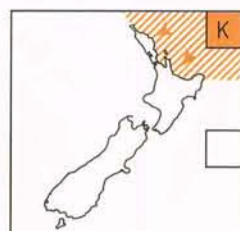


Gulls, terns and noddies are a large cosmopolitan group of mainly coastal birds. Most have short straight bills and short legs. Sexes alike. Usually grey, black or brown above, and white below in adults; juveniles usually have brown barring on back and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured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

**GREY TERNLET** *Procelsterna cerulea*

Locally common native

28 cm, 75 g. Distinctive small delicate *blue-grey tern*. Wings darker grey, especially at tips, and with a thin white trailing edge. Prominent eye owing to small black patch in front of eye; long forked tail; bill black; long black legs, feet black with yellow to pink webs. Juvenile has head streaked and upperparts and wings washed brownish. Flight graceful. Feeds by hovering, fluttering and paddling on sea surface like a huge Storm Petrel; sometimes settles on the surface. **Habitat:** Tropical and subtropical Pacific; in NZ region, breeds at Kermadecs, in some years also at Three Kings Is and rock stacks off eastern coast of Northland and in Bay of Plenty. Occasionally seen in northern NZ coastal waters; straggles as far south as Canterbury. **Breeding:** Aug–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.

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.

**252. GREY TERNLET** *Procelsterna cerulea* Plate 57

**Other names:** Blue-grey/Grey Noddy  
**Size:** 28 cm, 75 g  
**Geographical variation:** Several subspecies, of which *albivittata* breeds in northern New Zealand and northeastern Australia.  
**Distribution:** Breed on islands of the tropical and subtropical Pacific Ocean from New Zealand and Norfolk Island north to Hawai'i and east to islands off Chile. Breed on all islands of the Kermadecs, but mainly on Macauley and Curtis Islands. Known only as an occasional vagrant to the New Zealand mainland before the summer of 1969–70, mostly single birds off the coast of Northland between Cape Maria van Diemen and Waipu. That summer many frequented the waters off eastern Northland and the Bay of Plenty, and c. 1000 apparently bred at the Volkner Rocks off White Island; they were seen also at Sugarloaf Rock in the Aldermen Islands. Small groups have since bred irregularly at West Island, Three Kings Islands; Sugarloaf Rock, Poor Knights Islands; and Cathedral Rocks, Mokohinau Islands and at Volkner Rocks. One South Island record, at Banks Peninsula, following the *Wahine* storm of mid-April 1968. One was seen at Lake Taupo (1994).  
**Population:** c. 17,000 pairs: Macauley 10,000 pairs, Curtis 5000 pairs, Raoul Island and Herald Group several thousand pairs, and

L'Esperance Rock several hundred pairs. The number breeding on islands off the north-eastern North Island has not been determined but is probably fewer than 50 pairs.  
**Conservation:** Protected native. Numbers breeding on Raoul Island have decreased in the last 30 years, but the removal of goats from Macauley Island has probably helped to increase productivity there.  
**Breeding:** Eggs are laid in August–December at the Kermadecs. They are laid on a bare rocky surface sheltered from the sun, in cavities and crevices, on cliff ledges, under clumps of vegetation along cliff tops and in the shade of boulders on the beach. They lay 1 creamy-white egg (42 x 28 mm) with small dark and light brown blotches. Both sexes incubate for c. 32 days. The fledging period is c. 35 days.  
**Behaviour:** Gregarious; breeding in loose colonies and feeding in flocks. Sometimes these flocks are immense and include 5000+ birds. Grey Ternlets are mainly sedentary; some disperse after breeding, but most stay within 20 km of their breeding site, and a few come ashore during the non-breeding period. Their flight is graceful, floating and unhurried.  
**Feeding:** Flocks work into the wind, hovering and fluttering over the water, repeatedly dipping down to pick up plankton from the

surface, sometimes skipping on the surface like a storm petrel, getting bill and feet wet only. As they run out of the feeding area, they veer away to the side, circle round to rejoin the rear of the flock and start working their way forward again. Their main food is plankton, but they also take small fish. Chicks

are fed by regurgitation, not whole small fish like most terns. They peck at first at the webs of the adult's feet, not at the bill as is usual.  
**Reading:** Falla, R.A. 1970. *Notornis* 17: 83–86. Soper, M.F. 1969. *Notornis* 16: 75–80.