



Southern Bird

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Exploring the Cloud Forests
of Ecuador

Godwits Followed North



Ruling on four records of *Pealeornis maoriana*

The records of four captured specimens of *Pealeornis maoriana* were received by the OSNZ Rare Birds Committee on 6th December 2006 for consideration (UBR 56/06). The records considered were:

- **4-5th November 2005** - one captured and released off Little Barrier Island (Murman, Griffiths and Baird) banded B-97715.
- **4-9th January 2006** - three captured and released in the Hauraki Gulf (Jamieson, Stephenson and Griffiths *et al.*) banded B-94503, B-94504, B-94505.

The OSNZ Rare Birds Committee does not make decisions on taxonomy, nor the validity of taxa. It is the OSNZ Checklist Committee's role to make decisions on the taxonomy or validity of taxa in New Zealand. It will do so with regard to *Pealeornis maoriana* when all data, including any DNA evidence based on analysis of both the museum and captured specimens has been published and peer-reviewed in the usual manner.

The OSNZ Rare Birds Committee is required to determine whether, in their opinion, the records submitted are morphologically inseparable from the three recognised specimens of *Pealeornis maoriana* held in overseas museums.

Having considered the morphological evidence presented, the OSNZ Rare Birds Committee believes the four captured specimens do not differ substantially from the **holotype** of *Pealeornis maoriana* held in the Natural History Museum, Tring (1895.2.1.11), nor from the two specimens in the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (No. 17 [14393] & No. 18 [14372]).

Accordingly, the OSNZ Rare Birds Committee rules that 'Based on the morphological evidence from captured birds only, the records of Murman, Griffiths and Baird (4-5/11/2005) and Jamieson, Stephenson and Griffiths *et al.* (4-9/01/2006) represent the first substantiated records of the taxon currently known as *Pealeornis maoriana*, since the 19th Century'.

PAUL SCOFIELD, *Convenor*
For OSNZ Rare Birds Committee



Isabelline Blackbird

The Blackbird illustrated in the accompanying photograph was first noticed by me in early September 2006. It was being chased around on the ground in our back yard in Levin by two normal-looking Blackbirds. Over the two days following its discovery it turned up mainly in the mornings and became quite aggressive towards the other Blackbirds in the area, chasing them around on the ground, in the air and trying to land next to them in trees. The normal-looking Blackbirds would just fly off. Later on the bird was only seen on fleeting visits, either flying straight through or landing briefly in the trees on its own.

PETER BENNETT

Paul Scofield adds:

The unusual plumage colouration seen in this bird is known as Isabelline. Technically this occurs due to a reduction in the production of melanin in the feathers due to either a temporary protein imbalance or a permanent genetic mutation. Partial albino Blackbirds are common in New Zealand, possibly due to the 'genetic bottleneck' of such small numbers being introduced originally, but I have not previously heard of an Isabelline individual of the species.

Another White-faced Heron with a Deformed Beak

Following Marion Milne's note regarding deformed beaks in White-faced Herons in the December 2006 issue of *Southern Bird* I photographed an individual of this species with an abnormal beak in Manukau Harbour in 1976.

GEOFF MOON



ATLAS OF BIRD DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ZEALAND 1999-2004

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand, Inc. will launch the most comprehensive survey of New Zealand's avifauna in August this year. *All members of the OSNZ are to receive a copy as part of their subscription for 2007.* With some 540 pages and 2,135 maps covering over 200 of our endemic, native, migratory and introduced birds, this work is the result of five years of extensive surveying by more than 850 people throughout the country. There is even a full atlas section specifically for the Chatham Islands. Conservatively valued at more than \$10 million worth of voluntary effort, it emphasises the importance of nationally co-ordinated environmental monitoring and recording, by a largely amateur organisation.

The OSNZ published its first Atlas of bird distribution in 1985 (covering the years 1969-1979), and these old distribution maps are reproduced alongside the new maps to demonstrate visible changes in the bird distribution throughout the country over some 35 years. Seasonal and breeding data are provided for each of the birds and there is a full section devoted to habitat use. Using the latest mapping techniques they have explored our national biodiversity for birds to demonstrate a statistical snapshot view of the hotspot areas round New Zealand which require consideration for conservation management and protection. It is also a good guide to where to find the birds that interest you.

Have there been changes over 30 years? Clearly yes! Of 137 birds mapped in 1985 the new atlas shows that 45 have increased and 33 have reduced their distribution significantly. Regrettably, but not surprisingly, the majority of the reductions (25) are among the endemic birds. The increases have been quite evenly spread among endemic (15), native (12), introduced (17) and migrant (1). The mapping techniques used show that even among plentifully distributed birds, there are signs of localised reductions as areas of important habitat are changed.

This atlas will provide a major reference source for the management of our countryside by all those who interact with our natural environment. Christopher Robertson and his international mapping team are proud to have produced from the efforts of the OSNZ members and their associates an invaluable record and database, which documents the birds of New Zealand over a period of 35 years, and is a nationwide resource unparalleled for any other part of the New Zealand flora and fauna.

A GOOD YEAR TO BE A MEMBER OF OSNZ!

