

Variable Oystercatcher



COMMON NAME:	VARIABLE OYSTERCATCHER – Forster, 1844
LATIN NAME:	<i>Haematopus unicolor</i>
LATIN MEANING:	Haematopus L. <i>Haematopus</i> , blood-foot (Gr. <i>haima</i> , blood; <i>pous</i> , the foot). <i>Unicolor</i> L. <i>unicolor</i> , of one colour, iniform.
MAORI NAME:	Torea-pango
CLASS:	Avia
ORDER:	Charadriiformes
FAMILY:	Haematopodidae
GENUS:	<i>Haematopus</i>
SPECIES/SUB SPECIES:	<i>Unicolor</i>

DESCRIPTION:

Variable colouration; unicolor individuals are entirely black with a red mandible and scarlet iris, legs a coral pink. Pied individuals are black with white belly, flanks, rump and tail coverts. Intermediate individuals have variable amounts of white on wing bars, rump and belly. All birds have an orange eye-ring, bright orange mandible (often with a yellow tip) and coral pink legs.

HABITAT / DISTRIBUTION:

Scattered right round the New Zealand coastline.

BREEDING:

October to February, clutch size 2–3 olive/grey eggs with dark brown spots. Eggs are laid two days apart and the incubation period is 26–28 days. Chicks fledge some six weeks after hatching.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:

Monogamous, divorce is rare and pairs will defend their territories. During the winter months Variable Oystercatchers will form flocks.

DIET:

Forage for shellfish (eg. limpets, mussels and other estuarine bivalves).

PRINCIPAL THREATS:

- Loss of habitat through waterfront development
- Introduced predators preying on eggs and young birds
- Human disturbance.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

Rare.



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