

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.

**CRESTED TERN** *Sterna bergii*

Rare tropical vagrant

47 cm, 350 g. Large tern with long slender greenish-yellow bill. Breeding adult has white forehead, black cap and a straggly crest; upperparts slate grey, paler on rump and tail; underparts white; legs black. Non-breeding adult has crown white or streaked black. Juvenile similar, but cap browner and extends around eye, wings brownish grey and mottled. Looks rakish yet graceful in flight. Plunge-dives. Noisy; call a rasping 'kerrcrick'. **Habitat:** Breeds eastern Asia, S Pacific and Australia. A few reach NZ coasts.

[Sp 248]



**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 plunge-diving 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.

**248. CRESTED TERN** *Sterna bergii*

Plate 54

**Other name:** Swift Tern

**Size:** 47 cm, 350 g

**Geographical variation:** Of four subspecies, probably *cristata* of New Guinea, Australia and the tropical South Pacific east to French Polynesia reaches New Zealand.

**Distribution:** Breed in South Africa, islands and coasts of the Indian Ocean, Australia and islands of the tropical South Pacific. Rare vagrants have been seen in New Zealand twelve times: Raoul Island, Kermadecs (1910), Spirits Bay (1951), Farewell Spit (1960), Firth of Thames

(1974), Napier (1981), Wellington Harbour and Kapiti Coast (1981–88), Kaikoura (1985), Pukerua Bay (1992), Manawatu Estuary (1995), Waikanae Estuary (1995), Washdyke (1995), Kaipara (1996) and New Plymouth (1996–97).

**Behaviour:** Adults in breeding and non-breeding plumage and immatures have all been seen, often roosting with White-fronted Terns. One bird apparently remained on, or regularly visited, the Wellington coast for eight (possibly 15) years.