

Biodiversity



Number 10

Spotless crane (*Porzana tabuensis plumbea*)

DESCRIPTION

Shy and elusive, the spotless crane or putoto is more often heard than seen around the swamps and marshes that it inhabits. It is a native bird that reaches up to 20cm tall and 45g in weight. The uniform slate-blue colour on its underside and brown on the top side differentiates it from the spotted crane of Europe and Asia.



DISTRIBUTION, BREEDING AND FEEDING

Spotless cranes are fast runners, good swimmers and are rarely seen in flight. Widespread colonization of these birds, however, suggests that they can travel long distances to colonise new marshes.

More common in the North Island than the South Island, most sightings are at raupo-dominated wetlands where they construct nests on the ground in the crown of the wetland plants. Spotless crane are highly territorial and are known to chase other birds from their territory, especially during breeding season which is usually from September to November.

Their diet is primarily insects such as grasshoppers, caterpillars, craneflies and sometimes seeds.

SPOTLESS CRAKE IN TARANAKI

Although significant areas of wetlands have been lost from Taranaki, the spotless crane can still be found in small populations especially in remaining raupo wetland areas. Sightings are rare and they are more often heard than seen. The raupo fringe of Lake Rotokare is an accessible area where spotless crane can often be heard.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Create, protect and retire wetlands on your property.
- Set up traps to control predators around suitable habitat.
- Plant native wetland species and eradicate invasive plant species in your wetland.
- Report sightings to the Taranaki Regional Council or the Ornithological Society NZ Regional Representative Barry Hartley (barry_hartley@xtra.co.nz).

CONSERVATION

The spotless crane is a threatened species listed as 'at risk'. Due to their elusive behaviour, numbers in the Taranaki region are relatively unknown.

THREATS

Threats to this species include:

- Habitat loss and degradation from wetland drainage.
- Wetland modification by invasive plant species.
- Predation by cats, dogs, rats and mustelids.

QUICK FACTS

- Member of the Raillidae family.
- They have a wide variety of calls.
- Spotless crane are a protected species.