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Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Broad-billed prion: pp 56-57.

Prions summary: p 52-53.



BROAD-BILLED PRION

Family Procellariidae

Species *Pachyptila vittata*

Common name Broad-billed Prion

Status Native

Abundance Common

Size 280 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm)

Breeding islands close to New Zealand Breeds on islands in Foveaux Strait, around Stewart Island, around the Chatham Islands and at Snares Island.

Breeding months August to January. 1 white egg is laid in a burrow.

Range worldwide Known from New Zealand west to South America and up to latitude 19°S. Some adult birds remain close to its breeding grounds over winter months and occasionally make visits to their burrows.

New Zealand range Found right around the coast but with greater numbers near the breeding islands in the south.

Description

Face Above eye, white. Under eye to behind eye, black. **Upperparts** Bluish-grey. **Underparts** White, except for tip of tail which is black. **Wings** Distinctive dark primaries and scapulars create an black open M marking across wings when in flight. **Underwing** White, with grey on secondary feathers and wing tips. **Bill** Dark grey, tapering to a broad base at the gape.

Conspicuous features

- The open M wing marking is distinctive.
- Has prominent high forehead.
- White stripe above the eye is prominent.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Birds in fast flight reveal their white underwing to the sun.
- All prions are fast flying birds
- Seen singly or in flocks.
- In flocks tend to fly erratically with frequent swerving from side to side.

Where to find – North Island

Bay of Islands – Beyond Cape Brett in winter only.

North Auckland – Waters towards Little Barrier island in winter only. P. 289.

Where to find – South Island

Southern waters – Bluff to Stewart Island on the ferry in summer. P. 367.

PRIONS

All six recognised species of prion are known from New Zealand waters. These are:

- Fairy Prion (*Pachyptila turtur*), which is a true New Zealand species breeding on offshore islands from the Poor Knights in the north to Stewart Island. Regularly seen at any season off the New Zealand coast.
- Fulmar Prion (*Pachyptila crassirostris*), which breeds on Snares Island and other southern islands. Sometimes included with the Fairy Prion.
- Thin-billed Prion (*Pachyptila belcheri*), which breeds from the Macquarie Islands (small colony only), east to the Indian Ocean. It occasionally strays into New Zealand waters.
- Antarctic Prion (*Pachyptila desolata*), which breeds on the southern islands from the Auckland Islands eastwards. This species is a common winter visitor to the northern seas about New Zealand. Some authorities place this species with the Broad-billed Prion.
- Salvins Prion (*Pachyptila salvini*), a species which breeds on Indian Ocean islands but straggles to New Zealand and is sometimes collected from “beach wrecks”. Placed with the Broad-billed Prion by some authorities.
- Broad-billed Prion (*Pachyptila vittata*), which breeds in abundance around

the Chatham Islands and Stewart Island. This species can be found in all New Zealand waters and especially those to the south.

Similarities All species of prion are difficult to identify in normal sea conditions. They are all of blue-grey colouring with white underparts, apart from dark central tail feathers, and all have a dark brown open M mark across the wings and back. In New Zealand waters in summer, only Fairy Prions are likely to be seen in northern waters but both Fairy and Broad-billed Prions in southern waters. In winter all species might be found in the same waters so reliable identification will be difficult.