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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Summary of shags: pp 75-76.

Little black shag: pp 79-80.



### LITTLE BLACK SHAG

**Family** Phalacrocoracidae

**Species** *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*

**Common name** Little Black Shag

**Abundance** Common

**Status** Native

**Size** 610 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Black Shag 880 mm)

**Habitat** Found on harbours and estuaries, inland lakes and rivers and often near human habitation, such as at Orakei Basin in Auckland, along the Waikato River

in Hamilton and in the bays of Lake Rotoiti close to cottages.

**Range worldwide** Found throughout a number of countries from Borneo to Indonesia and the Philippines, to Australia and New Zealand.

**New Zealand range** Well spread through Northland, the Waikato and the Bay of Plenty, but scattered populations exist in many other places in the North Island. Away from the Marlborough Sounds it is generally uncommon in the South Island.

### **Description**

**Upperparts** Black. **Underparts** Black. **Bill** Lead colour. **Feet and legs** Black.

**Description – immature bird** Black.

### **Conspicuous features**

- Smaller than the Black Shag.
- Of sleeker appearance than the Little Shag.
- Bill is long, slender and lead coloured.
- Tail is slightly shorter than that of the Little Shag.

### **Conspicuous characteristics**

- Often seen swimming in packs. Sometimes up to 100 birds might be seen all bobbing up together and diving together.
- A gregarious species which often roosts together in large numbers.

**Call** Croaks and whistles, at the nest site only.

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

### **Differences between immature Little Black Shags and Little Shags**

- Little Black Shags are sleeker and have more gloss to their plumage.
- Little Black Shags have longer and more slender bills than Little Shags.
- Little Black Shags have lead coloured bills.
- Little Shags have yellow bills.
- Little Black Shags lack the small head crest of Little Shags.

### **Where to find – North Island**

**Northland** – Around the coast and on wharfs and jetties.

**Auckland** – Hobson Bay and Orakei Basin in Remuera. P. 298.

**South Auckland** – Miranda and Matingarahi. P. 302.

**Waikato** – Waikato River in the lower reaches to Hamilton city.

**Rotorua** – Lake Rotorua on jetties. P. 324.

**Wellington** – Waikanae Estuary near beach. P. 342.

### **Where to find – South Island**

**Marlborough** – Pelorus Sound and Charlotte Sounds.

## 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.