

SHORT NOTE

Variable Oystercatchers cope with gulls

On 10 January 1993, while on Tern I. in Ohiwa Harbour, we saw an immature Variable Oystercatcher (*Haematopus unicolor*) swimming 30-40 metres off the shore of the island.

At first we thought the bird was being swept out to sea, but it was then attacked by three or four Black-backed Gulls (*Larus dominicanus*). At once, two adult oystercatchers, obviously the parents, flew out from the beach and attacked the gulls. They were then joined by two more adult Variable Oystercatchers, which helped drive off the gulls. The immature slowly swam back to the beach, was greeted by its parents, and all three flew off further down the beach.

Soon afterwards, on another part of the beach, we saw two unfledged Variable Oystercatcher chicks that, while running along the water's edge, took to the water and swam past a Black-backed Gull, which just stood on the beach watching.

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