (47 gulls, 37 terns and 4 noddies) worldwide; 5 gulls, 8 terns and 3 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 tip. Juvenile plumage has a distinctive buff barring on the back and wings. Gulls have a strong bill with a distinctive shape, shallow 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 on coastal islands. Noddies breed only in the tropics or subtropics, and seabirds may have nested them for their abundant nesting roosting courtship displays. Terns are usually

**Laridae**

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 eggs on a depression on a tree branch. White small fish, caught mainly by plungefeeding or by picking from the surface of water and hold cerebrospinal fluid in the trees, are usually brought in courtship displays to the chicks, but some tropical terns and noddies feed by regurgitation. Chicks go on feeding for months after they can fly.


247. **COMMON TERN Sterna hirundo**

Plate 55

Since 36 cm, 14 in. Geographical variation: Three or four subspecies, possibly some clinal rather than subspecies hirundo breeds in North America and Europe, minuta occurs in central and southern Siberia, tohjitu in central Asia, and longirostris in eastern Asia and is the form most likely to reach New Zealand, although hirundo has also been recorded in Australia. Distribution: Breeds in eastern North America and across temperate Europe and Asia. Eastern Common Terns longirostris breed in northern Asia eastwards from Lake Baikal. They winter from eastern India to Australasia. Since the 1960s, they have become common in north-eastern Australia and New Guinea each summer, where floppy socks come to roost. In New Zealand, one was recorded at Lake Hawororau (1957), but the first positive sighting was of an adult in breeding plumage with White-fronted Terns at the mouth of the Wanganui River, Bay of Plenty (1974). Single pairs have sometimes been seen almost annually, mainly in the Bay of Plenty and on the Kapiti/Horqueama coast. Behaviour: Congregates often joining roosting flocks of White-fronted Terns, in which they are easily overlooked. Reading: Latham, J.C.M. 1846. Notilia 3: 69-76.