

Watola, G. 2011. The Discovery of New Zealand's Birds. (3rd Edition in prep.)
Based on: Watola, G. 2009. The Discovery of New Zealand's Birds. (2nd Edition)
Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.
Updated and amended text supplied by George Watola, October, 2011.
Page numbers follow Watola, G. 2009 (2nd Edition)
Black-bellied storm petrel: pp 81-82.

Black-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta tropica* (Gould 1844), Native
1856 Chatham Islands
1960 Ross Sea (Dell 1960)

Buller was familiar with this species, and recorded specimens from several museums. He also observed them off the Chathams in 1856, which appears to be the earliest dated record. He wrote – “Adult. General plumage sooty black, darker on the wings and tail; sides of the body, flanks, and long upper tail-coverts pure white; some of the under tail-coverts on each side edged with white; long inner wing coverts and axillary plumes pure white. Irides black; bill and legs black.

Occasional examples of this Storm-Petrel are recorded; and specimens are to be found in the Auckland, Nelson, and Canterbury Museums, all obtained on the adjacent coasts. Mr. Gould, who met with it in great abundance, in March 1840, between the eastern coast of Australia and New Zealand, observes:— ‘It is a bird of powerful flight, and pats the surface of the rising waves more frequently than any other species that came under my notice; or perhaps the great length of its legs rendered this action more conspicuous’.

During stormy weather it often follows in the wake of the labouring vessel, and apparently for days together. I observed this myself, in 1856, during a severe gale, experienced off the Chatham Islands, which lasted nearly a fortnight. These Storm-Petrels followed us day and night; and it was some relief to the extreme monotony and misery of our situation to watch the movements of these fairy-like beings as they danced among the surging billows, running with fluttering wings in the hollow of the waves, and then hovering over their foaming crests with the lightness of summer butterflies. I observed that the same individual bird often remained in our wake for considerable distances, without ever resting on the water or changing its course for one moment, its powers of endurance being truly wonderful” (Buller 1888).

Oliver thought that Hutton's records were the earliest, apparently dismissing Buller's records, but Hutton had given no confirming details.

Hutton (1868) recorded them off the “East Coast” of Great Barrier Island in summer 1868, and said there was also a specimen in the Auckland Museum. A now-lost specimen found at Mokohinau light-house in 1886 was also identified as this species. In light of the recent rediscovery of New Zealand Storm Petrel in the Hauraki Gulf, these birds should be re-examined. Hutton (1868) also saw them on a voyage from London to New Zealand in 1866, when they were present in large numbers (30-40 daily) in the southern oceans, and last seen on June 3rd at 420 51' 1550 17'.

Hanson (British Museum (Nat. Hist.) 1902) recorded one on 30/12/1898, as the Southern Cross approached the pack-ice of the Ross Sea. Mathews described a specimen from New Zealand as a new subspecies *F. t. australis* in 1914, based on its larger size. Beck collected 26 birds between the Bounty Islands and the Antipodes in mid-February 1926. Oliver observed large numbers to the south of New Zealand in 1927.

The eight beach-cast specimens from the Beach Patrol Scheme were found mostly on the Wellington west coast southwards, except for one from the Bay of Plenty (February 1999).