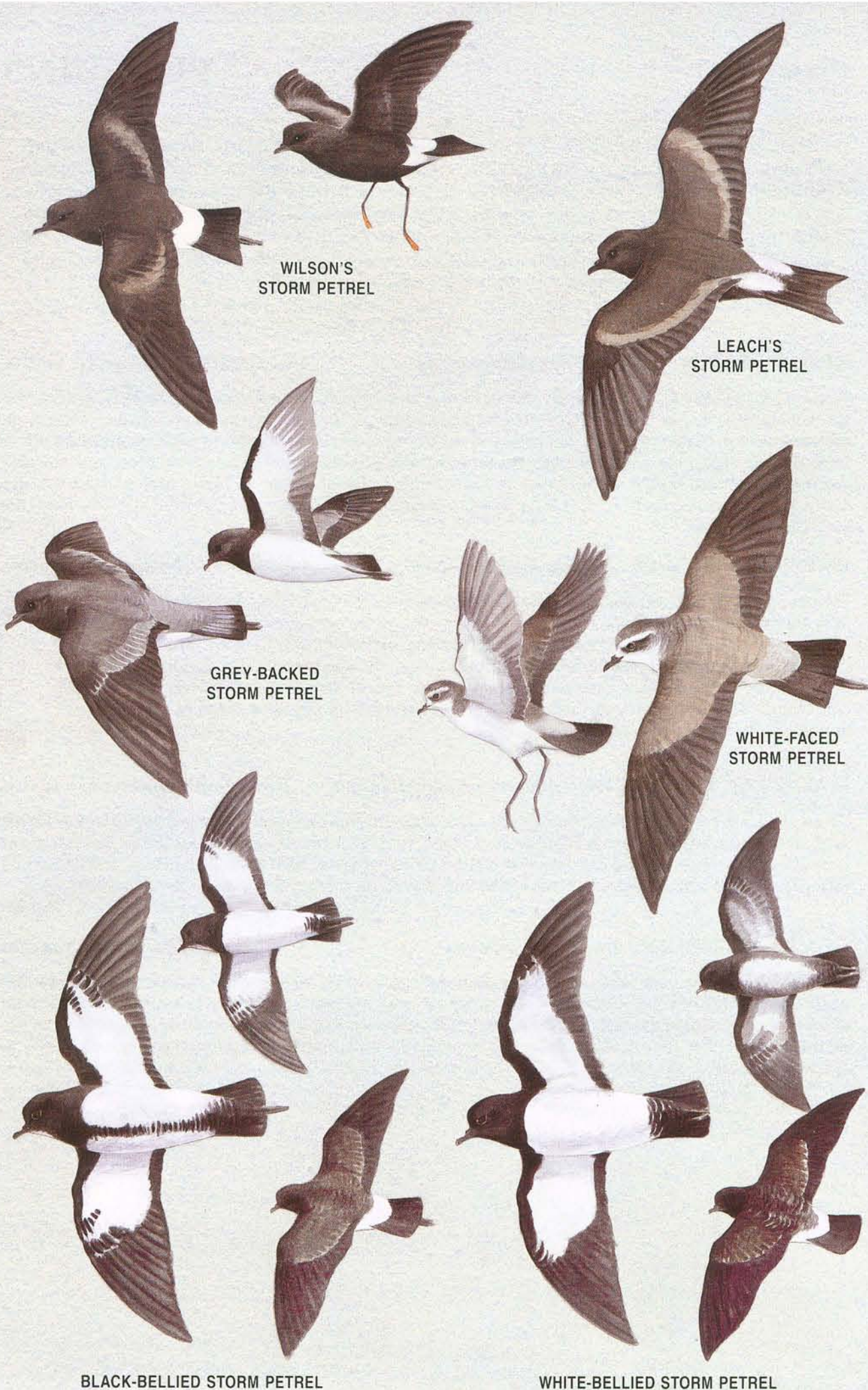


Very small dainty seabirds with broad rounded wings, short bill with a prominent nostril with a single opening, and very long legs. Mostly black or grey upperparts except for rump. Sexes and ages alike. Fly close to the surface, erratically with short glides or hops. Pick up food while hovering or pattering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

WILSON'S STORM PETREL *Oceanites oceanicus*

Locally common native

18 cm, 35 g. *Brownish black* with faint diagonal grey-brown bar on upperwing from bend of wing to body; prominent *unmarked white rump*; *square tail*. Yellow-webbed feet project beyond tail. **Habitat:** Breeds subantarctic and Antarctica, including several colonies in the Ross Sea Sector. Migrates to Northern Hemisphere but occasionally seen in NZ waters, mainly Nov–Dec and Mar–May. **Breeding:** Dec–Apr. [Sp 67]



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.

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.

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.

67. WILSON'S STORM PETREL

Oceanites oceanicus

Plate 17

Size: 18 cm, 35 g
Geographical variation: Two subspecies: *oceanicus* breeds on subantarctic islands in the South Atlantic and South Indian Ocean; *exasperatus* breeds on coasts and islands off Antarctica and is an uncommon passage migrant through New Zealand waters.
Distribution: Circumpolar, breeding at many sites on the coast of Antarctica and on many islands in antarctic and southern subantarctic waters to 46°S. In the Ross Dependency, they breed at many sites along the coast of the Ross Sea and on Balleny and Scott Islands. After breeding, they migrate to the Northern Hemisphere and are beach-wrecked or seen passing through New Zealand waters, heading north in March–May and returning south in November–December. The main migration routes appear to avoid New

Zealand waters; they are regularly seen in Perversance Harbour, Campbell Island. In most years, the main southward migration route passes to the east of New Zealand, judging by records at sea near the Chathams, on the Chatham Rise, near the Bounty Islands, and at Campbell Island.
Population: One of the most abundant species of bird in the world; c. 125,000 pairs breed in the Ross Dependency.
Conservation: Protected native. Numbers are huge despite skua predation and reductions in some subantarctic colonies after the introduction of cats and rats.
Breeding: Not studied in Ross Dependency, but elsewhere in Antarctica, adults return to their colonies in November to early December to claim nest sites and to court. Laying is in December–January. They lay 1 white egg (33

x 24 mm, 10 g) in a crevice in a cliff or scree slope. Eggs hatch in January–February after c. 45 days, and chicks depart March–April at c. 50 days old. Young breed at 3 years old, and average life expectancy is at least 10 years.
Behaviour: Breed in large dense colonies and often feed in flocks, but migrate singly.
In the hand: Wilson's Storm Petrels are like Leach's

Storm Petrels, the only other black storm petrel with a white rump known from the region, but have a smaller bill: 11–12.5–13.5 mm cf. 13.5–16.0–17.5 mm. The white rump patch of Wilson's Storm Petrel is not divided or partially divided by a dark central line of feathers as in Leach's Storm Petrel.
Reading: Falla, R.A. 1933. *Rep BANZARE B 2*: 1–288. Lacan, F. 1971. *Oiseau 41*: 65–89. Pryor, M.E. 1968. *Ant Res Ser (Wash) 12*: 57–82.