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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Royal albatross: pp 21-22.



ROYAL ALBATROSS

(Northern Royal, *Diomedea sandfordi*, and Southern Royal *D.epomophora*)

Family Diomedidae

Species *Diomedea sandfordi* and *D. epomophora*

Common name Royal Albatross

Other names Northern Royal Albatross and Southern Royal Albatross.

Status Endemic

Abundance Common

Size 1120 - 1300 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm).

Species Two species are recognised. They are the Northern Royal (*D. sandfordi*) and the Southern Royal (*D. epomophora*) – **above**.

Breeding islands close to New Zealand Northern Royal (*D. sandfordi*) on the South Island of New Zealand at Taiaroa Heads on the Otago Peninsula, and on islands off the Chatham Islands. Southern Royal (*D. epomophora*), Auckland Islands, Enderby Island and Campbell Island.

Breeding months October to September. Breeding season commences about

two months earlier than the Wandering Albatross.

Range worldwide Probably similar to the Wandering Albatross but does not wander as far north into the tropics.

New Zealand range Around New Zealand but more regularly seen from the Stewart Island coast to Cook Strait.

Description – mature bird (Northern Royal)

Upper and underparts White. **Upperwings** Black. **Underwings** White, with black leading edges from carpal joint to wing tip and black along the trailing edge. **Tail** White, but sometimes black dotted on the undertail. **Bill** Pinkish, with cream tip, and it has a black cutting-edge to the upper mandible.

Description – mature bird (Southern Royal)

Upper and underparts White. **Upperwings** Black, but with broad areas of white on inner leading edges. **Underwings** White with black leading edges from carpal joint to wing tip and black along the trailing edge. **Tail** White. **Bill** Pinkish, with cream tip and black cutting-edge to upper mandible similar to the Wandering Albatross.

Description – immature bird

Generally Royal Albatross immatures have traces of black on head, back and uppertail which are otherwise white. Northern Royals have more black markings than Southern Royals.

Differences between Northern and Southern Royal Albatrosses

- The Northern Royal adult has an all black upperwing.
- The Southern Royal adult has a black upperwing with broad areas of inner white on the leading edge and across the back.

Differences between Royal and Wandering Albatrosses

- See Wandering Albatross. P 19.

Differences between Albatrosses and Mollymawks

- Albatross species are white-backed, Mollymawks black-backed.

Where to find – North Island

Auckland – Hauraki Gulf. Try an excursion from Sandspit. P. 289.

Bay of Plenty – White Island. Try an excursion from Whakatane or Ohope to White Island in winter. P. 322.

Wellington – Cook Strait. Watch for them from the inter-island ferry.

Where to find – South Island

North Canterbury – Kaikoura. P. 345.

Canterbury – Akaroa Harbour. Excursions regularly leave from here. P. 351.

Otago Peninsula – Taiaroa Heads, Cape Saunders. P. 361.

Southland – Curio Bay. P. 364.

Southland – Bluff at Stirling Point. P365.

Where to find – Stewart Island

Foveaux Strait – Leave from Half Moon Bay. P. 367.

ALBATROSSES

From Page 19

“Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World”, by Derek Onley and Paul Scofield (2007), lists 13 species and subspecies of albatross for New Zealand waters. These are likely to be seen if the time of year is right for that species. This makes New Zealand an important seabird venue.

Note about names In New Zealand the species of albatross which have white backs, the Wandering Albatross and the Royal Albatross, are called albatrosses. The other species and subspecies in the family Diomedidae, all with black upperwings and black backs, are called mollymawks. The Sooty and Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses, in the genus *Phoebastria*, retain the name albatross.

Mainland nesting sites Only one species of albatross, the Northern Royal Albatross (*Diomedea sanfordi*), nests on mainland New Zealand. All the other species nest on offshore islands from the Chatham Islands south to the Campbell Islands.

“Beach-wrecked” birds Birds collected by members from the Ornithological Society of New Zealand over many years, indicate that all the albatrosses listed here are found in waters right around New Zealand. Auckland west coast beaches, for example, have provided dead birds of all listed species.

Although these birds range widely, they are only in northern waters during the winter months. Generally they do not come close to the shoreline, but during rough weather, Wandering Albatrosses have been known to enter Auckland Harbour near Rangitoto Island, and are recorded in Wellington Harbour. The southern waters, from Cook Strait south, provide the best opportunities to view these birds as they are closer to the breeding grounds.

Note Permission is required from the Department of Conservation to visit most of the seabird nesting islands.

Seabird places and excursions ideas Seabird excursions and land-based seabird sighting place are recorded in the back of the book – Sandspit excursions, P 289; Kaikoura excursions, P 345; land sites, P 376.