

A Pied Shag (*Phalacrocorax varius*) beating the surface of the water while fishing

On 25 March 1996, during a visit to Waiheke Island to locate post-breeding flocks of terns, my attention was caught by the particular behaviour of a Pied Shag (*Phalacrocorax varius*). At intervals while swimming close to the shore, the bird would beat the surface with half-open wings, then put its head under the water for a few seconds without diving. Five or six vigorous wing strokes were involved and this caused considerable sound and disturbance.

No other shags were nearby. The bird did not appear to be washing, and gave no sign of preening or trying to clean its plumage. I deduced that the most likely purpose was to disturb fish which might be sheltering in the shallows. The performance was repeated a number of times, and I supposed that sooner or later its action on the surface would be followed by diving to make a catch. However, before this could be confirmed the bird was disturbed by an in-coming motor launch and it flew off.

In a study of feeding behaviour and diving rhythms, Stonehouse (1967) found that Pied Shags intersperse dives, averaging 30 seconds, with rests of 12 seconds on the surface. Before the first dive, birds often fluffed their feathers and immersed the head and neck, probably to saturate the plumage. However, that activity does not match the behaviour which I describe here.

LITERATURE CITED

STONEHOUSE, B. 1967. Feeding behaviour and diving rhythms of some New Zealand shags. *Ibis* 109: 600-605.

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