

Gulls, terns and noddies are a large cosmopolitan group of mainly coastal birds. Most have short straight bills and short legs. Sexes alike. Usually grey, black or brown above, and white below in adults; juveniles usually have brown barring on back and wings. Bill and legs are often brightly coloured but usually change with age and/or season.

**ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*

Rare Arctic migrant

34 cm, 110 g. Like small dark White-fronted Tern and similar to Common Tern, but paler, smaller-bodied and longer-winged. Head rounded except steep forehead; bill rather short; legs very short, brilliant red to reddish black. Breeding adult has black cap down to blood-red bill; underparts darker grey than upperparts; small amount of black on tips of outer 3-4 primaries; all of outerwing appears translucent against the light except for a thin well-defined dark trailing edge to tip of underwing; thin dark outer edge to tail; at rest, deeply forked tail even with or longer than wings; red legs. In non-breeding plumage, cap recedes to behind eye; underparts white; some develop a faint carpal bar; bill black. Immature has thin carpal bar and darker primaries. In flight, looks slim, long-winged and long-tailed. Flight buoyant, with deeper, faster wingbeats than White-fronted Tern. Calls like Common Tern. **Habitat:** Breeds Arctic. Migrates to southern oceans. A few seen each summer at NZ estuaries or coastal lakes. [Sp 246]



**GULLS, TERNS and NODDIES**

Laridae

About 88 species (47 gulls, 37 terns and 4 noddies) worldwide: 3 gulls, 6 terns and 4 noddies breed in the New Zealand region, and 8 terns visit regularly or as rare vagrants.

Gulls are coastal or inland birds in New Zealand. Adults have white bodies and grey or black backs, and broad wings with black and white patterning at the tips. Juvenile plumage has a distinctive buff barring on the back and wings. Gulls have a strong bill with a distinctive shape, deepest about a third of the way back from the tip. They walk well on quite long legs. Gregarious; breeding in colonies and feeding and roosting in large numbers. The ground nest is a shallow cup in a low, well-formed mound of vegetation. Chicks are fed by regurgitation. Gulls feed on a wide variety of foods, including human refuse, fish, shellfish, crustaceans and other invertebrates (including earthworms and grubs exposed by ploughing) and eggs of other birds.

Terns and noddies are mostly pelagic or coastal, except some are inland on rivers or over coastal lakes. Noddies breed only in the tropics or subtropics, and sailors may have named them for their absurd-seeming nodding courtship displays. Terns are usually

white below and shades of black or grey above, while noddies are more uniformly white, grey or brown. Juvenile plumage has buff barring, especially on the back and wings. Terns and noddies are more aerial than gulls and are more delicate; their wings are narrower and more pointed and their tail is often forked, sometimes deeply. They have straight, slender, tapering bills. They shuffle or waddle along on short legs. Gregarious; breeding in colonies and feeding and roosting in tight flocks. The nest is a simple scrape or depression in sand, shingle, shell or rock, but some noddies build a small platform nest in a tree or shrub, and White Terns simply lay their egg in a depression on a tree branch. Whole small fish, caught mainly by plunging or by picking from the surface of water and held crosswise in the bill, are usually brought in courtship display and to the chicks, but some tropical terns and noddies feed by regurgitation. Chicks go on begging for months after they can fly.

**Reading:** Grant, P.J. 1981. *Gulls: An Identification Guide*. Calton: Poyser. Harrison, P. 1983. *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*. Beckenham: Croom Helm. Serventy, D.L. et al. 1971. *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed.

**246. ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*

Plate 55

**Size:** 34 cm, 110 g

**Distribution:** Circumpolar, breeding in arctic and subarctic regions of the Northern Hemisphere; Greenland, northern Europe, Siberia and North America. Arctic Terns migrate well south to the edge of the pack ice of the southern oceans, taking two routes, down the eastern sides of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans; return routes are less clearly defined. They are a rare but annual visitor to New Zealand as they pass by on their way to and

from Antarctic waters. Most records are of single birds on beaches and at river mouths from Northland to Southland, also at the Chathams. They are quite regular visitors to Auckland and Campbell Islands. A few subadults may overwinter.

**Behaviour:** Gregarious; often joining roosting flocks of White-fronted Terns, in which they are easily overlooked.

**Reading:** Latham, P.C.M. 1979. *Notornis* 26: 63-67.