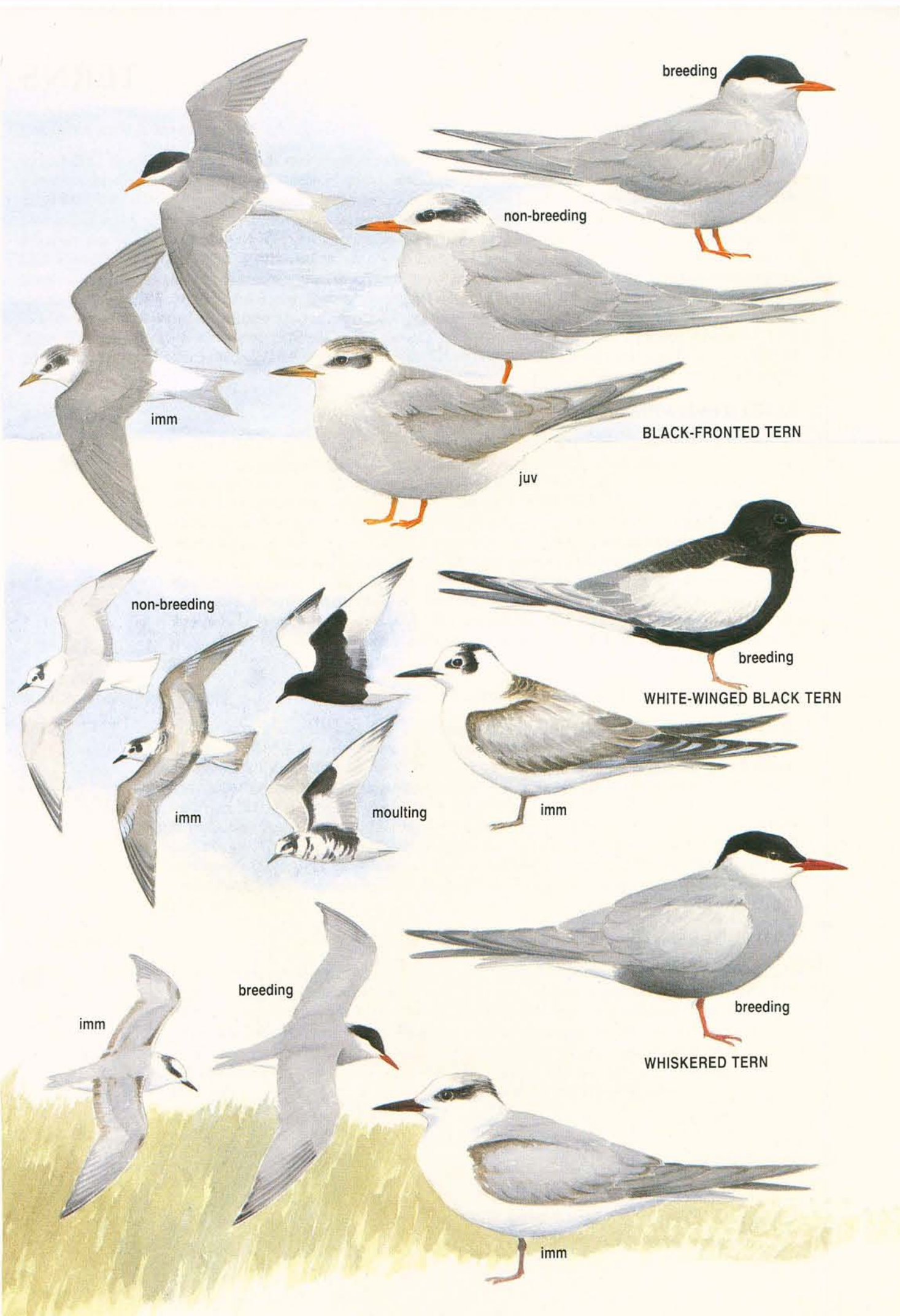


Gulls, terns and noddies are a large cosmopolitan group of mainly coastal birds. Most have short straight bills and short legs. Sexes alike. Usually grey, black or brown above, and white below in adults; juveniles usually have brown barring on back and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured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

BLACK-FRONTED TERN (Tarapiroe) *Sterna albobriata*

Common endemic

29 cm, 80 g. The common inland tern of the South I. Smaller and greyer than White-fronted Tern. *Blue-grey body, wings and short shallow-forked tail contrasts with white rump in flight; undertail white; bill and legs orange.* Breeding adult has black cap down to bill; thin white streak across cheeks; *bill and legs bright orange.* Non-breeding adult similar, but cap recedes to arc from eye to eye around back of head, except crown flecked grey; bill and legs dull orange. Immature has crown flecked black; dark patches around eye; chin white; breast very pale grey; bill dusky brown, becoming yellow with age; legs dull orange. Feeds mainly by hawking insects over riverbeds and dropping to pick prey from the surface of lakes, swamps and farmland. **Habitat:** Breeds in small colonies on gravel riverbeds of South I, mainly east of Alps. Migrates to coast to feed at sea, especially in Cook Strait and off eastern coast of North and South Is, as far north as Bay of Plenty. **Breeding:** Oct–Feb. [Sp 239]



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.

239. BLACK-FRONTED TERN

Sterna albobriata

Plate 56

Other name: Tarapiroe

Size: 29 cm, 90 g

Distribution: New Zealand only. Black-fronted Terns breed on the shingle riverbeds of the eastern South Island from Marlborough to Southland, and on the upper Motueka and Buller Rivers in southern Nelson. They feed over the rivers and nearby fields. In late summer and autumn, they disperse north, occasionally reaching Northland, and south to waters off Stewart Island, and once to The Snares (1998); however most feed at sea within 10 km of the eastern South Island and in Cook Strait north to the Waikanae Estuary and west to Farewell Spit. Autumn and winter flocks of 100–300 birds are regularly seen at Farewell Spit, Lake Grassmere, Kaikoura Peninsula, Hurunui, Ashley, Ashburton and Opihi River mouths, and at Aramoana. Smaller wintering flocks of 20–50 birds regularly appear in the North Island at the Bay of Plenty, Hawke's Bay and at Lake Onoke, Palliser Bay. In the non-breeding season, they sometimes feed over coastal fields or lagoons, and come ashore to roost in the middle of the day, often near roosting flocks of White-fronted Terns.

Population: c. 5000 birds.

Conservation: Protected rare endemic. Black-fronted Terns are declining in number throughout their breeding range. Their colonies are easily disturbed by predators and people, and many of their riverbed nesting sites have been invaded by exotic plants such as willows and lupins. The development of farmland beside their nesting sites may have created feeding opportunities, as they often

follow the plough to catch insects and worms that are exposed.

Breeding: They nest in small colonies of up to 50 pairs, some on riverbeds near the coast, but most are well inland, often near colonies of Black-billed Gulls. The nests, scrapes in the shingle, are spaced well apart. Eggs are laid from early October to late November, sometimes into January. They lay 1–2–4 dark stone eggs (40 x 29 mm, 18 g) with brown blotches. Both sexes incubate for 22–23–26 days. The eggs hatch a day or two apart. The young fledge at c. 30 days old.

Behaviour: Black-fronted Terns attack intruders at their colonies, by diving, calling harshly, and often striking the intruder's head with their feet. The usual call is a repetitive 'kit'; they usually feed silently.

Feeding: While breeding, they feed in flocks over rivers and nearby fields. They work their way up rapidly flowing rivers and return repeatedly to their starting point. They contact-dip from about 2 m above the water (i.e. dipping to touch the surface with the bill only) to take mainly emergent nymph and subimago mayflies and stoneflies. They sometimes plunge-dive to take small fish, such as upland bullies. On farmland, their main food is earthworms and grass-grub larvae. After breeding, most move to the coast for the autumn and winter, taking mostly planktonic crustaceans from the sea, as well as earthworms from wet coastal pasture.

Reading: Latham, P.C.M. 1981. *Notornis* 28: 221–239. Lalas, C. 1977. Unpubl MSc thesis, Univ Otago. Lalas, C. & Heather, B.D. 1980. *Notornis* 27: 45–68.