

## ENDANGERED SPECIES IN NEW ZEALAND

# Rare king shag — a truly royal bird

THE KING SHAG, *Phalacrocorax carunculatus*, is a sedentary species that remains in its breeding grounds all the year round. This beautiful bird is therefore seen only in Cook Strait and the outer Marlborough Sounds, a small circular area of about 50 km radius. It breeds on White Rock, Duffers Reef, North Trio, and Sentinel Rock (all island sites) and recently on a mainland rocky point in the Sounds but still within its natural breeding radius. This latest breeding has been a fitful thing over the past 9 years and apparently only one pair has been involved. However, adult and young birds also frequent the area and it seems that a colonisation is under way.

THERE ARE only 200 to 300 king shags in all, and, strangely, this is about the number estimated by H. H. Travers 100 years ago.

An example of this magnificent species was collected by Forster in Queen Charlotte Sound during Cook's second voyage, but he thought it the same as a species he had found in Tierra del Fuego.

---

**By David G. Collingwood,  
National Conservation  
Officer**

---

It remained for H. H. Travers in 1875 to establish the king shag's unique position among New Zealand avifauna. Apparently the Maoris were unaware of its separate species nature, for they had no name for it.

In later years some 14 other species of similar blue-eyed marine shag were discovered in subantarctic islands. They are all closely related and share the habit of confining themselves within a small breeding area; except for species inhabiting the coasts of Chile and Peru (where they are famous for producing guano) and the several New Zealand species with blue eyes, the



A group of king shags on Duffers Reef, near the entrance to Pelorus Sound.

Wildlife Service photo