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Fairy prion: pp 53-54.

Prions summary: p 52-53.



FAIRY PRION

Family Procellariidae

Species *Pachyptila turtur*

Common name Fairy Prion

Status Native

Abundance Common

Size 230 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm)

Breeding islands close to New Zealand Breeds on many islands around New Zealand from Poor Knights Island in the north, south to Snares Island. Also on Mangere Island in the Chatham Islands group.

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

Range worldwide Found around southern oceans from New Zealand to South

Africa up to latitude 19° S. Some adult birds do not move far from the breeding grounds as birds are known to make occasional visits back to their nesting sites in winter. Immatures probably range more widely.

New Zealand range Found in all waters around New Zealand.

Description

Face Grey with a faint whitish stripe above the eye. **Upperparts** Bluish-grey.

Wings Bluish-grey with a black open M marking across wings and lower-back.

Underwing Distinctly white. **Underparts** White. **Tail** Grey, with half the tail being boldly tipped with black. **Bill** Black.

Conspicuous feature

- Dark open M marking on upperwings.

Conspicuous characteristics

- A fast flying species.
- Birds toss and swerve in a jaunty manner above the wave tops.
- Birds alight on the water to feed.

Differences between the Fairy Prion and the Broad-billed Prion

- Very white underwing and underparts of the Fairy Prion separates it from the Broad-billed Prion.
- The Fairy Prion lacks the dark under-eye marking of the Broad-billed Prion.
- The bold black tail tip of the Fairy Prion separates it from the Broad-billed which has a narrow black tip.

Where to find – North Island

Bay of Islands – Throughout the year a common species in the outer waters.

North Auckland – In waters towards Little Barrier Island. P. 289.

Wellington – Cook Strait from the ferry.

Where to find – South Island

Kaikoura – Regularly seen from the seabird excursions. P. 345.

Where to find Stewart Island

Half Moon Bay – From the Bluff to Stewart Island ferry. 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.

