

Biodiversity



Number 6

North Island fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata*)

DESCRIPTION

The North Island fernbird is one of five sub-species of fernbird that is endemic to New Zealand. It is usually brown with an intricate pattern of darker flecks and a white chest. This helps to camouflage it well in its habitat as they are rather secretive birds.

Fernbirds are generally small but can reach lengths of up to 18cm, including their long scraggly tail. They have a distinctive variety of calls including metallic sounds.

DISTRIBUTION, BREEDING AND FEEDING

The fernbird is a ground-dwelling bird and a reluctant flier, much preferring to travel by foot. Any attempts to fly consist of short ungraceful flurries of movement and any flight over 100m is exceptional.

They mainly inhabit dense thickets of scrub close to or within wetlands, feeding on insects, but are also found in forested areas. The birds nest in sedges or other vegetation close to the ground and build tightly woven nests with hoods to shelter the nest from wind and rain. Breeding occurs between September to February with 2-3 eggs per clutch. Birds begin to breed after one year of age and often remain in the same pair for a long time.

FERNBIRDS IN TARANAKI

In Taranaki only a few small populations of fernbirds are still present on the ring plain due to habitat loss. The few small populations that remain inside Egmont National Park are responding well to predator control. Larger populations can still be found, usually confined to wetland areas in North and East Taranaki. There continues to be a significant increase in fernbirds at the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve since the predator-proof fence and predator control have been established.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Help maintain native wetland areas.
- Set traps on your property to help control invasive predator species.
- Donate your time to local organisations that help to protect these native species.
- Create, protect and retire wetlands on your property.
- Report sightings to the Taranaki Regional Council or the Ornithological Society NZ Regional Representative Barry Hartley (barry_hartley@xtra.co.nz).



PETER LANGLANDS

CONSERVATION

In the 19th century the fernbird was described as one of New Zealand's most common birds. However, due to the ongoing destruction of its natural wetland habitat the North Island fernbird is now hardly seen and is identified as a threatened species, listed as 'at risk'.

THREATS

Threats include:

- Destruction and degradation of native habitat.
- Predation by introduced species.

QUICK FACTS

- The Maori name for the fern bird is Matata.
- Maori tribes revered the Fernbird as an oracle or 'wise bird' and would interpret the bird calls as signs of success or failure in their daily activities such as fishing.
- Fernbirds are a protected species.



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