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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Summary of shags: pp 75-76.

Pied shag: pp 77-79.



PIED SHAG

Family Phalacrocoracidae

Species *Phalacrocorax varius*

Common name Pied Shag

Status Native

Abundance Common

Size 810 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Black Shag 880 mm)

Habitat Generally a coastal bird which usually prefers clean water for fishing, unlike the Black Shag which readily fishes in muddy waters. Might venture for short distances inland.

Range worldwide Closely related to Australian Pied Shag which is identical in appearance. The Australian bird though is a bird of inland waterways as well

as of coastal habitat while the New Zealand bird generally inhabits the coastal margins and only occasionally travels inland.

New Zealand range Found around the New Zealand coast including Stewart Island with gaps from Kawhia around to Napier and along the Westland coast and the Canterbury coast. Concentrations are found in Northland and the Bay of Plenty in the North Island, and the Marlborough Sounds and Fiordland in the South Island. There are several breeding colonies in Paterson Inlet on Stewart Island.

Description

Crown Black. **Face and side of neck** Pure white. **Eye-ring** Blue. **Facial skin** Yellow.

Upperparts Pure black. **Underparts** Pure white. **Bill** Grey. **Feet and legs** Black.

Conspicuous feature

- It is slightly smaller than the Black Shag but bigger than the Little Shag.

Conspicuous characteristics

- A white breast highlights a bird in a tree.
- Regularly sits on coastal rocks.
- Sits in the company of other species including Spotted and Little Shags.
- Sits in groups on sandy beaches in horizontal, duck-like, posture with tails cocked vertically above backs.

Call Grunts, croaks and squeals are heard at the nesting site.

Nest A colonial nester making a twig nest in a tree. Up to 4 greenish eggs are laid.

Where to find – North Island

Northland – Around the Bay of Islands it is common.

North Auckland – Whangaparaoa, Wenderholm and Weiti (Wade) River. P. 291, 292, 294.

North Auckland – There is a small colony on Kaipara Lake on South Head. Turn right into Tuparekura Road, 12 kms north of Parakai and left into Kaipara Lake Road. Walk down concrete driveway on left. P. 294.

Auckland – Orakei and Panmure Basins. P. 298.

South Auckland – Manukau Harbour and Waiau Beach P. 301.

Coromandel Peninsula – North of Thames on the coast road. P. 305.

Bay of Plenty – Kaituna River-mouth. P. 320.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough Sounds – Common on both Queen Charlotte Sound and Pelorus Sound. P. 342.

North Canterbury – Found along the coast and around Banks Peninsula. Not common along the South Canterbury coast.

Where to find Stewart Island

Paterson Inlet – A large nesting colony can be seen on Ulva Island. P. 367.

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.