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

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Summary of shags: pp 75-76.

King shag: pp 81-82.



KING SHAG

Family Phalacrocoracidae

Species *Phalacrocorax carunculatus*

Common names King Shag, Rough-faced Shag

Status Endemic

Abundance Rare

Size 760 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Pied Shag 810 mm)

Habitat A coastal species found around the rock stacks of offshore islands.

New Zealand range Confined to rocky stacks and small islands at the entrances of Pelorus and Queen Charlotte Sounds. This area is about 500 kms from the nearest colony of Stewart Island Shags at Tairaroa Heads.

Discussion This shag is a close relative of the Stewart Island Shag (*Phalacrocorax chalconotus*). It is separated by the lack of a crest during the breeding season and by the fact that it comes only in a pied phase. The Stewart Island Shag is dimorphic as to plumage colouring, coming in both a pied phase of all white underparts, and a dark phase of all black underparts which is known as the bronze phase. Breeding starts in April and continues to August. The Stewart

Island Shag reaches its breeding peak in September – October.

Description

Head Black. This distinguishes it from the Pied Shag which has a white face to just above the eye. **Eye-ring** Blue. **Caruncles** Yellow. (These are rough patches of flesh on the sides of the face at the base of the bill, also found on other pink-footed shags.) **Upperparts** Black. **Wings** Black, with a slash of white on the scapular feathers. **Underparts** White. **Bill** Grey. **Feet and legs** Pink.

Conspicuous features

- Lack of white on face is distinctive when compared with the Pied Shag.
- The blue eye-ring is distinctive.

Conspicuous characteristics

- When in flight head is held lower than the Pied Shag.
- Flies close to the water.

Call Usually silent unless displaying, when grunts and croaks are made.

Nest A colonial nester making a nest of seaweed and twigs on the ground. Up to 3 pale blue eggs.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough – Queen Charlotte Sound nesting on White Rocks. P. 340, 341.

Marlborough – Pelorus Sound nesting on Chetwode Island, Sentinel Rock, Duffers Reef, and Trio Islands at the entrance of the Sound. P. 342.

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.