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Summary of shags: pp 75-76.

Spotted shag: pp 84-86.



SPOTTED SHAG

Family Phalacrocoracidae

Species *Phalacrocorax punctatus*

Common name Spotted Shag

Status Endemic

Abundance Common in localised coastal areas

Size 730 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Pied Shag 810 mm)

Habitat A coastal species which roosts and nests on cliff ledges and in and around crevices and small rock caves.

New Zealand range In the North Island most of the population is confined to the Hauraki Gulf, along the coast near the township of Coromandel and a small number at Erangi Point at Bethells Beach (Te Henga), west of Auckland. Also around the Wellington coast. In the South Island the range is extensive with the Spotted Shag (*P. punctatus*) being found from Marlborough to Otago and the Blue Shag (*P. p. steadi*) being found around eastern Southland and up the West

Coast. It is absent from Fiordland.

Discussion Considered closely related to the Red-legged Shag (*Phalacrocorax gaimardi*) which is found along the west coast of South America. The slightly different Blue Shag (*P. p. steadi*), is considered a subspecies of *P. punctatus*.

Description

Head Black with a distinctive white head and neck stripe starting from above the eye then down the neck. **Naked skin around eye** Greenish-blue. **Crest** Black in breeding plumage birds. **Wings** Greyish-brown with black spotting. **Breast** Soft grey. **Underwings and undertail** Black. **Bill** Light brown. **Legs and feet** Orange.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Roosts on coastal rocks.
- Regularly feed up to 15 kms out to sea.
- Congregates in giant feeding rafts on the water where food is plentiful.
- Congregates at breeding colony roosts at night and can be seen in late afternoon flying low over the water as they head towards these places.

Call Usually silent but grunts and croaks can be heard when displaying.

Nest A colonial breeder nesting on the ground on cliffs or rocks. Nests are made of grass and seaweed. Up to 3 pale blue eggs are laid. Nesting colonies can spread over steep cliff faces.

Differences between the Spotted Shag, Blue Shag and Pitt Island Shag

- **Spotted Shag** Is the most colourful when in breeding plumage. It is distinguished by a broad white stripe which extends from above the eye and down the side of the neck. The black spotting on greyish-brown wings is clearly visible.
- **Blue Shag** The white head and neck stripe is much thinner and starts from behind the eye and not above, as in the Spotted Shag. This species has darker wings with the black spotting barely noticeable.
- **Pitt Island Shag** The white head and neck stripe is missing on this species. Sometimes white freckling can be seen on the hind neck. The black spotting on the wings is less noticeable than with the Spotted Shag.

Where to find – North Island (Spotted Shag – *P. punctatus*)

West Auckland – Bethells Beach. Only a few birds nest here and usually high up. P. 296.

South Auckland – Firth of Thames at Matingarahi Beach. This site is reliant on a fairly high tide. The rocks cover over at high tide. P. 302.

Coromandel – Thames about 4 kms north of the town of Thames. P. 305.

Coromandel – Waiomu Beach about 15 kms north of Thames. P. 306.

Coromandel – On offshore islands west and north of Coromandel township. P. 306.

Wellington – Waikanae Estuary. P. 339.

Wellington Harbour – Look for them around the wharf if taking the ferry to the South Island.

Where to find – South Island (Spotted Shag – *P. punctatus*)

North Canterbury – Kaikoura at the Raramai tunnel about 8 kms south of Kaikoura near Goose Bay and Oara. P. 345.

South Canterbury – Oamaru Harbour near breakwater. P. 357.

Otago Peninsula – Taiaroa Heads with Stewart Island Shags below the albatross observatory. P. 360.

Where to find – South Island (Blue Shag – *P. p. punctatus*)

Southland – Invercargill along coast to Riverton. P. 366.

Westland – Perpendicular Point 4 kms north of Punakaiki Rocks on cliffs. P. 374.

Westland – Motukiekie Rocks north of Greymouth just north of Nine Mile Bluff. P. 374.

Where to find – Stewart Island (Blue Shag – *P. p. punctatus*)

Paterson Inlet – Common in Paterson Inlet. P. 367.

Whero Island – Off the entrance to Paterson Inlet. P. 367.

Native Island – Just inside Paterson Inlet. P. 367.

Ulva Island – Inside Paterson Inlet. 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.

