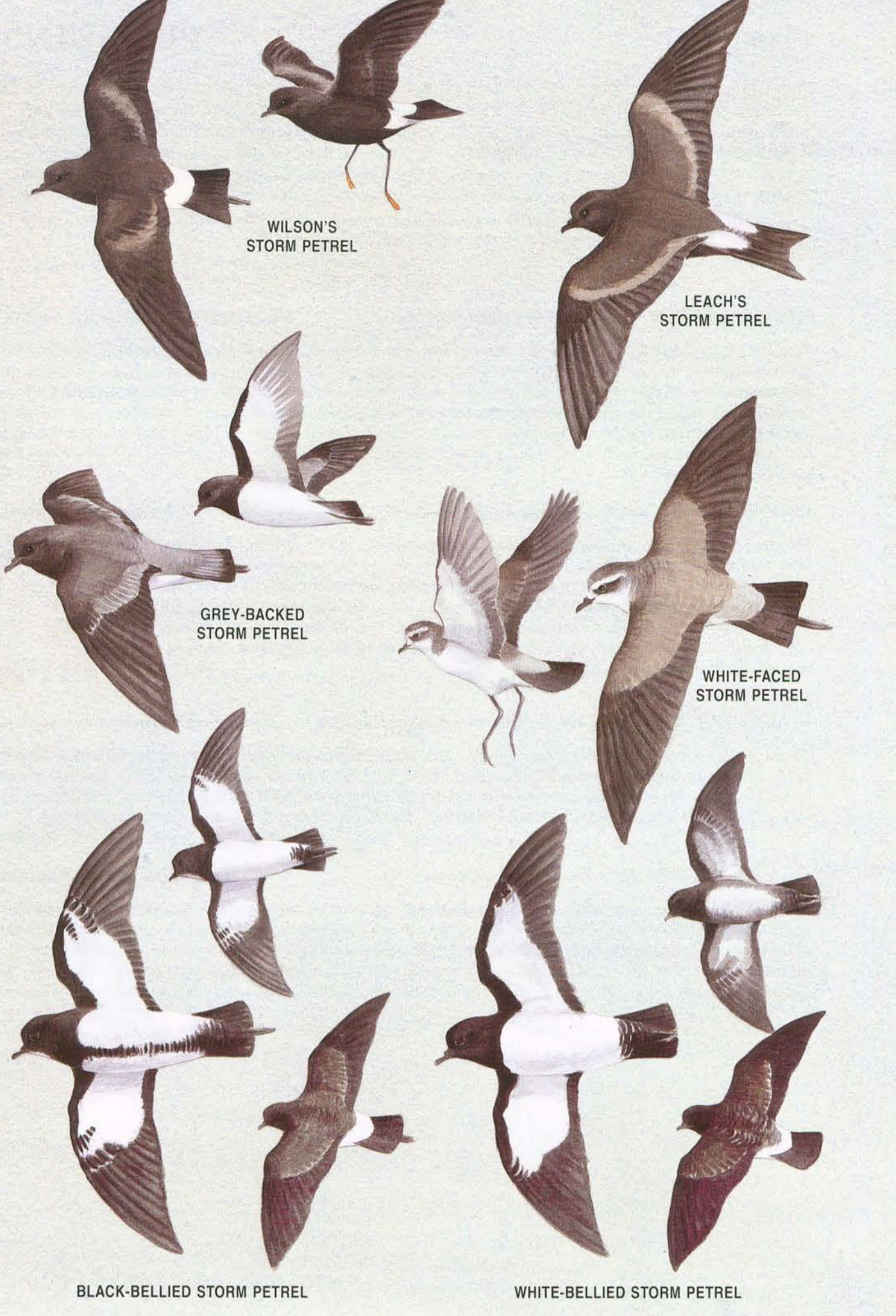
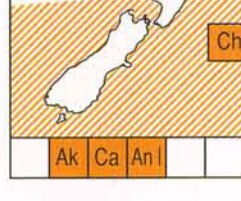


Very small dainty seabirds with broad rounded wings, short bill with a prominent nostril with a single opening, and very long legs. Mostly black or grey upperparts except for rump. Sexes and ages alike. Fly close to the surface, erratically with short glides or hops. Pick up food while hovering or pattering on the water. Oceanic; rarely follow boats. Most silent at night over colonies, but give coos, churrs or whistles from burrows or the ground.

GREY-BACKED STORM PETREL *Oceanites nereis*

Locally common native

18 cm, 35 g. Head, neck, throat and upper breast greyish black, rest of underparts white; back, upperwings and tail ashy grey, with black tips to wings and square tail. **Habitat:** Breeds circumpolar subantarctic; in NZ region, at Chathams, Antipodes, Auckland and Campbell Is. Mainly sedentary but ranges to 30°S in NZ seas, though rarely seen near mainland coast. **Breeding:** Sep–Mar.



STORM PETRELS

Oceanitidae

The Oceanitidae are very small seabirds, ranging from Antarctic waters to the tropics. There are 21 species, of which 5 breed in the New Zealand region, and 1 is a vagrant.

webbed toes are long and are used to skip or patter along the sea surface as the birds look for zooplankton.

The storm petrels are small, delicate birds with a weak black bill. They have prominent nostrils encased in a single, often upturned tube at the base of the bill. They have 11 primaries, but the 11th (outermost) is minute. The 10th primary is shorter than the 9th, giving the wing a rounded tip. The legs and

The biology of storm petrels and the threats to them are like those of the Procellariidae (see page 184). The main differences are that females are larger than males, they lay the heaviest egg relative to female weight of any birds (typically in the range of 25–29% of female weight for the smaller species), and the egg is regularly unattended for one or more days at a time during incubation, which

makes the total incubation period highly variable.

Flight of the Storm Petrel. Newton Abbot: David & Charles. Murphy, R.C. 1936. *Oceanic Birds of South America*. New York: MacMillan. Serventy, D.L. et al. 1971. *The Handbook of Australian Seabirds*. Sydney: Reed. Warham, J. 1990. *The Petrels: their ecology and breeding systems*. London: Academic Press.

Reading: Harrison, P. 1987. *Seabirds of the World: a photographic guide*. London: Christopher Helm. Harrison, P. 1988. *Seabirds: an identification guide*. London: Christopher Helm. Lockley, R.M. 1983.

68. GREY-BACKED STORM PETREL *Oceanites nereis* **Plate 17**

Size: 18 cm, 35 g
Distribution: Circumpolar, breeding on many subantarctic islands in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and in the New Zealand region. They breed at the Chathams on many small islands and stacks, with main colonies on South East and Mangere Islands; also on the Antipodes and Auckland Islands, and on islets off Campbell Island. Breeding birds return to their colonies almost all year round, but some New Zealand birds move north to about 30°S and westwards into the southern Tasman Sea, and they are regular visitors to coastal waters off southeastern Australia. Grey-backed Storm Petrels are occasionally beach-wrecked in June–December, especially around Cook Strait. Several times they have been recorded well inland in the southern South Island, and so may breed somewhere in Fiordland.
Population: Moderate numbers. Possibly 10,000–12,000 pairs breed in the Chathams; smaller colonies are on the Antipodes and Auckland Islands.
Conservation: Protected native. Little is known of the numbers of this species, but because they nest above the ground they are vulnerable to mammalian predators, and so most are now on islands free of ground predators and grazing mammals.
Breeding: Adults return to their colonies at almost any time of year. Numbers build up in August and eggs are laid from mid-

September to December. They lay 1 white egg (31 x 23 mm, 8.5 g) in a shallow cup of leaf fibres above ground in a 'rat hole' at the base of flax, ferns, herbs or tussock clumps, or under iceplants. The incubation period is 39–45 days; because the egg is often left unattended for a day or more, the period is quite variable. The chick is brooded for only a few hours and then guarded for up to 4 days. It is fed every 1–1.6–3 days and reaches adult weight by 17 days old, but it does not fledge until c. 50 days old.
Behaviour: Breed in loose colonies and feed alone or in small flocks. Silent in the air. A monotonous cricket-like chirping is given on the ground.
Feeding: Studies at the Chathams have found that Grey-backed Storm Petrels specialise in feeding on the free-swimming stage of immature barnacles, supplemented with other zooplankton.
In the hand: Grey-backed Storm Petrels are the smallest storm petrel in the New Zealand region (wing 117–131–139 mm). Females average longer in the wing and tail than males, but measurements overlap. The outermost primary is rounded in adults but pointed in juveniles.
Reading: Imber, M.J. 1981. In *Proc Symp Birds Sea Shore*. Cape Town: African Seabird Group. Imber, M.J. 1983. *Notornis* 30: 283–298. Plant, A. R. 1989. *Notornis* 36: 141–147. Warham J. & Bell, B.D. 1979. *Notornis* 26: 121–169.