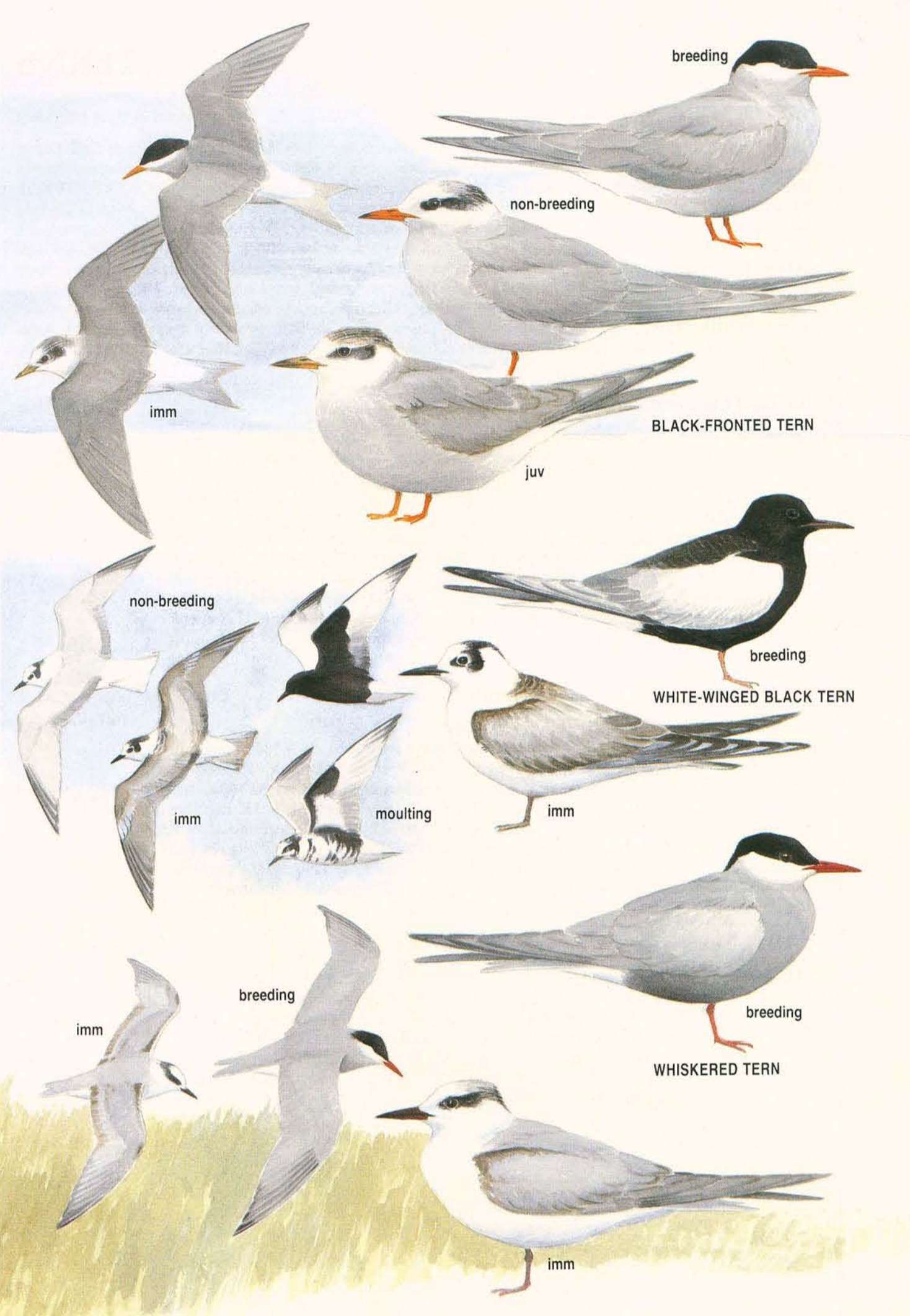


Gulls, terns and noddies are a large cosmopolitan group of mainly coastal birds. Most have short straight bills and short legs. Sexes alike. Usually grey, black or brown above, and white below in adults; juveniles usually have brown barring on back and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured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

**WHISKERED TERN** *Chlidonias hybrida*

Rare Australian vagrant

26 cm, 90 g. Small tern with slow buoyant flight, long legs and gull-like stance; *even grey on rump and slightly forked tail*. Breeding adult has black cap down to red bill; white cheeks; dark grey underparts and sooty belly contrasts with white undertail; red legs. Non-breeding is pale grey above and dull white below with black arc from eye to eye around back of head, solid on ears but flecked on nape; wingtips darker than rest of wings; bill and legs dull red-brown. Immature similar but narrow dark borders to upperwing, and rump slightly paler than rest of upperparts. Feeds by hawking insects, picking prey from the water surface or by taking shallow plunges into water. **Habitat:** Breeds Africa to Australia; nomadic or migratory. A few reach NZ, mainly at coastal lakes or sewage ponds. [Sp 236]



**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.

**236. WHISKERED TERN** *Chlidonias hybrida*

Plate 56

**Size:** 26 cm, 90 g  
**Geographical variation:** Three subspecies: *hybrida* breeds in Europe and Asia, *delalandi* in Africa, and *javanicus* in Australia.  
**Distribution:** Breed in widely separated populations, in the marshes of southern Europe and Asia; in southeastern Africa and Madagascar; and in inland Australia, mainly in the southeast. Australian birds migrate north after breeding into New Guinea, Indonesia and southeastern Asia. The few birds seen in New Zealand come from Australia, judging by the timing of plumage

changes: Lake Horowhenua (1977, 1978), lower Waikato River (1978), Pukekohe (1980) and Lake Rotorua (1987).  
**Behaviour:** Breeding and feeding habits are very like those of White-winged Black Terns. Their flight is buoyant, typical of marsh terns, flying upwind over fresh or brackish water, then dropping downwind to start again. They sometimes patrol and feed over the same stretch of still, inland water and use the same roosting places for months.  
**Reading:** Heather, B.D. & Jones, E.B. 1979. *Notornis* 26: 185-195.