

## TARA / WHITE-FRONTED TERN – DIET AND POPULATION SURVEY, A PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

There are two aims for this research project:

1. Survey the diet of tara / white-fronted tern with prey identified through a photographic competition run across the 2022-2023 breeding season. This is a nation-wide contest and welcomes citizen science participation in the international 'Year of the Terns 2022'.
2. Continue surveys for tara / white-fronted tern colonies for the wider Hauraki Gulf region (including estimates of breeding success).

Tara breed colonially in a wide range of sites: rocky offshore islands and stacks; exposed reefs; ledges on cliffs or on steep slopes; sand spits, shingle banks and shell-sand islands in estuaries and along the coast; and on groynes and harbour piles. The species is widespread and, at times, locally numerous. In a few cases where breeding has been followed at a location for several successive years, previous surveys have shown the transient nature of the white-fronted tern's occupancy of individual sites, with a place being used in one year sometimes wholly or largely being abandoned the next. The reasons for these sudden shifts in colony location and size are poorly known: disturbance; increasing predation; flooding; and shifting food supplies have all been suggested, among others. For these reasons we will continue the colony counts for the wider Hauraki Gulf region into a fourth season. Boats are required for most of the colonies which are on islands or stacks.

The photographic component aims to gather important data primarily on their prey, but also provide greater coverage of population, breeding success, geographical and temporal variation. We also want to investigate tara response to the pressures they face at nesting sites, in their foraging areas, and to changing environment conditions including climate change. The first aim is to establish a database of photographic records of tara with identifiable prey items over the 2022-2023 breeding season, linked geographically. Digital photo sampling has been used as a non-invasive method to study food provisioning of terns. Ideally, this will kick-start a long term or repeated monitoring project, given enough uptake from the birding and photographic community nationwide. Entries will be judged in three categories:

1. Best picture of a tern or terns carrying identifiable prey.
2. Most unique prey species captured.
3. Best portfolio of photographs of birds carrying identifiable prey items through the different breeding stages, and including colony counts for a single colony (or multiple colonies).

Further sponsorship is provided by  
Nikon NZ and Photo & Video  
Christchurch.

Chris Gaskin, Project Coordinator,  
Northern NZ Seabird Trust



*©Image: Edin Whitehead*