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Sooty shearwater: pp 35-36.



SOOTY SHEARWATER

Family Procellariidae

Species *Puffinus griseus*

Common names Sooty Shearwater, Mutton-bird

Status Native

Abundance Common

Size 440 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Flesh-footed Shearwater 450 mm)

Breeding islands close to New Zealand Breeds on many islands from the Three Kings Islands to the north of the North Island, to Campbell and Macquarie Islands in the far south of New Zealand. Very large populations breed on the islands around Stewart Islands.

Breeding months November to May. 1 white egg is laid in a burrow, the first birds arriving back to the breeding colonies in late September.

Range worldwide Undertakes a circular migration of the Pacific Ocean, moving into the northern hemisphere waters around the first week of May.

New Zealand range Widely spread around all New Zealand waters. At times can be seen feeding close to land, especially when weather is rough.

Discussion The Sooty Shearwater is probably New Zealand's most common species of seabird of some several million birds.

Description

Upperparts Black. **Underparts** Greyish-brown. **Underwing** Primary feathers black with some silver streaking on the secondary feathers. **Bill** Dark grey. **Legs and feet** Brownish.

Conspicuous features

- Smaller than Flesh-footed Shearwater and Buller's Shearwater both of which can be seen in the same waters.
- The silver streaking on the underwing quickly separates this species from Flesh-footed Shearwater, Grey-faced Petrel and Black Petrel.
- Brownish coloured feet separate it from the conspicuous, flesh-coloured feet, of the Flesh-footed Shearwater.
- Dark grey bill separates it from the pale yellow bill of the Flesh-footed Shearwater.

Conspicuous characteristic

- A fast flying shearwater with rather stiff wing action, which flaps and then glides for some distance along waves tops and in wave troughs.

Call "Kuu – ah kuu – ah", heard from incoming birds over the breeding islands. Call can be hysterical in tone and deafening.

Where to find – North Island

Bay of Islands – Both Sooty and Flesh-footed Shearwaters can be seen here.

North Auckland – Towards Little Barrier Island. P. 289.

Coromandel – Mercury Islands from Whitianga.

Wellington – Cook Strait from the Cook Strait ferry.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough Sounds – In deeper waters towards Maud Island. P. 343.

Otago Peninsula – Can be seen from Taiaroa Heads. P. 360, 361.

Southland coast – From a telescope mounted on the beach or cliffs.

Try the following places:

- Nugget Point – Balclutha. P. 362.
- Curio Bay – East of Invercargill on the south coast. P. 364.
- Bluff – Stirling Point. P. 365.
- Riverton – West of Invercargill. P. 366.

Where to find – Stewart Island

Half Moon Bay – Take a seabird excursion. P. 367

Foveaux Strait – From the ferry. P. 367.

Black-coloured petrels and shearwaters ranging around New Zealand waters are always difficult to identify. These include the dark brownish coloured Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*), Flesh-footed Shearwater (*P. carneipes*), White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*), Westland Black Petrel (*P. westlandica*) and Black Petrel (*P. parkinsoni*).

In the deeper waters of the Hauraki Gulf, Sooty Shearwater, Flesh-footed Shearwater, and the Black Petrel can be seen together. In waters such as Cook Strait all the above species might be seen.

Locality and breeding differences between White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) Westland Black Petrel (*P. westlandica*) and the Black Petrel (*P. parkinsoni*):

- The Westland Black Petrel is a winter breeder occupying its breeding colonies from February to December. The Black Petrel breeds from October through to July and the White-chinned from November to May.
- The Westland Black Petrel is considered to be non-migratory in the true annual migration sense. It spreads across the Tasman towards Australia while the Black Petrel migrates north-east of New Zealand and above the equator. The White-chinned Petrel is truly circumpolar.
- Breeding colonies of the three species are widely separated with Black Petrel breeding on Little Barrier Island and Great Barrier Island, Westland Black Petrel nesting on the Paparoa Ranges of mainland South Island in Westland, while the White-chinned Petrel nests well to the south of New Zealand on Auckland Island, Campbell Island and Antipodes Island, as well as other islands around the southern oceans.

Diagnostic similarities and differences between Sooty Shearwaters, Flesh-footed Shearwaters, White-chinned Petrels, Westland Black Petrels and Black Petrels as to bills and feet:

- Sooty Shearwater – bill dark grey. Legs and feet, lilac-brown.
- Flesh-footed Shearwater – bill pale yellowish, with top edge and tip, greyish. Legs and feet, flesh pink.
- White-chinned Petrel – bill yellowish with dark grey only at the end of the nasal tubes. Pale yellowish bill tip. Legs and feet, black.
- Westland Black Petrel – bill pale yellowish with black tip. Legs and feet, black.
- Black Petrel – bill pale yellowish with dark grey tip. Legs and feet, black.

General

- Birds have either yellowish or dark grey coloured bills.
- Birds have either black or pinkish legs and feet.

- All birds are difficult to separate at sea.
- The white chin of the White-chinned Petrel is not a good diagnostic feature as not all birds have it, but those with it are White-chinned Petrels.
- With the population of the Black Petrel increasing, the chances of seeing this species are improving. Chances are good for the Westland Black Petrel which numbers around 1100 breeding pairs, especially at Kaikoura.
- All species are noted for their habit of circling the coasts off their breeding islands at dusk, and then at dark, coming in and falling through the shrub canopies to land, all the time making very noisy and vocal calls. After a brief respite around midnight the noise again starts as birds leave the burrows for their take-off points.