

Bellbird/korimako *Anthornis melanura*

Endemic, Not Threatened



Bellbirds are olive green, with a purplish head. Females have duller plumage than males.



Their song resembles the chiming of bells. The alarm call is a series of loud, rapidly repeated, harsh staccato notes.



Bellbirds are endemic to New Zealand, and occur throughout the country from the coast to about 1200 metres. They live in forest and scrub habitats. They can be spotted in urban areas, especially if there is bush nearby.



Bellbirds eat nectar, fruit and insects. They are important pollinators of many native plant species, such as mistletoe, fuchsia and kōwhai.



Bellbirds breed from September through to February. They prefer to nest in trees with dense foliage for cover. Bellbirds mate with the same partner each year and maintain the same breeding territory. The female makes the nest, lays 3–5 eggs, and incubates the clutch. Both parents feed the chicks, which fledge after 14 days. A pair can raise two broods in a season.



Just as people from different parts of New Zealand can have noticeably regional accents, bellbirds also sing with regional 'dialects'. Bellbird songs vary enormously from one place to another, even over short distances.



Adult male bellbird/korimako.
Photo: Craig McKenzie

Seen it! ☐



Silvereye/tauhou *Zosterops lateralis*

Native, Not Threatened



The silvereye (waxeye, white-eye) is a small olive green bird, with a white ring around its eye. Males have slightly brighter plumage than females.



Adult silvereye/tauhou.
Photo: Tony Whitehead



Silvereyes have a range of clear, high-pitched and melodious calls including warbles and trills, often repeated. The main contact is a plaintive creee, and the flight call a shorter cli-cli, with many birds calling at once. Full song is a quiet, long warble.



The silvereye has a wide distribution throughout New Zealand. They can be found from sea level to above the treeline but they are not abundant in deep forest or open grassland.



Silvereyes mainly eat insects, fruit and nectar. They have a fine tapered bill and a brush-tipped tongue for reaching nectar. They are often seen feeding in flocks.



Silvereyes were self-introduced in the 1830s and are now among the most common bird in suburbia. Its Māori name, tauhou, means 'stranger' or more literally, 'new arrival'.

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Photo: Bartek Wypych

Common birds of the Marlborough Sounds



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Fantail/pīwakawaka *Rhipidura fuliginosa*

Endemic, Not Threatened



Fantails are easily recognized by their fan-tail. They have two colour forms, pied or black. The pied birds are grey-brown with white and black bands on their tails.



North Island adult fantail/
pīwakawaka calling.
Photo: Ormond Torr



Fantails are quite vocal with either a single 'cheet' call, or more rapid 'tweeta-tweeta-tweeta'.



Fantails are endemic (unique) to New Zealand and are widespread except where frosts and snow falls are too harsh. Their range extends from sea level to the snowline.



Their main prey are moths, flies, spiders, wasps, beetles and sometimes fruit. Fantails use their broad tails to change direction quickly while hunting for insects, plucking the insects from the air. They will hang around people (and other birds), but it's not because they are friendly, it's because you are disturbing food for them to eat!



The fantail lifespan is less than 3 years. Fantails stay in pairs all year but high mortality means that the pairing seldom survives more than one season. The success of the species is largely due to their prolific and early breeding. Both adults incubate eggs for about 14 days and the chicks fledge at about 13 days. Both adults feed the young, but as soon as the female starts building the next nest, the male takes over the role of feeding the previous brood.



Young are fed about every 10 minutes – about 100 times per day!

Seen it! ☐



Grey warbler/riroriro *Gerygone igata*

Endemic, Not Threatened



The grey warbler is a relatively inconspicuous grey-brown bird with pale grey on the face, throat and breast and an off-white belly and under-tail.



Adult grey warbler/riroriro.
Photo: Bartek Wypych



Grey warblers have a characteristic long trilled song. Only males sing, although females do give short chirp calls, usually as a contact call near the male.



The grey warbler occurs everywhere where there are trees or shrubs, including rural and urban areas. They are typically found only in woody vegetation, in mid to high levels of the canopy, making them difficult to observe.



Grey warblers are insectivores, often hovering to pick insects and spiders from plants.



Grey warblers usually breed from August to January. The nest is a hanging enclosed dome, usually found in the outer branches of the canopy, 2–4 m off the ground. Birds in the north raise one brood per season, whereas those in the South Island usually have two broods. Females lay 3–5 eggs per clutch.



Grey warblers are the only mainland host for the shining cuckoo. The female shining cuckoo removes a single egg from the grey warbler nest, replacing it with her egg. After hatching, the cuckoo chick ejects all grey warbler eggs and nestlings from the nest and is raised alone by the grey warbler.

Seen it! ☐



Wood pigeon/kererū *Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*

Endemic, Not Threatened



The kererū is a large bird with iridescent green and bronze feathers on its head and a white vest. Kererū measure up to 51 cm from tail to beak, and weigh about 650 g.



New Zealand wood
pigeon/kererū.
Photo: Herb Christophers



The noisy beat of their wings is a distinctive sound in our forests. Their call is a soft 'oo'.



Kererū are found in most lowland native forests throughout the country. They inhabit a wide variety of forest types. Providing there is food, they also visit urban parks and rural and suburban gardens.



Kererū eat berries, leaves, buds and flowers. Since the extinction of moa, kererū are now the only seed disperser with a beak big enough to swallow large fruit, such as those of karaka, tawa and taraire. The disappearance of the kererū would be a disaster for the regeneration of our native forests.



As long-lived birds, they breed slowly. They nest mainly in spring and early summer producing one egg per nest, which both parents look after. The chick leaves the nest when about 40 days old. It is fed 'pigeon milk', a protein-rich milky secretion from the walls of the parents' crops, mixed with fruit pulp.



When enough fruit is available, some pairs of kererū will have a large chick in one nest and be incubating an egg in another nearby.

Seen it! ☐



Tūī

Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae

Endemic, Not Threatened



Tūī appear black from a distance but are actually metallic blue-green. They have a distinctive white tuft under their throat.



Adult tūī in kōwhai.
Photo: Craig McKenzie



Their call is similar to bellbirds but combines the bell-like notes with harsh clicks, barks, cackles and wheezes.



Tūī are widespread and locally abundant in forested areas around the country but rarer in the drier, largely open country east of the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana. Tūī are found in native forest, scrub, exotic forests, suburban parks and gardens.



Tūī feed mainly on nectar from flowers of native plants such as kōwhai, kahikatea, rātā and flax. Occasionally they will eat insects. Tūī are important pollinators of many native trees and will fly large distances, especially during winter, for their favourite foods. Tūī are quite aggressive, and will chase other tūī and other species away from good food sources.



Courtship takes place between September and October when they sing high up in the trees in the early morning and late afternoon. Females build nests and incubate the 2-4 eggs. Incubation and brooding is by the female only. Chicks are initially fed by the female, later assisted by the male.



These clever birds mimic sounds such as the call of the bellbird and in urban areas sometimes telephones!

Seen it! ☐



Western weka *Gallirallus australis australis*

Endemic, At Risk—Declining



The weka is a large, brown flightless bird with a short, sharp bill.



Adult western weka.
Photo: James Mortimer



The weka's best known call is a repetitive, loud 'coo-et' that is usually heard at dusk. It is presented as a duet, with the male giving the lower and slower part.



There are four sub-species of weka: North Island, Stewart Island, buff and the western weka, the most common sub-species. Weka occupy a range of habitats from forests, subalpine grassland, and sand dunes to rocky shores, and modified semi-urban areas.



Weka mainly eat invertebrates and fruit, and occasionally eat lizards, rodents, food scraps, carrion, and the eggs and young of other ground-nesting birds. They will also take inedible items to the nearest cover to investigate them. It is best not to chase weka but to simply watch where they go and retrieve the objects later.



Weka usually breed once a year. Where the populations are territorial they mate for life but not when there is less need for males to defend a territory.



Buff weka were once common on the eastern South Island but became extinct there in the 1920s. However, they were introduced to Chatham and Pitt islands in 1905, where they are considered a pest, so many Chatham Islanders hunt them for the dinner table (that is illegal here!).

Seen it! ☐



Sacred kingfisher/kōtare *Todiramphus sanctus*

Native, Not Threatened



The kingfisher is a distinctive bird with a green-blue back, buff to yellow undersides and a large black bill. It has a broad black eye-stripe, and a white collar in adults. The females are slightly greener and duller.



Sacred kingfisher.
Photo: Bartek Wypych



Kingfishers have a wide range of unmusical calls, the most distinctive of which is the staccato 'kek-kek-kek' territorial call.



Kingfishers are found throughout the country in both coastal and inland freshwater habitats. They live in a wide range of habitats, including forest, river margins, farmland, lakes, estuaries and rocky coastlines.



Their diet in estuarine mudflats is mainly small crabs, with a range of tadpoles, freshwater crayfish and small fish in freshwater habitats. In open country they eat insects, spiders, lizards, mice and small birds.



Nest sites are in cavities in trees, cliffs and banks with breeding from September to February. After leaving the nest chicks are fed by both parents for 7-10 days before they start to catch food for themselves.



Kingfishers appear to have high fidelity to breeding sites. The same burrow has been reported in use for 20 consecutive years, but it is not known how many birds were involved.

Seen it! ☐



Variable oystercatcher/tōrea

Haematopus unicolor

Endemic, Recovering



The variable oystercatcher is a large heavily-built shorebird. Adults have black upperparts, their underparts vary from all black, through a range of 'smudgy' intermediate states to white. Pied morph birds can be confused with the South Island pied oystercatcher. They have a conspicuous long bright orange bill (longer in females), and stout coral-pink legs. The iris is red and the eye-ring orange.



Variable oystercatchers are very vocal; loud piping is used in territorial interactions and when alarmed. Chicks are warned of danger with a sharp, loud 'chip' or 'click'.



Variable oystercatchers occur around most of the coastline of New Zealand. They breed most commonly on sandy beaches, sandspits and in dunes.



Variable oystercatchers eat a wide range of coastal invertebrates, including molluscs and crustaceans which they open either by pushing the tip of the bill between shells and twisting, or by hammering. They occasionally eat small fish and a range of terrestrial invertebrates, including earthworms.



Variable oystercatchers breed in monogamous pairs and defend territories vigorously against neighbours. Nests are normally simple scrapes in the sand and the 2-3 eggs are laid from October onwards. Incubation is shared and takes about 28 days. Chicks fly at 6-7 weeks old and late chicks may not fledge until March. Chicks are vigorously protected by both parents, often well after fledging. Adults show high fidelity to their mate and the site.



The proportion of all-black birds increases as you head south.



Black colour morph, variable oystercatcher feeding.
Photo: Ormond Torr

Seen it! ☐



Little penguin/kororā

Eudyptula minor

Native, Declining



The little penguin (also called little blue penguin) is New Zealand's smallest penguin. It is medium-blue to dark indigo-blue, and has white underparts.



The main call at nesting sites is a loud bray ending in an inhalant squeal; also deep growls. A contact 'bark' is given at sea.



Little penguins are widely distributed along the coastlines of the North and South Islands, Stewart Island/Rakiura, and Chatham Islands and their offshore islands.



During the breeding season little penguins forage within 20 km of the colony, pursuit diving for prey generally in waters less than 50 m deep. Their diet is composed of varying proportions of small shoaling fish, squid and crustacean species.



Little penguins can breed as isolated pairs, in colonies, or semi-colonially. Nests are situated close to the sea in burrows excavated by the birds or other species, or in caves, rock crevices, under logs or in or under a variety of man-made structures. They are monogamous within a breeding season, and share incubation and chick-rearing duties. Incubation of 1-2 eggs takes up to 36 days. Chicks are brooded for 18-38 days, and fledge after 7-8 weeks.



When returning to nesting areas at dusk, they congregate in small groups, or 'rafts' offshore. Rafts usually come ashore together and comprise the same individuals each night.



Little penguin/kororā.
Photo: Colin Miskelly

Seen it! ☐



Spotted shag/parekareka

Stictocarbo punctatus

Endemic, Not Threatened



The spotted shag is a medium-sized, grey-blue marine shag with a long, slender bill and yellow-orange feet. Adult breeding birds have small black spots on their back and wings. A distinctive curved broad white stripe runs from above the eye down both sides of the neck. They have a black crest on the front and back of the head. Bare facial skin between the eye and bill turns green-blue before the breeding season.



They make loud grunts at resting, roosting and nesting areas, but are otherwise silent.



Spotted shags occur mainly around the South Island in coastal waters out to 16 km, entering inlets and estuaries to feed and roost. The Marlborough Sounds is a stronghold for the species.



Spotted shag diet consists of small fish and marine invertebrates, including squid and plankton. They feed in deep water up to 16 km offshore.



Spotted shags breed in colonies of a few pairs to 700 pairs. Timing varies year to year, depending on food availability. Spotted shags are monogamous; 3-4 pale blue eggs are laid in a large nest platform made of sticks and vegetation, built on coastal cliff ledges and stacks. Incubation and chick-rearing are shared. Young leave the nest at 62 days.



Spotted shags often have a mass of small stones ('rangle') in their gizzards, but the reason for this is unknown. The possibilities include: to function as ballast, to grind up food, or to create an inhospitable environment for gut parasites.



Adult spotted shag in breeding plumage.
Photo: Ormond Torr

Seen it! ☐

