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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Summary of shags: pp 75-76.

Stewart Island shag: pp 83-84.



### STEWART ISLAND SHAG

**Family** Phalacrocoracidae

**Species** *Phalacrocorax chalconotus*

**Common name** Stewart Island Shag

**Status** Endemic

**Abundance** Common in localised coastal places

**Size** 680 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, King Shag 760 mm)

**Habitat** Strictly coastal favouring rocky coastlines.

**New Zealand range** Around the coast of the South Island from the Otago Peninsula to Stewart Island and into Fiordland.

**Discussion** The Stewart Island Shag has in common with the King Shag the orange-yellow caruncles on the face, the blue eye-ring, the pink feet and in its pied phase the white scapular slash markings on the wings. It differs by being dimorphic coming in two phases – the pied and an all black phase known as the “bronze” phase. The name Bronze Shag was given to the black phase when at first it was considered to be a separate species. The name was derived from the green iridescent sheen which covers the black upper feathers of this bird.

### **Description – pied form**

**Head** Black. **Eye-ring** Blue. **Caruncles** Orange-yellow, tending to more orange than the King Shag. **Upperparts** Black. Feathering has a noticeable sheen when in breeding plumage. **Wings** Black, with a slash of white on scapular feathers. **Underparts** White from the throat down. **Bill** Grey. **Feet and legs** Pink.

### **Description – “bronze” form**

**Upperparts and underparts** Black, with an iridescent green sheen to the feathering.

### **Description – intermediate phases**

**Upperparts** Black. **Underparts** White, in varying amounts.

### **Conspicuous features**

- All black head is conspicuous.
- Look for the blue eye-ring. A telescope is really needed for this.

### **Conspicuous characteristics**

- Often seen in groups on offshore rocks.
- Usually seen feeding in deeper water than Pied Shags.
- A more confiding bird than the King Shag of the Marlborough Sounds.

**Call** Silent except when displaying at the colonies when grunts are made.

**Nest** It nests on the ground on rock ledges or among rock crevices where it builds a nest made of plant and vegetable material. 2 pale blue eggs are laid.

### **Where to find – South Island**

**Otago** – Oamaru at the breakwater. P. 357.

**Otago Peninsula** – Taiaroa Heads from the Royal Albatross observatory. P. 361.

**Southland** – Jacks Bay to Tautuku Bay, Porpoise Bay and Curio Bay. P. 364.

**Southland** – Riverton and Colac Bay west of Invercargill. P. 366.

### **Where to find – Stewart Island**

**Whero Island** – see from boat. P. 367.

**Ackers Point** – see from land. P. 367.



## SHAGS

**Groupings of New Zealand shags** New Zealand's shags are grouped in the one genus of *Phalacrocorax*. Previously they were grouped as –

- **Black-footed shags – Phalacrocorax** including Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Little Black Shag (*P. sulcirostris*), Pied Shag (*P. varius*), and Little Shag (*P. melanoleucos*). This group, apart from the Pied Shag which only occasionally ranges inland, are birds of both coastal waters and inland fresh water lakes and rivers. They are all tree-nesting birds although Black Shags will sometimes nest on rock ledges and sand banks.
- **Pink-footed shags – Leucocarbo** including King Shag (*Leucocarbo carunculatus*), Stewart Island Shag (*L. chalconotus*), Bounty Island Shag (*L. ranfurlyi*), Chatham Island Shag (*L. onslowi*), Campbell Island Shag (*L. campbelli*), Auckland Island Shag (*L. colensoi*) and Emperor Shag (*L. atriceps*). The pink-footed group are strictly coastal birds which breed on rock ledges.
- **Orange-footed shags – Stictocarbo** including Pitt Island Shag (*S. featherstoni*), Spotted Shag (*S. punctatus*) and its subspecies the Blue Shag (*S. p. steadi*) which has darker upper plumage and lacks the wide white facial and neck stripe of the spotted, this being reduced to a narrow band of white which does not extend in front of the eye. These species are strictly coastal and nest on rock ledges in inaccessible places.

### Characteristics of Shag species

- They dive for fish, some singly, but others like the Little Black Shag, in packs.
- After fishing, wing-spreading habits are common to all species but more so with the black-footed varieties. This latter action may be to help dry water-logged wings, as shags have inadequate feather waterproofing, possessing a grease gland at the bottom of the neck which is not equipped to cater for long under-water fishing excursions. It is possible a lack of feather waterproofing hinders flotation of swimming birds and so enables them to spend longer under the water.
- All New Zealand shags have similar flight patterns usually flying low to the water with necks outstretched. At times though they will fly at higher altitudes. Some also have the ability to raise a crest during the breeding season.