

Frigatebirds are large dark seabirds with very long thin pointed wings, long deeply forked tail and long hooked bill. The sexes differ in the amount of white on their underparts; males are mostly black and have a dark bill, whereas females have a prominent white chest and a pale bill. Immatures are hard to separate, having gingery heads and white chests like females. Usually seen soaring high over tropical seas or pursuing other birds, particularly boobies and terns, forcing them to drop their food, which they catch in midair. They feed entirely on the wing, snatching flying fish and picking fish and squid from the surface of the sea.

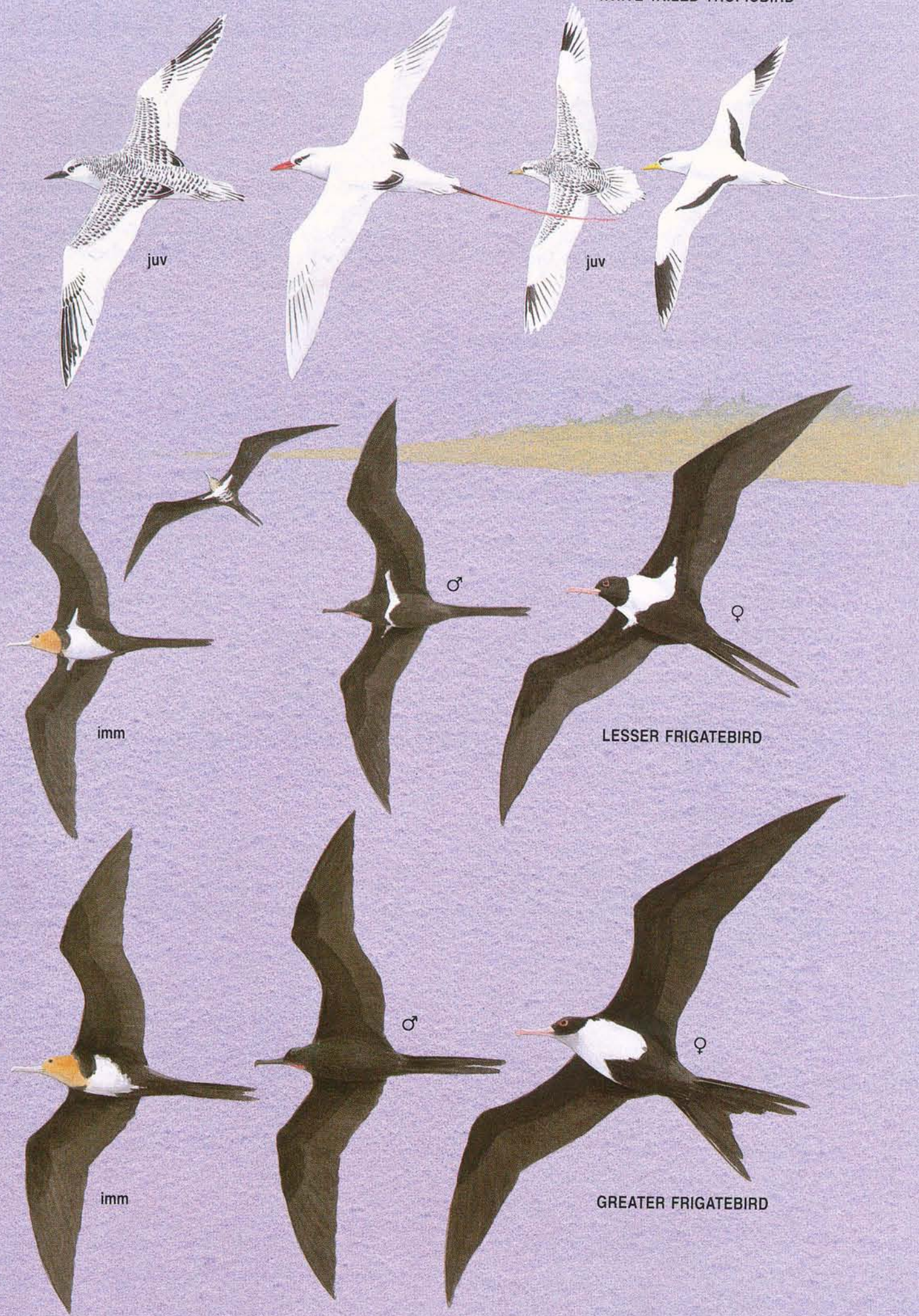
LESSER FRIGATEBIRD *Fregata ariel*

Rare tropical vagrant

76 cm, 1000 g. Diagnostic thin white tab extends from the chest onto the armpits and base of the underwing. Adult male is otherwise all dark. Adult female has white of chest and flanks extending to hindneck as a white collar contrasting with the dark hood, chin and throat. Juvenile has a white chest and gingery head, blotched white when worn. **Habitat:** Tropical seas. [Sp 105]

RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD

WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD



FRIGATEBIRDS

Fregatidae

5 species, of which 2 reach New Zealand.

Sailors called frigatebirds 'man-o'-war birds' because of their piratical habits. They inhabit tropical seas, often hundreds of kilometres from land, soaring high on thermals. They feed entirely on the wing, taking flying fish and squid by surface dipping and, to a lesser

extent, pursuing other seabirds, particularly boobies, and forcing them to disgorge their food. Most breed on remote islands, nesting in colonies in trees or on bushes, or, if necessary, on the ground. The nest is made of loosely woven sticks. They lay a single white egg.

105. LESSER FRIGATEBIRD *Fregata ariel*

Plate 21

Other name: Least Frigatebird
Size: 76 cm, 1000 g
Geographical variation: Three subspecies: *ariel*, of the central Indian Ocean, Australia and the southwestern Pacific, is the form recorded from New Zealand waters.
Distribution: Breed on islands of the tropical Indian, Pacific and southwestern Atlantic Oceans. They are more often recorded in New Zealand than Greater Frigatebirds because the nearest breeding sites are on islands off

Queensland, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. About 12 specimens have been collected beach-wrecked in New Zealand since 1907, mostly in the north, but including Cook Strait and the Chatham Islands; also about 12 sightings, mostly at the Kermadecs and in Northland, but as far south as Otago and at Chatham Island. Lesser Frigatebirds probably get swept south by tropical storms, as happened in 1971 when several were seen off the Northland coast.