

Coastal birds

Digging deeper...

The Royal spoonbill has only recently taken up residence in Otago, having started breeding on offshore islands just over 20 years ago. No one knows why these birds have decided to start breeding here, but they are welcome additions to our local fauna.

If you want a bird feeding experience, try a picnic in any of the parks or beaches around Otago as chances are some seagulls will be very keen to share your meal!

Seagulls are the most abundant coastal birds found in Otago. The Red-billed gull and Black-backed gull are the most common and these can be found on the coast and pretty much wherever there are people! They feed in estuaries, mudflats, lagoons and rubbish dumps and both species are very persistent scavengers.

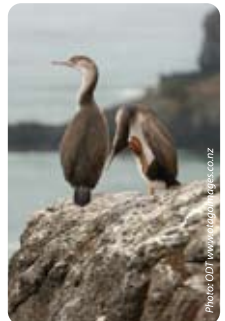
Other common groups of coastal birds you'll see in Otago are the shags and cormorants. Breeding colonies are abundant along Otago's coastline. The species you are most likely to see is the Little pied cormorant, which is found in estuaries, harbours and sometimes also on inland waterways. The largest species, the Black cormorant, is in fact a freshwater species and is therefore most commonly found inland.

Species of shag you can see in Otago include the Stewart Island shag, which breeds on the Otago Peninsula, and the Spotted shag. Both these shags feed mainly on small fish and invertebrates that they catch by diving underwater. They fly as far as 15km from the coast in search of food.

Seabirds that occasionally visit Otago include the mollymawks, prions, petrels and shearwaters (muttonbirds). As they feed exclusively at sea, these birds are best viewed from boats but sometimes come close enough to the shore for the keen bird spotter to see.



A Black-backed gull sounding the alarm



Two spotted shags taking in the view

