WILSON'S STORM PETREL
Oceanites oceanicus

LOCAL COMMON NAME
Oceanites oceanicus

18 cm, 5.5 g. Brownish back with faint diagonal grey-brown bar on upperwing from bend of wing to body. Prominent seven or nine round black spots on tail. Eggs are very narrow, foot project beyond tail. Habitat: Breeds subantarctic and Antarctica, including several colonies in the Ross Sea Sector. Migrants are seen in NZ waters, mainly Nov-Dec and Mar-May. Breeding: Dec-Apr. [Sp 67]

STORM PETRELS
The Oceanidæ are very small seabirds, ranging from Antarctic waters to the tropics. There are 23 species, of which 3 breed in the New Zealand region, and 1 is a vagrant.

The storm petrels are small, delicate birds with a weak black bill. They have prominent nostril flaps 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 toes are webbed and used to skid or paddle along the sea surface as the birds look for zooplankton.


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Size: 18 cm, 35 g

Geographical variation: Two subspecies: oceanicus breeds on subantarctic islands in the South Atlantic and South Indian Ocean; caerulescens breeds on coasts and islands off the east coast of New Zealand and migrates through New Zealand waters. Distribution: Circumpolar, breeding at many sites on the coast of Antarctica and on many islands in the southern subantarctic and subantarctic waters to 40ºS. 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.

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Plate 17

Oceanidæ

New Zealand waters: they are regularly seen in Pencarrow Harbour, Campbell Island. In most years, the main southeast migration route passes to the coast of New Zealand, judged by records near sea at 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 nests and to court. Laying is in December-January. They lay one egg (33 x 24 mm, 30 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. 60 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 Petrel, the only other black-storm petrel with a white rump known from the region, but with a smaller bill, 11-12.5-13.5 mm, of 13-14-16-17.5 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.