

Southern black-backed gull

Larus dominicanus

60 cm

NEW ZEALAND NATIVE, NOT THREATENED



Southern black-backed gull
feeding chicks at nest.
Photo: Peter Morrison
(DOC).

The southern black-backed gull, also known as the Dominican gull, kelp gull, or karoro, is a large black-and-white gull with a yellow bill and greenish legs. The bill has an orange spot at the tip of the lower mandible. Juvenile plumage is dark brown in the first year, becoming mottled buff-and-white in the second year, gradually changing to adult plumage by the fourth year.



Immature southern
black-backed gull.
Photo: Fred Kinsky (DOC).

Sexes are alike. Black-backed gulls inhabit coasts, lakes and open country, and have adapted extremely well to modified environments, readily utilising new food sources such as rubbish dumps and fishing waste. They are abundant on the Chatham Islands, breeding on Chatham, Pitt, and Rabbit Islands, Rangatira, Star Keys, The Sisters, The Forty Fours, The Pyramid, Houruakopara, Kokope, and Blyth Stack. Breeding occurs during October-February, usually in colonies, although some solitary nests are found on coastal rock stacks and headlands. The only estimate of numbers in the Chatham Islands has been on Rangatira, where 20-41 active nests were counted annually between 1986 and 1995, but there are larger colonies on Chatham Island.