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Black-fronted tern: pp 192-193.



BLACK-FRONTED TERN

Family Sternidae

Species *Sterna albostrata*

Common name Black-fronted Tern

Status Endemic

Size 290 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, White-fronted Tern 400 mm)

Habitat A bird of inland waterways and especially the wide braided rivers of Mid-Canterbury. It also feeds over farmland, especially recently ploughed earth, arable crops and recently flooded irrigated land.

New Zealand range It is found east of the Southern Alps in the South Island and particularly in Canterbury. In winter some birds move to the coast spreading south to Stewart Island or north into the North Island and up the east coast as far as Tauranga Harbour.

Discussion The Black-fronted Tern breeds along the South Island riverbeds. It belongs to the marsh tern group and is closely related to the Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*), a tern which has widespread distribution through Africa,

Asia and Australia. It is the only inland tern of the South Island. The occasional visit of a White-winged Black Tern (*C. leucopterus*) is not likely to confuse as sightings of this bird are rare.

Description

Crown Velvet-black. **Under-eye** White. **Upperparts** Soft bluish-grey. **Cheeks, throat and underparts** Soft bluish-grey. **Rump** White, with a grey forked tail. **Bill and legs** Orange.

Description – immature birds

Crown White behind bill then mottled with black. **Wings** Grey. **Bill** Dusky brown with a reddish base.

Conspicuous features

- Orange bill and legs.
- Black crown coming right to the bill.
- Blue grey underparts.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Birds flit and dart when in flight.
- Upon spotting prey, birds hover with fast wing beats.
- Birds blend with the riverbed stones when on the ground.

Call A high-pitched “kit kit kit”. It is more brittle than the call of the White-fronted Tern. Birds can “bark” angrily at intruders near their nests.

Nest A scrape among the pebbles of the riverbeds in loose colonies. Up to 2 greyish, brown-blotched eggs are laid.

Differences between Black-fronted Terns and White-fronted Terns

- Black-fronted Tern has an orange bill and feet.
- White-fronted Tern has a black bill and black legs.
- Black-fronted Tern has bluish grey underparts.
- White-fronted Tern has clean white underparts.
- Black-fronted Tern has a white forehead above the bill and black coming right to the bill.
- Black-fronted Tern is generally an inland bird except during winter months.
- White-fronted Tern is coastal.

Where to find – North Island – in winter only

Bay of Plenty – Tauranga Harbour sandbanks at Bowentown road. P. 318.

Bay of Plenty – Kaituna River-mouth. P. 320.

Bay of Plenty – Matata Lagoon. P. 320.

King Country – Kawhia Harbour near the town. P. 313.

Manawatu – Manawutu Estuary. P. 336.

Manawatu – Rangitikei River-mouth. P. 336.

Wellington – Waikanae Estuary. P. 339.

Where to find – South Island – in breeding season

Marlborough – Wairau River north of Blenheim, either where the road to Nelson crosses it on Highway 6 or where the road to Picton crosses it on Highway 1. P. 345.

North Canterbury – Waiau River. P. 346.

Canterbury – Most rivers and in cropping areas, inspections of ploughed land will often reveal terns feeding with Black-billed Gulls. Anywhere along the Rangitata River, south of Ashburton, should have this bird.

Southland – Good locations are the wide riverbeds of the Oreti and Aparima Rivers.

Fiordland – Te Anau along the shoreline of Lake Te Anau. P. 369.

Fiordland – In the Eglinton Valley, birds nest in small colonies of 6 or 7 pairs on the sand of the braided river. They are easy to observe here right along the Eglinton River. P. 370.