

Text and images extracted from Heather, B.D. & Robertson, H.A. (2005) *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*. Penguin Books, Auckland. Pages 122, 332, 424, 426.

Gulls, terns and noddies are a large cosmopolitan group of mainly coastal birds. Most have short straight bills and short legs. Sexes alike. Usually grey, black or brown above, and white below in adults; juveniles usually have brown barring on back and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured but usually change with age and/or season.

GULLS, TERNS and NODDIES Laridae

About 88 species (47 gulls, 37 terns and 4 noddies) worldwide: 3 gulls, 6 terns and 4 noddies breed in the New Zealand region, and 8 terns visit regularly or as rare vagrants.

Gulls are coastal or inland birds in New Zealand. Adults have white bodies and grey or black backs, and broad wings with black and white patterning at the tips. Juvenile plumage has a distinctive buff barring on the back and wings. Gulls have a strong bill with a distinctive shape, deepest about a third of the way back from the tip. They walk well on quite long legs. Gregarious; breeding in colonies and feeding and roosting in large numbers. The ground nest is a shallow cup in a low, well-formed mound of vegetation. Chicks are fed by regurgitation. Gulls feed on a wide variety of foods, including human refuse, fish, shellfish, crustaceans and other invertebrates (including earthworms and grubs exposed by ploughing) and eggs of other birds.

Terns and noddies are mostly pelagic or coastal, except some are inland on rivers or over coastal lakes. Noddies breed only in the tropics or subtropics, and sailors may have named them for their absurd-seeming nodding courtship displays. Terns are usually

white below and shades of black or grey above, while noddies are more uniformly white, grey or brown. Juvenile plumage has buff barring, especially on the back and wings. Terns and noddies are more aerial than gulls and are more delicate; their wings are narrower and more pointed and their tail is often forked, sometimes deeply. They have straight, slender, tapering bills. They shuffle or waddle along on short legs. Gregarious; breeding in colonies and feeding and roosting in tight flocks. The nest is a simple scrape or depression in sand, shingle, shell or rock, but some noddies build a small platform nest in a tree or shrub, and White Terns simply lay their egg in a depression on a tree branch. Whole small fish, caught mainly by plunging or by picking from the surface of water and held crosswise in the bill, are usually brought in courtship display and to the chicks, but some tropical terns and noddies feed by regurgitation. Chicks go on begging for months after they can fly.

Reading: Grant, P.J. 1981. *Gulls: An Identification Guide*. Calton: Poyser. Harrison, P. 1983. *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*. Beckenham: Croom Helm. Serventy, D.L. et al. 1971. *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed.

ADDENDUM

Since 1996, the following 11 species were accepted by the Rare Birds Committee of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand as having been reliably recorded for the first time in the New Zealand region. All appeared as single vagrants or stragglers, and none of the species has settled to breed.

FRANKLIN'S GULL *Larus pipixcan*

Size: 35 cm, 280 g

Description: Like a very dark grey Black-billed Gull or Red-billed Gull with extensive black on the head, especially from the eye to the hind crown in all plumages, and a contrasting white crescent around the back of the eye. Back, scapulars and wing coverts slate grey, separated from the black hood, hind crown and upper neck by a white lower neck. Bill black, turning red in breeding plumage; legs and feet black. Flight graceful, almost tern-like, the wings appearing long and narrow. In flight, the upperwing is grey with a broad white trailing edge, white wing tips with broad black subterminal band separated from grey

upperwing by a white band. Immatures have a black subterminal bar across the entire tail and less distinct wing markings except for the broad white trailing edge.

Distribution: Breeds in inland North America, especially in the prairies, and migrates to the Gulf Coast, Mexico and the western coast of South America. Vagrants have reached Australia, and the one New Zealand record was of a bird in full breeding plumage in July 2002 at Tomahawk Lagoon, Dunedin.

Reading: Onley, D.J. & Schweigman, P. 2004. *Notornis* 51: 49–50.