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Black petrel: pp 45-46.



BLACK PETREL

Family Procellariidae

Species *Procellaria parkinsoni*

Common name Black Petrel

Status Endemic

Abundance Rare but numbers are increasing

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

Breeding islands close to New Zealand Little Barrier and Great Barrier Island. The Little Barrier Island colony near the summit was in the past severely predated on by cats but with the eradication of these, numbers are increasing (7 pairs breeding in 1988, 100 pairs in 2008). Great Barrier Island birds have been less predated even though cats and rats are present – population 800 pairs.

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

Range worldwide Eastwards from New Zealand into the tropical Pacific and across the Tasman to Australia.

New Zealand range Around the North Island and north of the South Island.

Discussion The Black Petrel is thought to have originally nested in the higher ranges of the North Island and in the Heaphy Range near Nelson in the South Island. Introduced predators helped to bring about its demise in these places.

Although the breeding colonies of this species must have overlapped with the Westland Black Petrel in the past, the species have evolved separately with different breeding seasons and migration patterns. It is considered a close relative of the White-chinned Petrel (*P. aequinoctialis*) which breeds to the south of New Zealand on the Auckland, Campbell and Antipodes Islands. This species is also a summer breeder.

Description

Upperparts Black. **Underparts** Black. **Bill** Pale yellowish with dark grey tip. **Feet and legs** Black.

Conspicuous features

- An all black petrel.
- Pale yellowish bill with dark grey tip.
- Conspicuous characteristics
- Wheels, glides, tosses and skids down waves in rough weather. A rather stiff-winged and continuous flier in calm weather.

Call Staccato like clacks and dull moans.

Where to find

Northland – Bay of Islands Occasionally seen in these waters.

North Auckland – Waters towards Little Barrier Island. P. 289.

Coromandel – Mercury Islands waters.

Wellington – Cook Strait from the ferry. Could be mixed with Westland Black or White-chinned Petrel in these waters.

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.