

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Caspian tern: pp 194-195.



CASPIAN TERN

Family Sternidae

Species *Sterna caspia*

Common name Caspian Tern

Status Native

Abundance Common

Size 510 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, White-fronted Tern 400 mm)

Habitat Sandy stretches of coast more common in northern waters.

Worldwide range A very cosmopolitan species with a range through Britain, southern Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand and to the United States of America. It is absent in South America, northern North America, Asia and Europe. It is the largest of the world's terns and closely related to the Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*).

New Zealand range Found right around the New Zealand coastline and sometimes inland to lakes such as Lake Taupo, the Rotorua lakes and Hamilton

Lake.

Description – breeding

Crown Black to below the eye. **Upperparts** Grey. **Underparts** White. **Bill** Bright red. **Feet and legs** Black.

Description – non-breeding

Crown White flecked with black through eye and round back of head.

Conspicuous features

- Larger than the White-fronted Tern with which it frequently associates.
- The black cap, extending from the bill base on forehead, separates it from the smaller White-fronted Tern.
- Body looks long and legs short.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Has a squat posture when standing.
- Usually birds feed alone flying slowly above water with heads down. The heavy bill is obvious in this position.
- When a fish is spotted, birds hover momentarily and then dive forcefully in a similar fashion to gannets.
- Birds rest on sandbanks and high-tide roosts often among shorebirds such as oystercatchers. When resting they spread through them.

Call A guttural “kaar-kaa kaar-kaa kaar” noise, different from the higher-pitched “kee-eet” call of the White-fronted Tern. Immature birds make a “petulant” whistle.

Nest A colonial nester which makes a scrape in the sand. Up to 2 greyish, brown-blotched eggs are laid.

Where to find – North Island

Northland waters – Common.

South Auckland – At Miranda common on the shellbanks. P. 302.

Where to find – South Island

Kaikoura – Along coastal verges east of the town. P. 345.