

to Halfmoon Bay the birds can be seen in the torch beam scuttling across the track on their bellies at a man's running speed, surmounting incredible physical obstacles on their way to their nests.

By daylight the coastal tracks are equally rewarding as they wend their way round sandy coves, across tidal creeks, and along bush-covered cliff tops, affording now and then a picturesque view of the sea. From the various points many species of shore birds may be recognised, including black oystercatcher, white-faced heron, kingfisher, and harrier hawk. The tidal creeks are the habitat of brown teal, and though this duck is now extremely rare on Stewart Island, one pair with three chicks was located not far from Oban. Grey duck and mallard are also scattered along the coast in small numbers, and black swans were seen on one occasion as a group of six flew high over Oban from the direction of Paterson Inlet.

#### Four Species of Shags

Conspicuous by their size and numbers along the coast are shags, of which there are four species on Stewart Island. Undoubtedly the best way to observe these birds closely is to approach them by boat. This is readily done by joining one of the launch excursions to Ulva or another of the islands in Paterson Inlet; close approaches to the nesting sea birds are then made.

The little shag, ranging in plumage phases from the fully pied phase, through the white-throated to the totally black phase, nests in stunted rata trees that grow on the small off-shore nuggets. Each nugget will also have its pair of black-backed gulls and perhaps a small colony of red-billed gulls and white-fronted terns.

Blue shags (the Stewart Island race of the spotted shag) are probably the most numerous of the shags and are to be seen flying and fishing all along the coastline, but they prefer vertical cliffs with ledges for their breeding sites. The big pied shag, on the other hand, nests in small colonies in trees which grow on the sides and tops of cliffs and overhang the sea.

The fourth shag species, the dimorphic Stewart Island shag, breeds around the coastline in remote, inaccessible places, but congregates in large numbers in Paterson Inlet



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The native pigeon, which the author found numerous around the settlement and which fed on broom and gorse flowers.

to feed. The bronze form, showing a "bronze" sheen only in good sunlight, appears uniformly dark, but the pied form is not unlike the large pied shag. These two pied birds may, however, be readily distinguished by the more extensive area of white around the face and throat of the pied shag and the presence of white patches on the upper surfaces of the wings in the Stewart Island shag.

#### Sea Birds on Ulva Island

All these shags, with several other interesting sea bird species such as sooty shearwater, Cape pigeon, white-capped mollymawk, and little blue and yellow-eyed penguin may be seen closely during a trip to Ulva Island. On Ulva itself yellow-crowned parakeet and brown creeper (not usually observed near Oban) may be found in the bush, and perhaps also a yellow-eyed penguin incubating on its nest in some spot where the vegetation has escaped heavy browsing.

To record additional species we had to penetrate the interior regions of Stewart Island and cross to Mason Bay on the west coast. This could be done either by setting out on foot from Oban or by proceeding by boat to the head of Paterson Inlet where it narrows