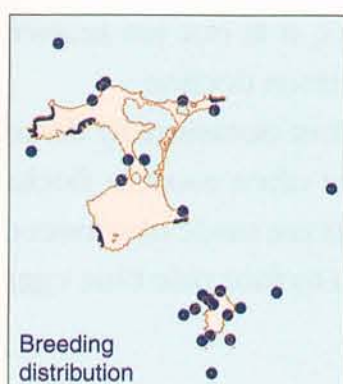




## Pitt Island shag *Stictocarbo featherstoni*

63 cm

CHATHAM ISLANDS ENDEMIC, RANGE RESTRICTED



Pitt Island shag on nest, Tapuaenuku, September 1976.

Photo: Dick Veitch (DOC).

### Identification

The Pitt Island shag is more slender than the Chatham Island shag, and has yellow feet, a long slender bill, a dark head, double crest and upperparts, and light grey underparts. The wings are dark grey with small black spots, similar to those of the closely related spotted shag around coasts of mainland New Zealand. The lime-green face and white plumes at the back of the neck are particularly prominent just before breeding. Sexes are alike. Pitt Island shags can be recognised in flight by their slim silhouette, dark plumage, and because they hold their neck and head horizontal.

### Distribution and ecology

The Pitt Island shag is a marine species restricted to the Chatham Islands. It breeds in small colonies of 3–20 pairs on rocky headlands, coastal cliff ledges and islets. Pitt Island shags breed on Chatham, Pitt, and Rabbit Islands, Rangatira, Mangere, Star Keys, Tapuaenuku, The



Castle, some of the Murumurus, The Pyramid, The Forty Fours, The Sisters, and Western Reef. Some also breed on Shag Rock (off Motuhinahina) in Te Whanga Lagoon. The total Pitt Island shag population is estimated to be less than 700 breeding pairs. Nests are platforms of seaweed and other vegetation cemented with guano. Three pale blue eggs are laid during August to December. Nest sites are often changed between years.

### Threats and conservation

Pitt Island shags usually nest at sites inaccessible to dogs, pigs or stock. However, a few nests on Chatham and Pitt Islands are at sites accessible to feral cats and weka. Some eggs and chicks may be lost to rats on Chatham Island. Pitt Island shags are sometimes caught in crayfish pots and cod pots, and illegal shooting has occasionally been reported.

Colonies on Rangatira and Mangere are protected by the gazettal of the islands as Nature Reserves, the removal of stock, and quarantine measures implemented to prevent the arrival of mammalian predators. A survey of breeding sites and census of breeding pairs was conducted by the Department of Conservation in 1997 and 2003, revealing an apparent decline of 25% over the 6 years.



Top: Pitt Island shag in breeding plumage, with Mangere in background, October 1976. Photo: Rod Morris (DOC)

Above: Juvenile Pitt Island shags, Rangatira, December 1983.

Photo: Colin Miskelly..