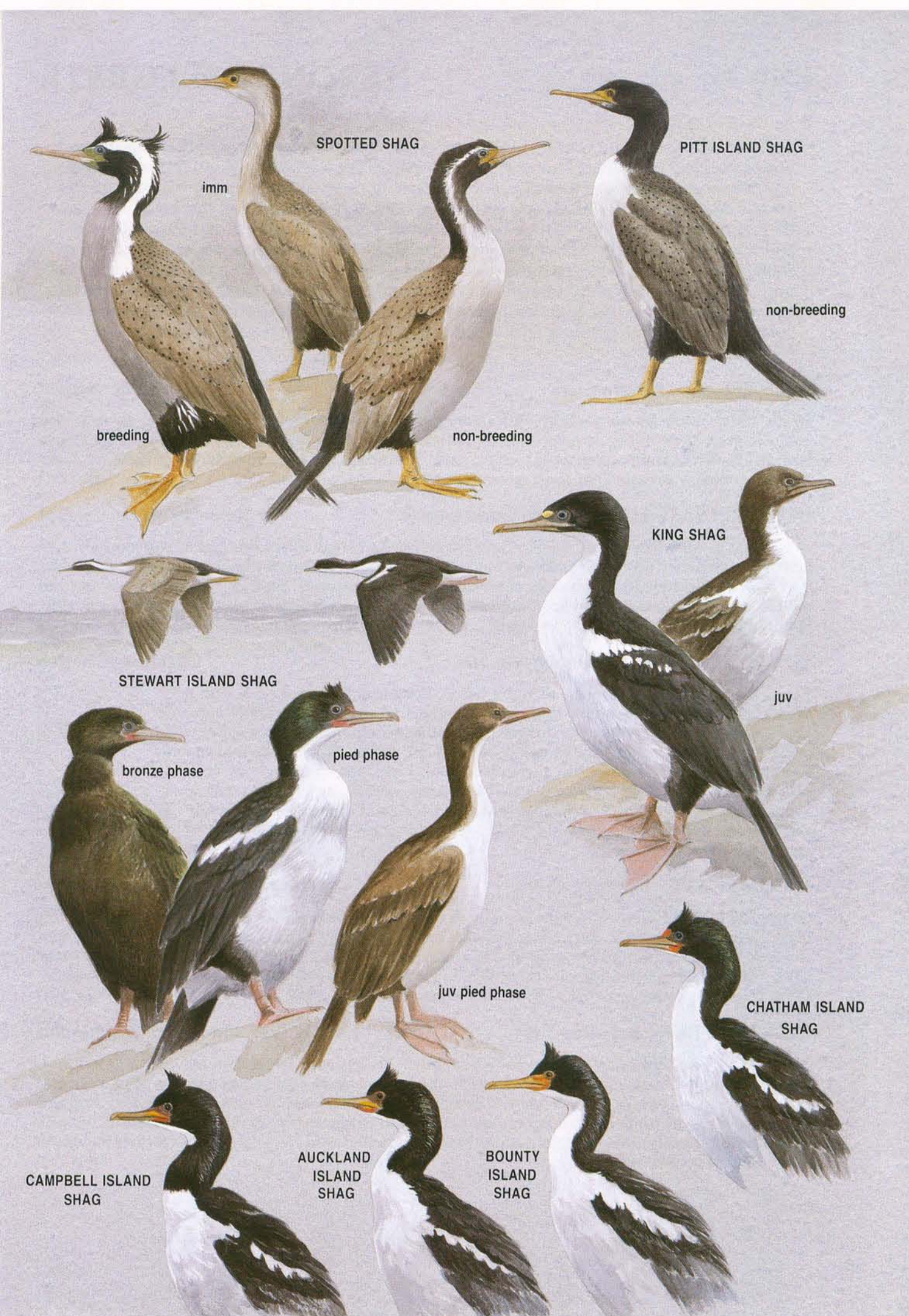


Shags are medium to large aquatic birds. Most are all black, or black above and white below. Bill long, strongly hooked at the tip. Upright posture when perched. Short legs; feet are fully webbed. Many have brightly coloured facial skin when breeding. Sexes alike. In flight, wings short and broad, and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

BOUNTY ISLAND SHAG *Leucocarbo ranfurlyi*

Locally common endemic

71 cm, 2.5 kg. Like King Shag, but caruncles absent. **Habitat:** Coastal and offshore waters around Bounty Is only. **Breeding:** Oct–Mar. [Sp 98]



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

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.

Phalacrocoracidae

98. BOUNTY ISLAND SHAG *Leucocarbo ranfurlyi*

Plate 24

Size: 71 cm, 2.5 kg

Distribution: Breed only on the Bounty Islands; commonly feed within the group, but also venture into the open ocean. One seen at The Snares (April–May 1997).

Population: 569 pairs in November 1978; the largest colony was on Lion Island (165 pairs); however, only 120 nests found in 1997/98.

Conservation: Protected rare endemic. The population may be declining rapidly.

Breeding: Nest mainly in colonies on narrow cliff-side ledges, but a few nests are on rocky ridges. The nest is a flattened bowl 35 cm in

diameter, made of seaweed, feathers, stones and mud. Laying is in October–November. They lay 2–3 eggs (64 x 41 mm). There is no information on incubation or fledging periods. **Behaviour:** Sometimes feed in flocks of up to 300 birds. They are generally silent, but the male only makes calls during displays. **Feeding:** Diet includes small fish and squid, snails, isopods and sea urchins.

Reading: Robertson, C.J.R. & van Tets, G.F. 1982. *Notornis* 29: 311–336.