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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Black-billed gull: pp 189-190.



BLACK-BILLED GULL

Family Laridae

Species *Larus bulleri*

Common name Black-billed Gull

Status Endemic

Abundance Common in selected areas

Size 370 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Red-billed Gull 370 mm)

Habitat Pastureland and river-beds with a coastwards and northwards movement in winter.

New Zealand range Well-spread through inland South Island pastureland areas. In the North Island it is scattered around coastal estuaries northwards to Miranda and Manukau Harbour.

Discussion The Black-billed Gull is often seen feeding with Black-fronted Terns when its tern-like flight sometimes causes confusion. Over recent years it has spread to the North Island breeding at Te Hihi on the Manukau Harbour and

Miranda, while regularly being seen at Tauranga Harbour, Lake Rotorua and Manawatu Estuary and Waikanae Estuary. Its closest relative is thought to be the Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*), a species which ranges through southern Europe and North Africa to Pakistan.

Description

Head, neck and underparts Pure white. **Wings** Soft grey. **Primaries** Soft grey, edged with black and a trace of white. **Bill and legs** Black.

Note See Red-billed Gull article for differences between species, immature birds and habitats.

Conspicuous features

- Black bill and black feet which separate mature Black-billed Gulls from Red-billed Gulls.
- Less black on primary feathers, showing more white on wings when in flight than Red-billed Gulls.

Call As for Red-billed Gull.

Nest A colonial nester which makes a nest of twigs and seaweed on sand or river pebbles. Up to 2 pale greenish, brown-blotched eggs are laid.

From PP 188-189

Differences between mature Red-billed Gulls and Black-billed Gulls

- Red-billed has a red bill.
- Black-billed has black bill.
- Red-billed has a shorter and heavier bill than the Black-billed.
- Red-billed has red legs.
- Black-billed has reddish-black legs.
- Red-billed has distinctive black wing tips with a triangle of black on the end of wings and a white marking among the black.
- Red-billed has a heavier head with the eye appearing to be less well balanced within it than the Black-billed.
- Black-billed has only an edge of black on the wing tips showing much more white on the wings when in flight.
- Black-billed has a softer appearance than the Red-billed.
- Black-billed have black tail dots on the end of the upper tail.

Differences between immature Red-billed Gulls and Black-billed Gulls

- Red-billed Gull has a black bill in the fledgling stage and blackish legs.
- Black-billed Gull has a reddish bill with a dark tip and dark reddish legs in the fledgling stage.

Ecological differences between Red-billed Gulls and Black-billed Gulls

- Red-billed Gull takes a wide range of sea foods. It is also a recognised scavenger well known for its rubbish tip feeding habits.

- Black-billed Gull is a specialised feeder taking estuarine fish and crustacean matter as well as worms and insects common on pastureland. It has a regular habit of following the plough in parts of the South Island.

Habitat differences between Red-billed Gulls and Black-billed Gulls

- Red-billed Gull is mainly a coastal bird.
- Black-billed Gull is predominantly an inland bird.
- Red-billed Gull is a coastal nesting species.
- Black-billed Gull nests inland on the wide riverbeds of the South Island. In the North Island it is recorded nesting on sand and shell-spits.

Where to find – North Island

South Auckland – Wattle Downs Ponds. P. 299.

South Auckland – Manukau Harbour at Te Hihi. P. 300.

South Auckland – Miranda on the shellbank. P. 302.

Bay of Plenty – Rotorua behind the Polynesian Pools. P. 324.

Where to find – South Island

Southland – Open pastureland.

Southland – Eglinton Valley near Cascade Creek. P. 370.

Southland – Oreti River just north of Mossburn. P. 369.