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Westland black petrel: pp 46-47.



WESTLAND BLACK PETREL

Family Procellariidae

Species *Procellaria westlandica*

Common name Westland Black Petrel

Status Endemic

Abundance Uncommon

Size 480 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Black Petrel 460 mm, White-chinned Petrel 550 mm)

Breeding place The steep ranges in the Punakaiki district of Westland, in the South Island.

Breeding months April to December. 1 white egg is laid in a burrow.

Range worldwide Migrates from its breeding colonies mainly east of New Zealand beyond Chatham Island and into the Tasman Sea towards Australia.

New Zealand range Around the northern waters of the South Island and up the west coast of the North Island. Storm killed birds have been collected from Auckland west coast beaches.

Discussion The Westland Black Petrel has a breeding population estimated to be around 9000 birds and increasing.

Description

Upper and underparts Black. **Bill** Pale yellowish with a black bill tip. **Feet and legs** Black.

Conspicuous features

- An overall black bird.
- Pale yellowish bill with dark bill tip.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Has a steady and even wing beat when seen returning to its breeding colony in the evenings.
- Over the water it has typical petrel flight of wheeling turning and skimming down waves.

Call A silent bird when on its return to the breeding burrow but it makes a noisy guttural “coo-coo-rah” near its burrow.

Where to find – South Island

Westland – Paparoa Ranges. P. 374.

Best area to see them – Scotchmans Creek, 4 kms south of the Punakaiki River. P. 374.

Time of year to see them Between late February and December with June onwards being when the colony is at its peak of activity.

Viewing times 5 p.m. onwards in June. Some nights are better than others.

BLACK-COLOURED PETRELS AND SHEARWATERS

From pages 43-45

Black-coloured petrels and shearwaters ranging around New Zealand waters are always difficult to identify. These include the dark brownish coloured Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*), Flesh-footed Shearwater (*P. carneipes*), White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*), Westland Black Petrel (*P. westlandica*) and Black Petrel (*P. parkinsoni*).

In the deeper waters of the Hauraki Gulf, Sooty Shearwater, Flesh-footed Shearwater, and the Black Petrel can be seen together. In waters such as Cook Strait all the above species might be seen.

Locality and breeding differences between White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) Westland Black Petrel (*P. westlandica*) and the Black Petrel (*P. parkinsoni*):

- The Westland Black Petrel is a winter breeder occupying its breeding colonies from February to December. The Black Petrel breeds from October through to July and the White-chinned from November to May.
- The Westland Black Petrel is considered to be non-migratory in the true annual migration sense. It spreads across the Tasman towards Australia

while the Black Petrel migrates north-east of New Zealand and above the equator. The White-chinned Petrel is truly circumpolar.

- Breeding colonies of the three species are widely separated with Black Petrel breeding on Little Barrier Island and Great Barrier Island, Westland Black Petrel nesting on the Paparoa Ranges of mainland South Island in Westland, while the White-chinned Petrel nests well to the south of New Zealand on Auckland Island, Campbell Island and Antipodes Island, as well as other islands around the southern oceans.

Diagnostic similarities and differences between Sooty Shearwaters, Flesh-footed Shearwaters, White-chinned Petrels, Westland Black Petrels and Black Petrels as to bills and feet:

- Sooty Shearwater – bill dark grey. Legs and feet, lilac-brown.
- Flesh-footed Shearwater – bill pale yellowish, with top edge and tip, greyish. Legs and feet, flesh pink.
- White-chinned Petrel – bill yellowish with dark grey only at the end of the nasal tubes. Pale yellowish bill tip. Legs and feet, black.
- Westland Black Petrel – bill pale yellowish with black tip. Legs and feet, black.
- Black Petrel – bill pale yellowish with dark grey tip. Legs and feet, black.

General

- Birds have either yellowish or dark grey coloured bills.
- Birds have either black or pinkish legs and feet.
- All birds are difficult to separate at sea.
- The white chin of the White-chinned Petrel is not a good diagnostic feature as not all birds have it, but those with it are White-chinned Petrels.
- With the population of the Black Petrel increasing, the chances of seeing this species are improving. Chances are good for the Westland Black Petrel which numbers around 1100 breeding pairs, especially at Kaikoura.
- All species are noted for their habit of circling the coasts off their breeding islands at dusk, and then at dark, coming in and falling through the shrub canopies to land, all the time making very noisy and vocal calls. After a brief respite around midnight the noise again starts as birds leave the burrows for their take-off points.