

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Summary of shags: PP 75-76

Black shag: pp 76-77.



BLACK SHAG

Family Phalacrocoracidae

Species *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common names Black Shag, Great Cormorant

Status Native

Abundance Common

Size 880 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm)

Habitat A bird of muddy estuaries, tidal areas, and sand banks but also found inland along drains, canals and lakes in most fresh-water localities.

Range worldwide Found in Australia and through much of the world from North America to Europe and through Africa, Asia and Micronesia. The New Zealand Black Shag tends to have far less white on the face and throat than does the African species which is white-throated. Some New Zealand birds lack the white

altogether.

New Zealand range Found throughout New Zealand.

Description

Face White (on some birds only). **Facial skin** Yellow. **Upperparts and underparts** Black. **Flank patches** White (on some birds only). **Bill** Grey.

Description – immature birds

Upperparts Brownish-black. **Underparts** Variable amounts of dirty white.

Conspicuous feature

- A heavy looking all black bird.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Often seen perched high on trees with wings extended.
- Sits on sand banks in an upright position with a kinked neck-bulge.
- Flight heavy and slow.

Nest Makes a platform of sticks in a tree. Up to 4 bluish-green eggs.

Call Usually silent, but croaks and grunts are made at the nest.

Where to find – North Island

Auckland – Manukau Harbour from the Southern Motorway. P. 300.

Auckland – Waitemata Harbour and the Tamaki Estuary. P. 297, 298.

South Auckland – Miranda at Pukororo Creek. P. 302.

North Island generally – Found in most waterways and estuarine localities.

Where to find – South Island

Any waterway coastal or inland could have this bird.

SHAGS

Groupings of New Zealand shags New Zealand's shags are grouped in the one genus of *Phalacrocorax*. Previously they were grouped as –

- **Black-footed shags – Phalacrocorax** including Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Little Black Shag (*P. sulcirostris*), Pied Shag (*P. varius*), and Little Shag (*P. melanoleucos*). This group, apart from the Pied Shag which only occasionally ranges inland, are birds of both coastal waters and inland fresh water lakes and rivers. They are all tree-nesting birds although Black Shags will sometimes nest on rock ledges and sand banks.
- **Pink-footed shags – Leucocarbo** including King Shag (*Leucocarbo carunculatus*), Stewart Island Shag (*L. chalconotus*), Bounty Island Shag (*L. ranfurlyi*), Chatham Island Shag (*L. onslowi*), Campbell Island Shag (*L. campbelli*), Auckland Island Shag (*L. colensoi*) and Emperor Shag (*L. atriceps*). The pink-footed group are strictly coastal birds which breed on rock ledges.
- **Orange-footed shags – Stictocarbo** including Pitt Island Shag (*S.*

featherstoni), Spotted Shag (*S. punctatus*) and its subspecies the Blue Shag (*S. p. steadi*) which has darker upper plumage and lacks the wide white facial and neck stripe of the spotted, this being reduced to a narrow band of white which does not extend in front of the eye. These species are strictly coastal and nest on rock ledges in inaccessible places.

Characteristics of Shag species

- They dive for fish, some singly, but others like the Little Black Shag, in packs.
- After fishing, wing-spreading habits are common to all species but more so with the black-footed varieties. This latter action may be to help dry water-logged wings, as shags have inadequate feather waterproofing, possessing a grease gland at the bottom of the neck which is not equipped to cater for long under-water fishing excursions. It is possible a lack of feather waterproofing hinders flotation of swimming birds and so enables them to spend longer under the water.
- All New Zealand shags have similar flight patterns usually flying low to the water with necks outstretched. At times though they will fly at higher altitudes. Some also have the ability to raise a crest during the breeding season.