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Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.
Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.
Australasian gannet: pp 74-75.



AUSTRALASIAN GANNET

Family Sulidae

Species *Morus serrator*

Common names Australasian Gannet, Takapu

Status Native

Abundance Common

Size 900 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Red-billed Gull 370 mm)

Habitat A coastal species but also in deeper waters.

Breeding islands close to New Zealand Nests on islands from the Three Kings in the north to Little Solander Island in Foveaux Strait in the south.

Mainland breeding colonies Breeds at Muriwai Beach west of Auckland and at Cape Kidnappers south of Napier in the North Island, and Farewell Spit in the north of the South Island.

Breeding months July to February.

Breeding Birds nest in close proximity to each other with nest spacings of about

one metre. 1 pale blue-green egg is laid in an open nest made of seaweed. Because of the wide egg laying season from mid-September to mid-December, the visitor to a gannet colony can usually witness a variety of happenings from courtship displays, to brooding birds, to birds feeding young, to fighting birds, to calling birds and to birds generally coming and going. The “music” of the Gannet colony is memorable. Nesting gannets create geometric patterns of black and white.

Range worldwide From New Zealand westward and around southern Australia and up the Queensland coast.

New Zealand range From the south of the South Island northward. Juvenile New Zealand birds migrate to northern Queensland where they spend between three years to seven years before returning to New Zealand to breed.

Closely related species The Australasian Gannet (*M. serrator*) is a close relative of the Northern Gannet (*M. bassana*), which is found along both sides of the north Atlantic Sea almost to the Arctic circle. It is also a very close relative of the Cape Gannet (*M. capensis*), which is found around the southern coasts of Africa. Main differences between the subspecies are subtle plumage changes, the Northern Gannet having less black markings on the edges of the primary wing feathers and no black on the tails of adult birds. The black under-bill gular marking is also of greater length on *M. capensis* than on *M. serrator*.

Description

Forehead White with black markings in front of eyes. **Head** Yellow. **Upperparts and underparts** White. **Wings** Primary feathers black. Remainder white. **Tail** Central tail feathers black. Remainder white. **Bill and bare skin of face** Bluish-grey. Black line around gape. **Feet and legs** Legs greyish, with feet striped with yellow.

Description – immature birds

These vary from having all brown upperparts in the first year with white underparts to various amounts of brown and black markings over white in succeeding years until year four when they resemble adults.

Conspicuous features

- Yellow head.
- White body.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Feed by diving on to fish from considerable heights with wings folded back. If they catch a fish they usually bob to the surface and eat it before becoming airborne again. Otherwise they take to the air promptly.
- Regularly seen flying parallel to the coastline with heads down.

Call Excited high-pitch chatter heard at the breeding colony.

Where to find – North Island

Auckland – Muriwai colony at Muriwai Beach north-west of Auckland. P. 296.

Auckland – Regularly seen on the harbour or in coastal areas and even from popular beaches.

Coromandel – Coromandel Islands west from Coromandel township. P. 306.

Hawkes Bay – Cape Kidnappers south-east of Napier. P. 333.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough – Farewell Spit. P. 342.