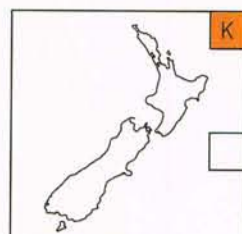


Gulls, terns and noddies are a large cosmopolitan group of mainly coastal birds. Most have short straight bills and short legs. Sexes alike. Usually grey, black or brown above, and white below in adults; juveniles usually have brown barring on back and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured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

WHITE-CAPPED (Lesser) NODDY. *Anous tenuirostris*

Locally common native

37 cm, 100 g. Medium-sized dark tropical tern with long broad tail, square or slightly notched. Like small Common Noddy but *black*, and in flight has completely dark underwings. Adult has silvery-white forehead, cap to level of eyes, and hindcrown; black line from bill to eye; sooty black neck, body and wings; tail brownish black, underwings black. Fine slightly decurved (4 cm) black bill; legs and feet dark brown. Juvenile similar but less white on hindcrown, sharper separation of pale crown from dark neck, and feathers on back and wings edged pale. Flight buoyant; feeds mainly from sea surface but sometimes dives; occasionally settles on the water. **Habitat:** Breeds tropics and subtropics, including Kermadecs. After breeding, remains close to breeding sites, but vagrants occasionally reach NZ mainland, mostly in autumn after northerly gales. **Breeding:** Aug–Apr.



[Sp 251]



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.

251. WHITE-CAPPED NODDY

Anous tenuirostris

Plate 58

Other names: Lesser/Black Noddy
Size: 37 cm, 100 g
Geographical variation: Of several subspecies, the White-capped Noddy *minutus* breeds in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, including the Kermadecs. Some taxonomists separate the Lesser Noddy *tenuirostris* of the Indian Ocean from the White-capped Noddy of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.
Distribution: Breed on tropical and subtropical islands of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. The White-capped Noddy

breeds widely in the tropical Pacific from the Great Barrier Reef to French Polynesia, and in the subtropics at the Norfolk and Kermadec Islands. They breed on North and South Meyer Islets in the Herald Group off Raoul Island, and at Macauley, Curtis and Cheeseman Islands and L'Esperance Rock in the southern Kermadecs. Fourteen records of single birds from the New Zealand mainland, some appearing after northerly gales: Kaipara Harbour (1953, 1964), Farewell Spit (1961), Spirits Bay (1965), Whangarei (1965, 1997),

Houhora Harbour (1975), Taieri Estuary (1977), Karikari Bay (1986), Muriwai (1986), Three Kings (1989), Rangaunu (1990) and Waikato (1997), Rapahoe (2000).

Population: c. 1100 pairs: Meyer Islets 1000 pairs, Macauley Island 50 pairs, Curtis Island 40 pairs, Cheeseman Island 20 pairs, and a few pairs on L'Esperance Rock.

Conservation: Protected native. They formerly bred on Raoul Island, but rats and cats have eliminated them. Moves to eradicate these predators could see White-capped Noddies become re-established there.

Breeding: The breeding season varies from year to year at the Kermadecs; eggs are laid in August–January, mostly October–Novem-

ber. The nest is usually an untidy heap of sticks and seaweed, cemented by guano, in trees and scrub. Sometimes, such as on Macauley Island, where there are no trees, the nest is on a rock ledge or in a cave. They lay 1 creamy-white egg (44 x 31 mm), blotched reddish brown. Both adults incubate for c. 36 days and care for the black downy young. The fledging period is 50–55 days.
Behaviour: Like the Common Noddy, except that after breeding they stay at or near the islands, feeding at sea during the day and roosting in the colonies at night.

Feeding: At sea, they hover and dip at the surface mainly for fish, also plankton.