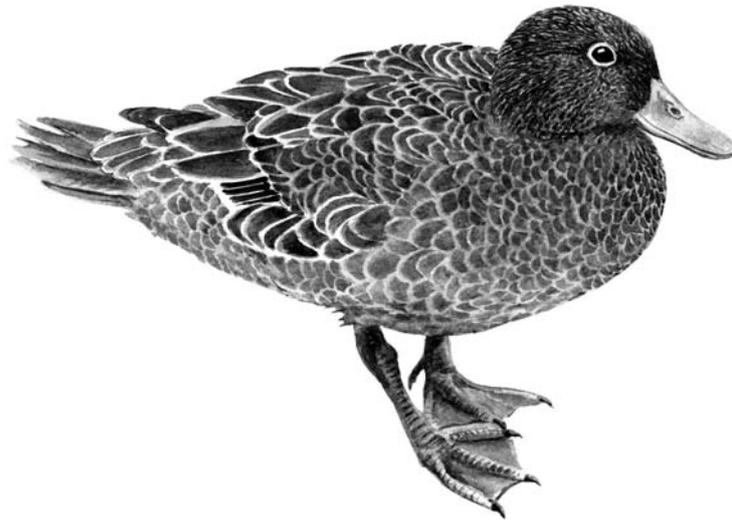


Brown teal

Anas chlorotis

Pateke



A threatened endemic, this duck is one of the rarest in the world and has been protected since 1921. They were first introduced to Tiritiri Matangi Island in 1987. They are extremely active and confident at night, but spend much of the day hidden in grass and rushes overhanging waterways. Brown teal can often be seen on the dam just above the wharf.

What do they look like?

Brown teal are small ducks with a narrow head and dark brown face. They are usually an overall warm dark brown colour with pale edges to the feathers. In breeding plumage, the male has a dark glossy green head, a narrow indistinct white collar at the front of the neck, a chestnut breast and a white patch on the flanks. The bill is bluish-black and the legs and feet are slate grey.

What do they sound like?

Males give a quiet but high-pitched whistle, while females growl and quack.

What do they eat?

They are mainly nocturnal feeders, and eat aquatic invertebrates scooped from the surface of water, or from the mud below. They can often be found on a Tiritiri Matangi night walk as they travel over open grassland and rummage through scrub, eating fruit, seeds and vegetation.

Breeding

Between June and October, brown teal build nests of grass, well-hidden under dense vegetation. The male guards the nest and territory while the female incubates the eggs and raises the ducklings. They are strongly territorial during the breeding season. When ducklings mature, they are aggressively driven from the territory by their father.

Where else can they be found?

In the 1840's they were common and widespread throughout New Zealand and could be found in their millions in mountain and coastal areas, wetlands, rivers, lakes and ponds. Only small populations – in 2002 estimated at 1000 – now remain. Most are on Great Barrier Island (about 700) and in eastern Northland. Small numbers can be found in parts of the Waikato, Coromandel, and Fiordland, as well as on predator-free islands.

Hunting by early Maori and later by Pakeha, drainage of favoured habitat, and predation by cats, dogs, weasels, stoats and ferrets has led to their rapid decline.



Did you know?



Although they are strong fliers, they are more likely to escape from danger by running for cover if on land or by diving if on water.

There are two other closely related brown teal species – in the Campbell Island group (*Anas nesiotis*) and on the Auckland Islands (*Anas aucklandica*). These are flightless.

Whitehead

Mohoua albicilla

Popokatea



Whitehead are protected endemic birds which disappeared from the Auckland area 120 years ago. They were introduced to Tiritiri Matangi Island in 1989.

They usually live for five to eight years but have been known to live for 16 years.

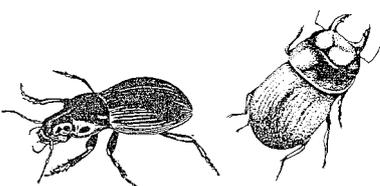
Whitehead move around in sociable groups. If one of them is chased by a tui or bellbird, others have been known to intervene and distract the chaser.

What do they look like?

Males have a distinctly white head, pale brown body and black legs, bill and eyes. The heads of females and juveniles are a brownish white. Whitehead are a bit smaller and more finely-built than a sparrow.

What do they sound like?

They have a wide variety of chirps, squeaks and buzzes for keeping in contact with the flock, for giving alarms and for marking territory. Calls include ones that sound like the song of a canary. Constant, slightly harsh chattering sounds as they keep in contact with their fast-moving group of sometimes 30 birds, can also be heard a lot on the island. They are vocal all year round.



What do they eat?

Mainly beetles, spiders, moths and caterpillars, but also some berries from native shrubs, especially mahoe on Tiritiri Matangi.

They can be seen gleaning insects from the leaves, branches and the bark of trees, often as they hang upside down or climb up the tree trunk in a series of runs and pauses. They also feed on insects that have been dislodged by other birds such as saddleback, kakariki and silvereyes. Adult birds crush the insects they are about to feed to their babies.

Breeding

Whitehead build tidy nests out of rootlets, twigs, grass, moss and thin strips of manuka or kanuka bark.

Usually three eggs are laid, and the young are raised by a group of adults. Some observers have noted four adults per nest, with three feeding the young and one remaining on lookout. Whitehead are able to breed at one year old but when population densities are high, most young birds delay breeding and act as helpers instead.

On the mainland, the long tailed cuckoo, often lays its eggs in the nests of the whitehead, and this can be expected to eventually occur on Tiritiri Matangi.

The cuckoos are three times as long and about nine times the weight of the little whitehead!

Where else are they found?

Whitehead are found in native forest and in older exotic forest throughout the North Island mainland, and on Hauturu / Little Barrier, Mokoia and Kapiti islands. They are more common in some places than others, and until recently were absent on the mainland from Auckland north.

In recent years, whitehead from Tiritiri Matangi have been released in the Hunua ranges, the Waitakere Ranges and Tawharanui Regional Park.

Although endemic to the North Island, two closely related species, the yellowhead and brown creeper, can be found in the South and Stewart Islands.



Did you know?

In ancient times, large flocks of whitehead travelling through an area were thought to warn Maori of the presence of kehua (ghosts).

References:

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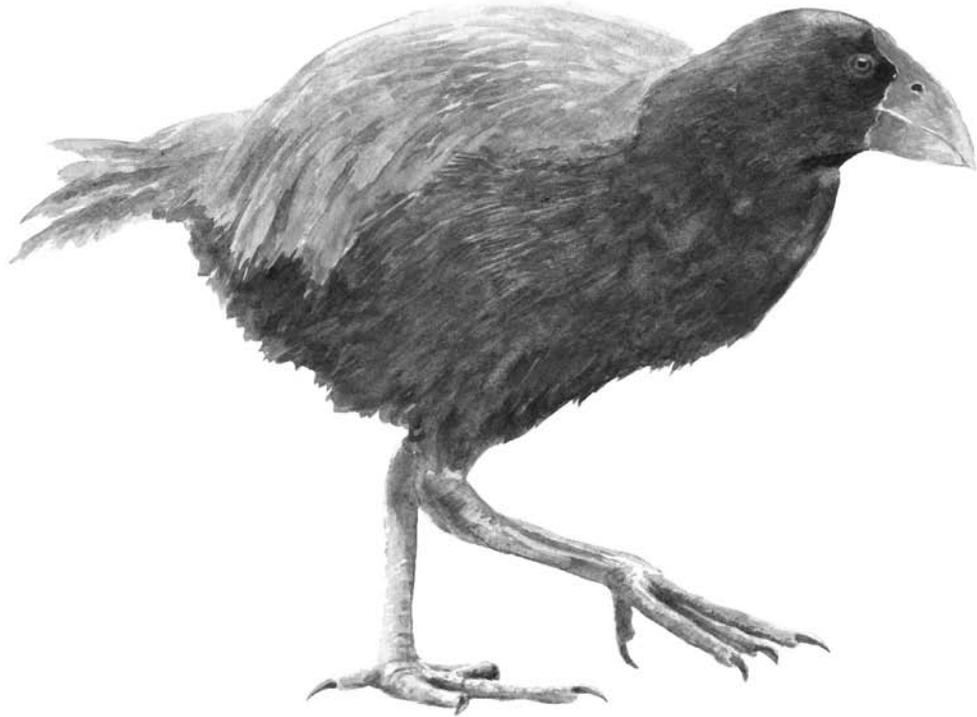
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Takahe

Porphyrio hochstetteri

Notornis



Protected endangered endemic bird.

The first two takahe on Tiritiri Matangi, Mr Blue and Stormy, arrived on the island in 1991. Both were males. The first female, JJ, arrived a few months later. The last survivor of these three, JJ, died in 2006.

Takahe are the largest living member of the rail family.

Takahe fossils and bones discovered in ancient middens have proven that these birds were once plentiful and widespread throughout New Zealand. Between 1800 and 1900 there were only four official sightings and they were declared extinct in 1930.

The last population, about 250 birds, survived undiscovered in the Murchison Mountains in the South Island, until found by Dr Geoffrey Orbell in 1948.

By 1982 numbers had dropped to 118 due to predators and loss of habitat, which was being eaten by deer.

The total adult population of takahe in 1999/2000 was 221. In 2004/2005 it was 259.

Takahe have been placed on islands such as Tiritiri Matangi to insure against the extinction of the mainland population, and to be ambassadors for all endangered birds.

What do they look like?

Takahe look like a very large plump pukeko (they are related) but with feathers that are much more beautiful. Their heads and chests are a dark blue, but their backs and wings a mix of olive green and blue. Their wings are quite small for the size of the bird and useless for flying, but they flap them in courtship or aggression displays. Takahe have very sturdy red legs and an extremely large and powerful red beak.

What do they sound like?

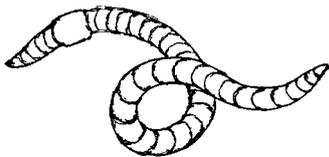
When males and females call to each other their piercing, raucous call is similar to that of a weka.

When up close to a takahe you can also hear a quiet deep 'oomph' sound which appears to resonate from the chest area. This sometimes indicates unease but has been heard being used to calm a chick.

What do they eat?

When first rediscovered, takahe were eating snow tussock and fern rhizomes in the South Island high country. On Tiritiri Matangi they mainly eat introduced grasses, and can be seen pulling grass stem bases out by their beaks, then holding the stems in their claw while 'chewing' the base to extract the juices, which contain sugars and protein. The grass fibres are passed out, largely unchanged, in their droppings, and these can be seen on the island's tracks. They spend most of the day grazing.

Takahe will also eat worms and insects if they come across them but don't appear to actively search for them.



Breeding

Takahe are usually about two years old before breeding. They lay one or two eggs in a ground nest and parents take turns to incubate. Eggs take about 30 days to hatch. Newly hatched chicks have black fluffy down, black legs, and a black beak with a white spot on the tip. Their feathers, beaks and legs change colour gradually as they mature.

Unfortunately, takahe have a high number of infertile eggs, as well as a high chick mortality rate, so success in a breeding season causes great excitement. On Tiritiri Matangi, most years see just one or maybe two chicks successfully raised to maturity. Both parents feed their chick for about three months while the chick is learning how to feed itself by copying them.

Where else can they be found?

Burwood Bush (Southland) where takahe are captive-bred, Maud Island (Marlborough Sounds/Cook Strait area), Mana Island (Wellington), Kapiti Island (Wellington), Maungatautari Mountain Wetlands(Waikato) and of course the 500 sq km special reserve set aside in the Murchison Mountains where they were rediscovered in 1948.

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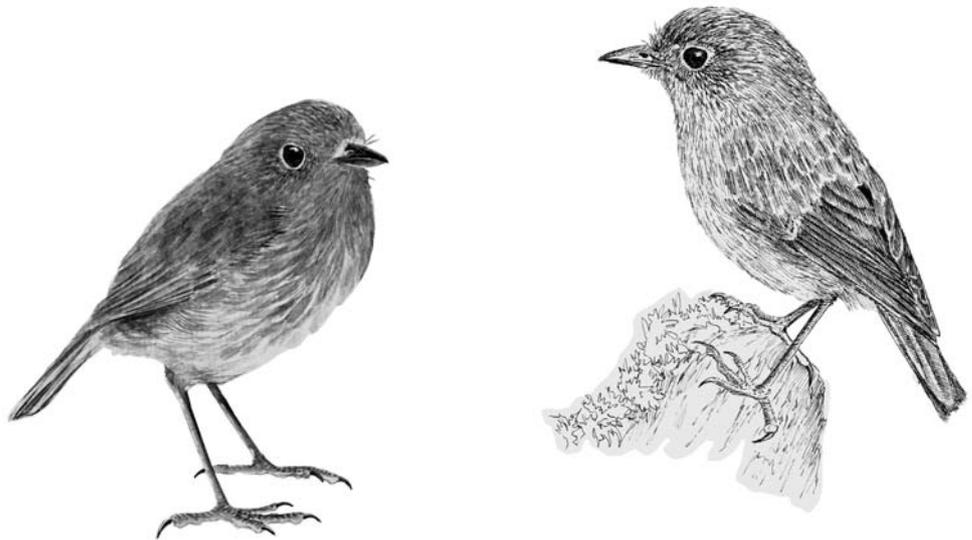
Baber & Craig, 'Notornis', Vol.50, Part 2, June 2003.

Grzelewski, & Morris, 'Takahe – The Bird That Came Back From The Dead' in 'New Zealand Geographic', No 41, 1999.

North Island robin

Petroica longipes

Toutouwai



Robins are protected endemic birds.

Those on Tiritiri Matangi were first introduced in 1993, translocated from the Mamaku pine plantations in Rotorua. These birds were all colour banded before release, so when in 2006 the female with the bands YM – RR disappeared, researchers knew that she was the last of those ‘Mamakuan’s’ and was over 12 and a half years old! Dr Doug Armstrong from Massey University has been involved since that first transfer and says that the chance of robins surviving that long is about seven percent. Other robins on Tiritiri Matangi are known to be ten to 12 years old. They have thrived and so can be seen in all the bush areas of the island.

What do they look like?

Robins are very inquisitive and trusting birds, a little larger than a house sparrow. The North Island male is a dark slaty grey, with a pale greyish-white lower chest. Males grow darker with age. The female and the juvenile are a lighter grey.

They have short white feathers on the top edge of their bill, and when the bird is alert or disturbed by humans, these feathers stand up noticeably. Robins have quite long legs for their size and a perky, upright stance.

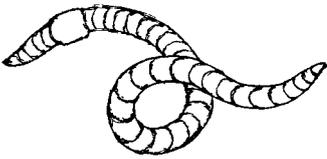
What do they sound like?

Robins will give a short chirp as a contact call to its mate. Otherwise their main territorial call is very loud and can be heard from a long distance. Heather and Robertson describe the call as a 'loud, clear and sustained string of phrases . . . including "pwee-pwee-pwee" phrases'.

Robins can be belligerent. When other robins approach they will drive them away with loud snapping of the beak and a rising of their crown feathers.

What do they eat?

Robins can often be seen sitting on branches watching for insect movement on the forest floor. They have excellent eyesight. They eat mainly insects, spiders, slugs and earthworms, and will tremble one foot on the ground in order to entice prey to the surface.



Most of their food is caught on the forest floor, although sometimes they will take insects from under the bark of a tree trunk or from leaves. They will also eat small fruits.

In times of plenty they have been known to store extra food in the forks of trees to eat later. Unfortunately for them though, stitchbird and bellbird sometimes find these caches of food and steal them.



Because they are so inquisitive, robins can be encouraged to come closer by scratching the surface of forest litter to reveal insects.

Breeding

They are strongly territorial and hold their territory all year round. They usually also keep the same mate year after year. Female YM – RR outlived three mates!

Female robins usually build their bulky nests in the lower canopy, in the hollows of rotting trees, the fork of tree trunks or between larger branches. They take about five days to build a nest. Both parent birds will perform distraction displays if humans get really close to their nest.

Where else can they be found?

The North Island species can be found on Little Barrier and Kapiti islands, in a band across the central North Island, and more recently, have been translocated to predator-controlled areas in Auckland (such as Wenderholm Regional Park, Great Barrier Island, Tawharanui Regional Park and the Hunua and Waitakere Ranges) and the Waikato.

Did you know?

The North Island robin is now considered a separate species from the South Island and rarer Stewart Island robins.



Scientific studies of robins have helped further the understanding of other native birds. For example, in trying to minimise the kill of native birds while poisoning mammalian predators in mainland bush areas, trials carried out on two populations of robins showed that they preferred not to eat anything blue or brown but didn't mind green, which most poison bait is coloured! Further work is needed to see if that still holds true in other seasons of the year.

Also, research on Tiritiri Matangi has shown that the lighter plumage of juvenile robins helps protect them from being considered a threat by the darker grey adult male robins.

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Alexander, Duthie, Fyfe, Haws, Hunt, Montoya, Ochoa, Siva, Stringer, Van Horik, Burns: 'Notornis' Vol 52 Part 3, September 2005, pp138-142.

Steer & Van Horik, 'Notornis' Vol 53 Part 3, September 2006, pp315, 316.

Little spotted kiwi

Apteryx owenii

Kiwi pukupuku



An endemic bird, as are all kiwi.

They were first introduced to Tiritiri Matangi Island in 1993, from Kapiti Island.

What do they look like?

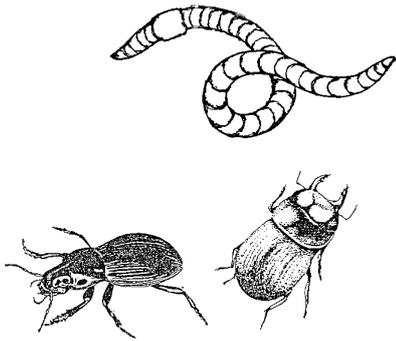
This is New Zealand's smallest kiwi and it is similar in height and weight to a rather fat, fluffy domestic hen. It has been described by Derek Grzelewski as 'a shaggy, pear-shaped ball of feathers'. The little spotted kiwi's barbless feathers and their tiny vestiges of wings mean they are unable to fly.

'Little spots' are brown-grey with whitish horizontal mottled bands, and have a long ivory-coloured bill, with nostrils near the tip. They have small eyes, but still have good vision both day and night. Hidden under their feathers are large ear holes, which give them excellent hearing.

Females are bigger and heavier than males.

What do they sound like?

The male little spotted kiwi makes a high-pitched, ascending, repetitive whistling call; the female's call is lower, a sort of hoarse trill. They also grunt, and at night may also be heard snuffling a bit like a hedgehog, as they search for food.



What do they eat?

Little spotted kiwi eat mostly earthworms, larvae, spiders, flies, moths and beetles. They snuffle loudly and tap the ground, then probe into leaf litter, soil or rotten logs to find these creatures. Sometimes their bills go quite deeply into the ground. Sometimes they also eat leaves and fruit that has fallen on the ground.

Breeding

Pairs stay together all year and between years.

Nesting burrows are dug well ahead of time so that regrowth will disguise them, though they will also nest in hollow logs.

Most eggs are laid between September and January. Usually one egg is laid, weighing 20 percent of the female's body weight, and is made up of 65 percent yolk, compared to about 40 percent for most birds.

Only the male takes care of the incubation. The chick hatches with a big fat stomach full of yolk and lives on that for a week to ten days before it starts foraging for itself. It hatches out with adult plumage, looking just like a smaller version of its parents.

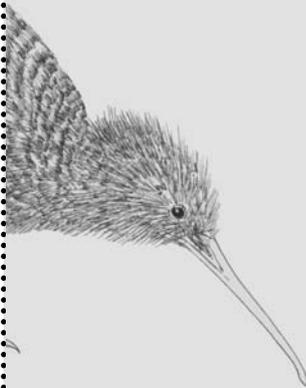
Where else are they found?

Kapiti Island, Hen Island, Red Mercury Island, Long Island and Karori Wildlife Sanctuary.

Fossil remains show they used to be widespread throughout mainland New Zealand.



Did you know?



1. Ten little spotted kiwi were introduced to Tiritiri Matangi in 1993 and six in 1995. There are now (2007) estimated to be about 60 – 80 on the island.
2. There are records of these birds reaching the age of at least 22 years on Kapiti Island, and it is believed they may live 30 – 40 years.
3. Ornithologists expect that as long as predator-free islands containing little spotted kiwi remain free of mammalian predators, they are now at low risk of extinction compared to other kiwi.
4. Their fleshy footpads allow them to move silently, and their powerful legs mean they can run fast (as fast as a human) and kick strongly. This added to their razor-sharp claws and their short temper make fully-grown adult kiwi pukupuku well able to take care of most predators.
5. Kiwi have heavy bones full of marrow, just like mammals, whereas other birds have light bones full of air sacs, which help them fly.
6. Most other birds have a strong keel bone in their chests which provides strength for their wing attachments. However, because kiwi don't fly, they have no keel bone so their chests are their weak point. Even if a gentle dog were to pick one up, it would almost certainly damage or kill it.
7. There are now five known types of kiwi: North Island brown, little spotted, great spotted, tokoeka and rowi.

References:

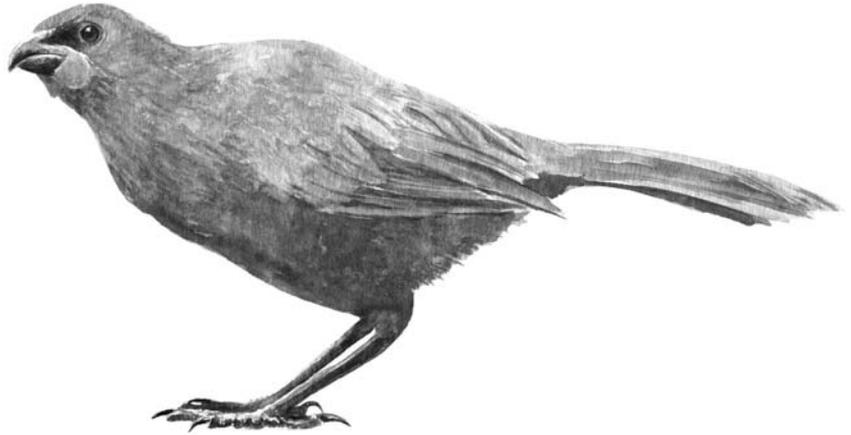
'Icon In Trouble' by Derek Grzelewski In 'New Zealand Geographic' No. 45, January – March 2000.

Robertson & Colbourne: 'Notornis' Vol. 51 Part 3, September 2004, pp 161 – 163.

North Island kokako

Callaeas wilsoni

Blue wattled crow



An endemic bird. The first three kokako arrived on Tiritiri Matangi Island in 1997, coming from Mapara and Mount Bruce, and kokako have bred well on the island since then.

What do they look like?

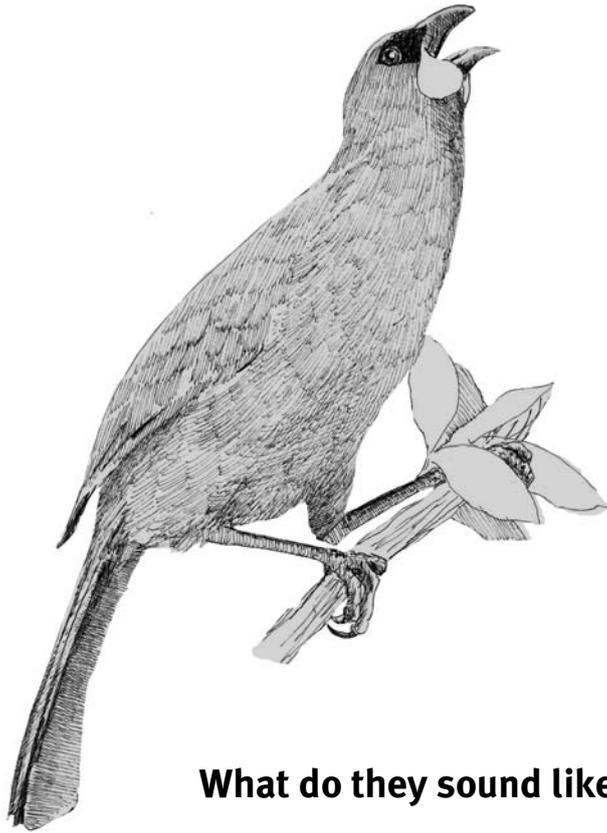
Kokako are wattlebirds, which is an ancient species. The other surviving New Zealand wattlebird is the saddleback.

North Island kokako have bluish-grey feathers and are a little smaller than a magpie.

They have a black 'robber's' mask, powerful long black legs, a long broad drooping tail, and bright blue wattles tight against the throat below the short black bill. The wattles of the chicks are pink and gradually turn blue as they mature.

Kokako have short rounded wings, which makes them poor fliers. They prefer to bound along branches using their long strong legs to move through the forest. They leap from branch to branch up to the tops of trees, and then often use their wings to glide back down. They can move extremely quickly through the trees, hence the Maori proverb:

'Hoki i kona e kore e mau I a koe te kokako e Whareatua'
(You can turn back, for you will never catch the kokako of Whareatua)



What do they sound like?

Kokako have a wide repertoire of calls, one of which sounds like their name, a quick 'ko-ko-ko'.

They also sing loudly from a high tree at dawn and in the evening, often flapping their wings as they do so (an action known as 'archangel'). This call is to maintain territory and is long, haunting and mournful. During the day family members keep in contact with regular quiet calls to each other.

What do they eat?

Kokako will eat seasonal berries and fruit from native trees and bushes, and feed on leaves all year round, at all levels of the forest. They need a varied forest structure for an all-year-round food supply. They supplement their diet with insects, especially when they have chicks to feed.

Breeding

Kokako remain in pairs all year round. They breed from October to March. Their nest is usually placed where it is concealed from above, and made of a twig base with woven vines and ferns, and lined with fern scales, moss and lichen. The parents always approach the nest from below. Only the female incubates the eggs but the male visits her regularly with food. Both parents feed the chicks. They may feed them for up to twelve months, even though the chicks are independent by four months. Some nest more than

once a year, and may raise two or more chicks at a time. Some kokako form male / male pair bonds. This may have developed as a result of a long-term shortage of females due to nest predation.

Where else can they be found?

Kokako are endangered. They were once widespread but there are now only small numbers left on the mainland. In July 1999 there were only 270 pairs left. The main areas in which they can still be found include the King Country (Mapara), Rotoehu (Rotorua) and Northland. The largest population is in the Urewera Ranges.

The population has declined rapidly due to the predation of chicks and adults by introduced mammals, especially rats, stoats and possums, as well as by harriers. The destruction of the understorey food plants by deer, goats and possums, and clearance and fragmentation of tall lowland forest (including 'selective logging' which removes many food plants) has also played a part.

In some areas the gene pool is too small to be safe, so translocation has been necessary. From time to time Tiritiri Matangi kokako are translocated to other places as part of the Department of Conservation's North Island Kokako Recovery Plan.

Did you know?



The South Island kokako, which is thought to be extinct, had the same features as the North Island subspecies, but with orange wattles instead of blue ones. They were also considered to be more secretive and therefore harder to find. It has been observed that the songs of Tiritiri Matangi kokako (descended from captive birds) are less complex than those of kokako in remote areas.

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'Dawn Chorus' Bulletin 62, August 2005, p7.

Birds Australia, 'Wingspan' vol. 15 no. 4; republished by Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. 'The State of New Zealand's Birds, 2005'.

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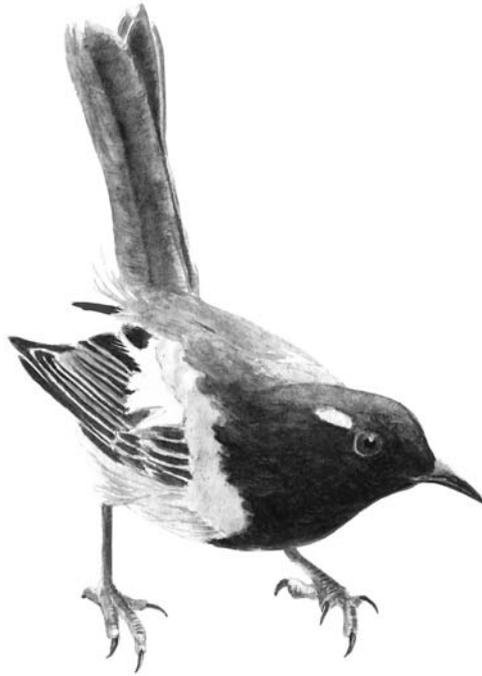
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Stitchbird

Notiomystis cincta

Hihi



A threatened endemic North Island bird.

The last self-sustaining population is on Hauturu/Little Barrier Island.

Hihi were first released on Tiritiri Matangi Island in 1995 with few birds surviving the stress of transfer. They have successfully bred there since, with the island's current population large enough for transfers to other protected areas.

What do they look like?

Hihi are about the size of korimako (bellbird). Male and female hihi colouring is different, with the female being greyish brown with white wing bars. The male is larger and more colourful. He has a velvety jet-black head with white feather ear tufts, bright yellow feathers across the shoulders and upper breast, white wing bars and a grey-brown body. The tails of both males and females are usually tilted upward when perched.



What do they sound like?

Both male and female make a ‘stitch’ sound. They also have a range of whistles, including warbling ones when they are close to each other. Males also give out a loud, explosive high-pitched call quite unlike that of any other bush bird – a three-toned squeak.

What do they eat?

Hihi prefer nectar, but also eat fruits, berries and insects. Because tui and korimako compete aggressively with hihi for nectar, supplementary feeders containing a mix of raw sugar and water have been made available on Tiritiri Matangi.

Breeding

In their natural habitat, hihi nest in hollow parts of large old trees such as puriri, rata, pohutukawa and kohekohe. On Tiritiri Matangi there are few suitable old trees so nest boxes have been built. Nests are built on a high base of sticks, with a small soft cup made of fern scales, lichen and spider web, where the eggs are laid.

Hihi have an unusual mating system, as a female may mate with more than one male, and a male with more than one female. They do not mate for life. Sometimes hihi will mate face to face – the only bird in the world known to do so.

Where else can they be found?

Until the early 1870's hihi were common in parts of the North Island, but are now only found on Hauturu/Little Barrier Island, and in small, managed populations that have been translocated to Kapiti island, Mount Bruce, Karori and the Waitakere Ranges in West Auckland.



Did you know?

Hihi from Tiritiri Matangi Island were sent to Karori Sanctuary (Wellington) and Waitakere Ranges (West Auckland) to begin mainland breeding colonies.

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(Matthew Low) www.nzes.org.nz/nzje.
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Fernbird

Bowdleria punctata

Matata



Fernbirds are endemic birds. They were released on Tiritiri Matangi Island as part of a rescue translocation in 2001 when their habitat was destroyed by the development of the Northern Motorway in the Orewa area. They are secretive, but sometimes can be seen or at least heard in the clumps of pohuehue vine or bracken, which line the roadway from the wharf, although they are all over the island.

In some places in New Zealand they are common but in others rare, because their natural habitat of fern and scrubland has been destroyed by farming and other development.

What do they look like?

These little secretive birds are pale brown underneath, heavily streaked and spotted dark brown, with a warmer brown streaked with dark brown above. They have a whitish eye stripe and a distinctive long frayed tail. When they fly, which is rare, they whirr past with their tail drooping. Mostly they run about like mice in thick vegetation because their short stubby wings are not good for flying.

What do they sound like?

They have several different calls, including bell-like notes, but the most common is a sharp metallic 'U-tick' sound. Sometimes this is given by the male alone, but at other times the male sounds the first half and the female instantly responds with the second half. This is to maintain their territory.

What do they eat?

Matata mainly eat insects, caterpillars and spiders gleaned from low vegetation or from the ground.

Breeding

Male and female birds both build the nest, which is a neatly woven deep cup of dry grass and rushes, usually lined with feathers. On Tiritiri Matangi the nest will be in pohuehue, regenerating scrub or other dense vegetation and not more than two metres off the ground.

Where else can they be found?

Fernbird live throughout New Zealand in small numbers in places where their natural habitat remains. They are found in greatest numbers on the South Island West Coast, as well as coastal Southland and Otago, and in the North Island in Northland and the volcanic plateau. They are abundant on Stewart, Codfish and Snares Islands.



Did you know?

Maori regarded matata as wise birds whose cries could foretell the future and considered them tapu.

References:

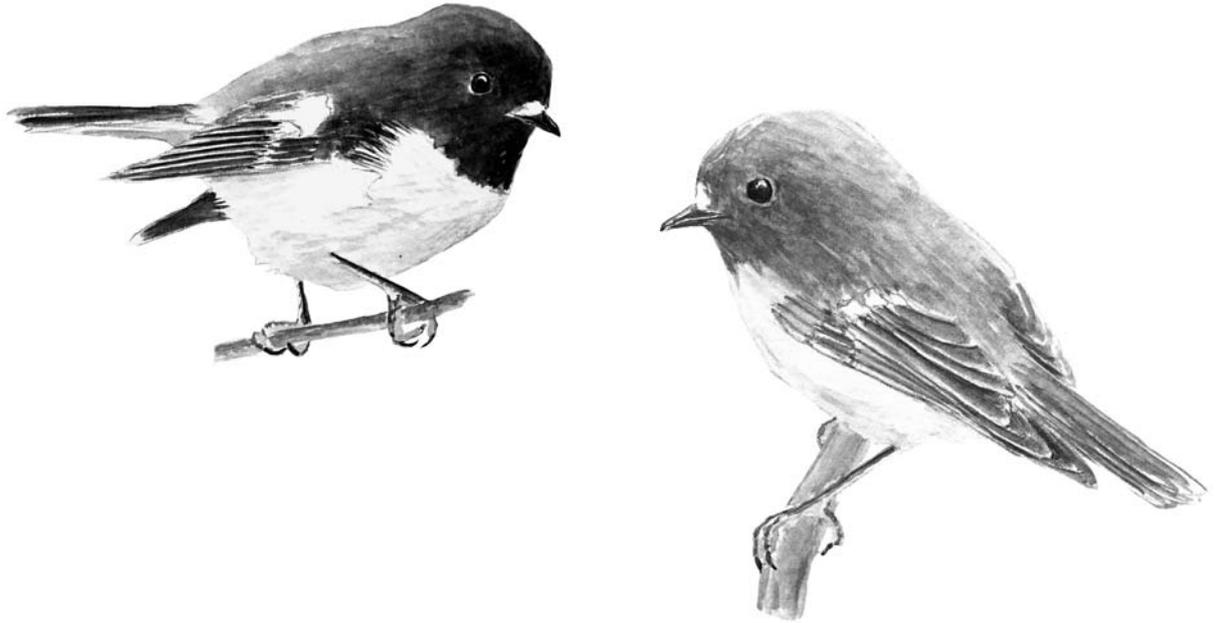
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North Island tomtit

Petroica macrocephala

Miromiro



Tomtit are endemic to New Zealand, and 32 were translocated to Tiritiri Matangi Island from the Hunua Ranges in 2004. Unfortunately they do not appear to have established on the island as sightings have been very infrequent. However, vagrant individuals have been observed periodically for many years.

What do they look like?

They are very attractive small birds with a large head and sharp little bill. The very smart-looking males have a black head and back, and white wing bars and tail sides. Underneath, the males are white. Females have a brown head and back, a grey-brown chin and upper breast, and white underneath. Wing bars and tail sides are a buff colour. Both have a white spot above the bill which enlarges under stress.

What do they sound like?

The song of the male is described in the field guide as ‘ti oly oly oly oh’, with the female making a softer version of this. Males also have a high pitched ‘swee’ call.

What do they eat?

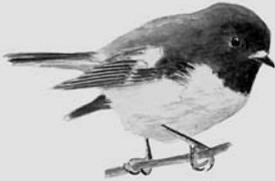
Tomtit mainly eat spiders, beetles, caterpillars, moths, weta and other insects, but they will also sometimes eat small fruits. To catch their prey they usually wait and watch, then fly quickly to the branch or trunk it has been hiding on.

Breeding

Tomtit usually keep the same partner year after year. Their nests can be found in a tree cavity, a tree fork, a treefern trunk, or a tangle of muehlenbeckia or other vine. They lay their eggs between September and January, raising up to three broods, but if nests fail, they have been known to lay again up to six times in a season. Babies fledge at about four weeks of age and then parents feed the fledglings for up to ten days after that.

Where else can you find them?

They can be found all over New Zealand, especially in the central North Island and throughout the South Island. Whereas the North Island males have a white breast, the breast of the South Island males is more yellowish, and is a brighter yellow or orange colour at the point where it joins the black-coloured head.



Did you know?

The tomtit were carried by helicopter from the Hunua Ranges to Tiritiri Matangi island (about 56km in a straight line) shut in boxes, and yet, when the capture site in the Hunua was checked just two months later, one of the translocated birds was found back in his territory. He had flown all that way back home! No one knows how he managed to fly all that way across sea and land, and find his way back to the Hunua.

References:

- 'Dawn chorus' 57, May 2004, p5.
- 'Notornis' vol. 46 Part 4, December 1999, pp 446 – 456.
- 'Notornis' vol 51 Part 4, December 2004, pp 238/239.
- 'Notornis' vol 52 Part 3, September 2005, p 173.

Rifleman

Acanthisitta chloris

Titipounamu



A protected, endemic bird. The rifleman belong to the New Zealand wren family. This is an ancient family of tiny birds with no close affinity to other groups of birds. There are only two members of this family left, the rifleman and the rock wren.

What do they look like?

Measuring only eight centimetres this is New Zealand's smallest bird, although the grey warbler is about the same weight but with a longer tail. The male is a vivid green above, whilst the female is streaked dark and light brown above. They are whitish below and have a white eyebrow stripe, rounded wings, a very short stumpy tail and a fine slightly upturned bill.

What do they sound like?

The common call is a sharp, repetitive squeak, which is so high pitched that it is beyond the hearing range of some people.

What do they eat?

Rifleman eat beetles, spiders, small wetas, flies, moths, caterpillars, a few bugs, snails and lacewings. Some ripe fruit is also taken. They are usually seen feeding by working their way up trees and shrubs. They are constantly on the move and continuously flick their wings while exploring small crevices, mosses and the bark and lichen of trunks, branches and leaves. They don't normally feed on the ground.

Breeding

Pairs remain on their territory all year. The male usually starts building several nests before the female joins in. As they normally use a tree hole to build their nest, nest boxes have been provided on Tiritiri Matangi to make sure they have plenty of choice. These 150 millimeter cubed boxes have a 25 millimetre entrance hole so no other birds can use the boxes.

Both sexes incubate the eggs and, while the male does more of the daytime incubation, the female does the night shift. Often the male will feed the first clutch, while the female starts laying eggs in a second nest. When they are old enough, the offspring can help raise this second clutch.

Where else can they be found?

Riflemen occur only rarely north of Te Aroha, with populations on Great Barrier and Little Barrier islands. The North Island subspecies is found mainly in lowland tawa forest, while the South Island subspecies is found in high altitude beech forest or lowland areas forested with podocarp trees.

Riflemen do not fly over open water or pasture.

Both the Pakeha and Maori names refer to the birds' colour. 'Rifleman' comes from the 19th century New Zealand military riflemen's green uniform. The Maori name, titipounamu means little piece of greenstone.



Did you know?

Five hundred riflemen weigh about the same as one takahe.

The female (seven grams) is larger than the male (six grams).

(For such a small bird she produces relatively large eggs – the egg mass is on average 84% of her body weight. Perhaps she needs to be larger to cope with the physiological stress of laying this huge egg mass.)

References:

Heather, Barrie & Robertson, Hugh. 'The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand'.
Hutching, Gerard. 'The Natural World of New Zealand'.