

Shags are medium to large aquatic birds. Most are all black, or black above and white below. Bill long, strongly hooked at the tip. Upright posture when perched. Short legs; feet are fully webbed. Many have brightly coloured facial skin when breeding. Sexes alike. In flight, wings short and broad, and neck is extended. Swim with head held uptilted and body low in the water.

AUCKLAND ISLAND SHAG *Leucocarbo colensoi* **Locally common endemic**

63 cm, 2 kg. Like King Shag, but caruncles absent. **Habitat:** Coastal and offshore waters around Auckland Is only. **Breeding:** Nov–May. [Sp 99]



SHAGS

33 species worldwide in freshwater and marine habitats; 12 species breed in the New Zealand region, including 8 endemic species.

In New Zealand, all members of the Phalacrocoracidae are called shags, whereas elsewhere the term 'cormorant' is used for members of the genus *Phalacrocorax*. Foot colour varies between the three genera in New Zealand: black in the mainly freshwater *Phalacrocorax*, pink in the marine *Leucocarbo*, and yellow in the marine *Stictocarbo*.

Shags are medium to large, long-necked aquatic birds with a stiff, wedge-shaped tail, and moderately short, rounded wings, which black-footed shags hold out to dry when perched. They feed by diving from the water surface to catch fish and crustacea with their long hooked bill. They use their webbed feet to swim underwater. The outermost toe is

Phalacrocoracidae

longest, and a web connects the inner toe with the long hind toe. In the breeding season, bare skin on the face becomes brightly coloured and contrasts with the eye and bill.

Shags sometimes feed in flocks, but they typically roost in flocks and breed in colonies on cliffs or rocky islets, or in trees overhanging water, sometimes together with other shags. They have an elaborate series of ritualised courtship displays at or near the nest, a bulky platform made of sticks or seaweed. Their eggs have a chalky encrustation on the surface. Both sexes share incubation. The chicks are naked at hatching but soon develop down. Both parents regurgitate food for the chicks. If a predator approaches, chicks in tree nests overhanging water will jump well before they can fly, but they are adept at climbing back up to the nest.

99. AUCKLAND ISLAND SHAG *Leucocarbo colensoi* **Plate 24**

Size: 63 cm, 2 kg
Distribution: Breed only on the Auckland Islands and have not been recorded elsewhere. Commonly seen around the sheltered harbours and inlets of the southern and eastern side of the islands.
Population: Probably c. 1000 pairs, including c. 500 on Enderby Island, and c. 300 on Ewing Island.
Conservation: Protected rare endemic. The population is limited to one island group, but no known threat exists.
Breeding: Nest in colonies on cliff-side ledges, usually under an overhang or under trees to

afford protection from skuas. The nest is a flattened bowl made of twigs, tussock, seaweed, peat and guano. Laying is in November–February. They lay 3 pale blue eggs (62 x 39 mm) at intervals of 2–4 days. The incubation period is about 28 days. The fledging period is not known.
Behaviour: Sometimes feed and roost in flocks. During courtship displays, the male utters barks and ticking sounds, and females give a soft purr.
Feeding: No detailed studies, but their diet includes small fish and marine invertebrates.