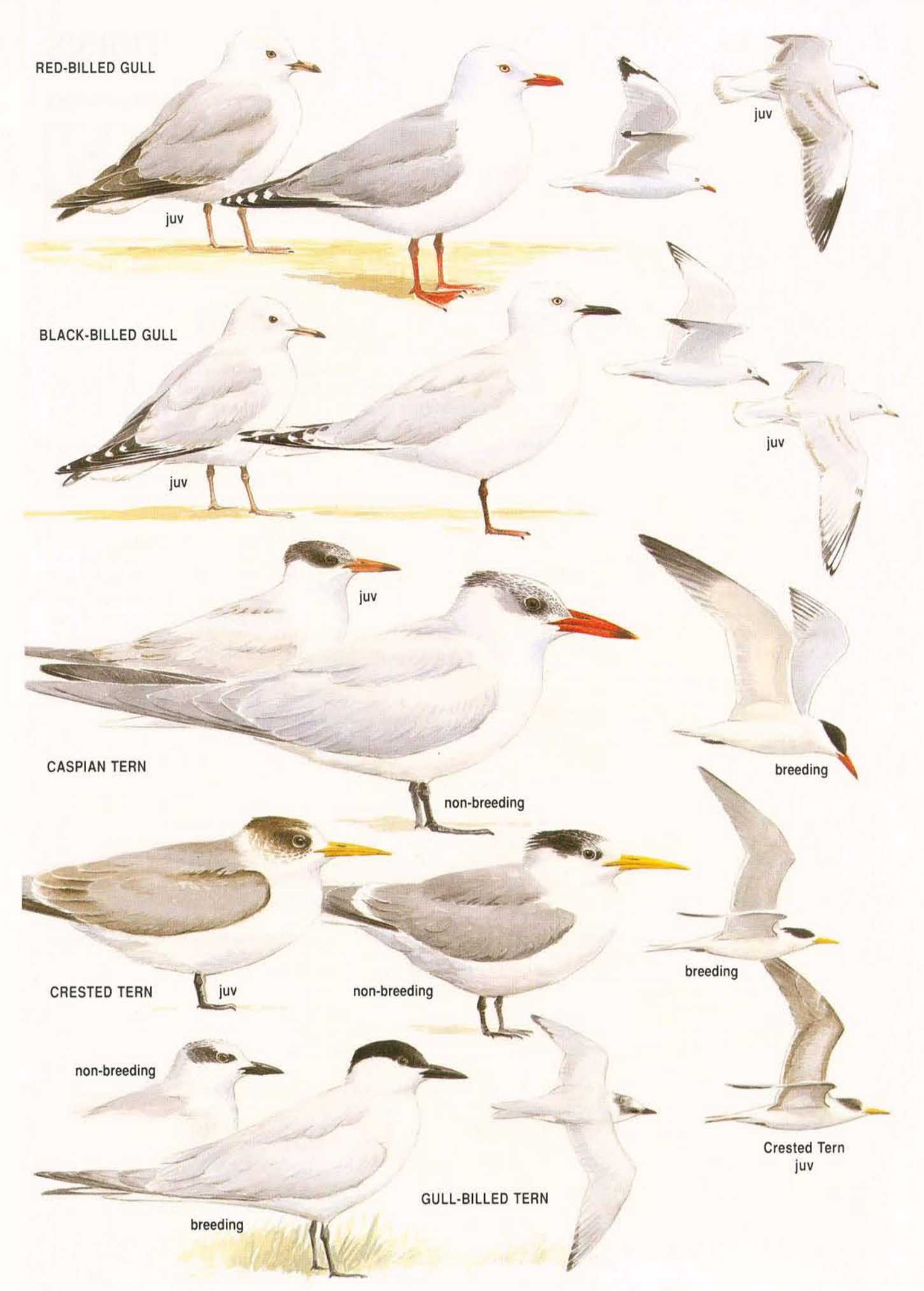


Gulls, terns and noddies are a large cosmopolitan group of mainly coastal birds. Most have short straight bills and short legs. Sexes alike. Usually grey, black or brown above, and white below in adults; juveniles usually have brown barring on back and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured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

BLACK-BILLED GULL *Larus bulleri*

Common endemic

37 cm; ♂ 300 g, ♀ 250 g. *Very pale* gull of inland South I and coasts. Like Red-billed Gull but *longer thinner bill* and *very pale wingtips*. Adult has back and *wings pale silvery grey, wingtips only thinly bordered black*. Long thin black bill; legs and feet black or reddish black; eye white. Juvenile quickly loses small grey patch behind eye; has more extensive black on wingtips; bill pale flesh with dark tip; legs from pinkish to reddish black; eye brown. **Habitat:** Breeds on riverbeds and lake margins of South I, some also in southern North I and at Lake Rotorua; a few coastal colonies in both islands. Feeds inland in wet paddocks, ploughed fields and over lakes; also coastal waters, beaches and estuaries. **Breeding:** Sep–Feb.



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.

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.

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.

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.

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

235. BLACK-BILLED GULL *Larus bulleri* Plate 54

Size: 37 cm; males 300 g, females 250 g
Distribution: New Zealand only. Breed mainly on braided riverbeds of the South Island from Marlborough to Southland, but some nest on Hawke's Bay and Wairarapa riverbeds, and there are also a few colonies on the North Island coast (Manukau Harbour, Bay of Plenty, Gisborne, Wairoa, Clive and Porangahau) and a colony at Lake Rotorua,

where they nest with, and rarely hybridise with, Red-billed Gulls. In spring and summer, Black-billed Gulls are mainly inland on the larger rivers and lakes of the South Island and on nearby arable farmland where they are often seen following the plough. In winter, they are mainly coastal, frequenting estuaries, harbours, open coastlines and parks of coastal towns, often in association with Red-billed

Gulls. In bad weather, they head inland to feed on flooded pasture and wet sportsfields. A few inhabit lakes in the central North Island. They are moderately mobile, with many South Island birds moving to the southern North Island in winter; some birds reach Stewart Island and vagrants appear at The Snares. **Population:** c. 50,000 pairs in 1996. For some unknown reason, numbers of Black-billed Gulls have crashed in the South Island since the 1970s. For instance, the number nesting on the Oreti River, Southland, declined from 85,000 pairs in 1974 to 15,000 pairs in 1997 and there were only 33,500 pairs in Southland in 1996. However, they are slowly increasing in numbers and range in the North Island. Before 1970, the only known regular breeding colony in the North Island was at Lake Rotorua, but several coastal and riverbed colonies have been established recently.

replacements after a colony has been destroyed by floods or predators, or deserted if food supplies dwindle in the early stages of the nesting cycle. Within each colony, most birds start laying within a few days, and usually within a fortnight of occupying the site, although some late arrivals lay near the edge of the colony well after the majority are incubating. They lay 1–2–4 pale olive-green to pale grey eggs (55 x 37 mm) with sparse light and dark brown blotches. Both sexes incubate for 20–24 days. The chicks are capable of walking within 24 hours of hatching, and 1–2 days after the final chick hatches, the family abandons its nest site and becomes nomadic within the vicinity of the colony, though both parents continue to brood, feed and guard the young. The young chicks are fed by regurgitating onto the ground, but older chicks feed from their parents' bills. From about 2 weeks old the chicks are capable of swimming, and at about this age the chicks tend to congregate in loose crèches guarded by a few adults. These are usually near the water's edge, and if a ground predator approaches, the chicks swim out in a tightly packed raft, with the adults mobbing the predator by swooping and calling noisily. The chicks fledge at c. 26 days. They first breed at 2 years old and can live for over 18 years.

Conservation: Protected endemic. Although Black-billed Gulls are less parasitic on man than are the other gulls, they have probably benefited from human settlement in New Zealand, especially with the creation of arable farmland near their South Island riverbed breeding sites. The cause of the recent declines in Southland are unknown, but possibly due to introduced predators, weed encroachment and human disturbance of colonies.

Behaviour: Highly gregarious; nesting in large colonies, roosting in large flocks and often feeding in flocks of birds at locally abundant food. When breeding, they defend a small patch around their nest site, attack other birds entering the area and mob predators and people approaching the colony. Black-billed Gulls have a large variety of breeding calls, but the most characteristic call heard through the year is a loud and discordant screech.

Breeding: Black-billed Gulls nest in large, densely packed colonies of up to 1000 pairs on open shingle margins or islands in braided riverbeds, or on the coast on sandspits, boulderbanks or shellbanks. Most birds form pairs in their winter flocks. On South Island rivers, birds return in September to the general area of their previous colony, but with changes in riverbed patterns and in vegetation growth, they rarely use the same site for more than a few years. Once a site has been chosen, they quickly build their nests and start laying, but further nest material is added as incubation proceeds. The nest is a small mound of dry grass and twigs of driftwood, measuring about 15 cm in diameter, with a shallow depression in the centre. Nests are c. 50 cm apart in the centre of colonies, further apart towards the edge.

Feeding: Inland-breeding Black-billed Gulls usually feed in flocks on unpredictable but temporarily rich food supplies such as invertebrates (especially earthworms and grass-grub adults and larvae) exposed by ploughing or brought to the surface by irrigation or rains, and shoals of small fish such as whitebait and young flatfish. They are also adept at hawking above flowing

Laying is from from late September to December; later clutches are generally

Reading: Beer, C.G. 1965. *Auk* 82: 1–18. Beer, C.G. 1966. *Ibis* 108: 394–410. Black, M.S. 1955. *Notornis* 6: 167–170. Dawson, E. W. 1958. *Notornis* 8: 1–7. Evans, R.M. 1982. *Ibis* 124: 491–501. Gurr, L. 1967. *Ibis* 109: 552–555. Powlesland, R.G. & Powlesland, M.H. 1994. *Notornis* 41: 117–132.