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Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Rifleman: pp 224-226.



RIFLEMAN

Family Xenicidae

Species *Acanthisitta chloris*

Common name Rifleman

Status Endemic

Size 80 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Grey Warbler 100 mm)

Habitat A bird of old forests which has not adapted to exotic pine forests. In the South Island it comes into bush remnants and forest verges.

New Zealand range Recorded in 2007 in the Warara Forest a remote forest on the northern side of the Hokianga Harbour. Otherwise absent from Northland but found on Little Barrier Island and Great Barrier Island. Found in forests south of the Waikato. In the South Island absent from North and South Canterbury and Central Otago.

Discussion The family of Xenicidae is considered New Zealand's most ancient

bird family apart from the Kiwi (Apterygidae). Relationship of this family to other world bird families is unclear. This family is a good example of adaptive radiation, the original ancestor separating into the Rifleman (*A. chloris*), a middle and upper forest dweller, the Bush Wren (*X. longipes*), a bird of the forest floor and understorey, the Rock Wren (*X. gilviventris*), a bird of alpine “rock garden” areas, and the Stephen Island Wren (*X. lyalli*). The Stephen Island Wren and the Bush Wren are both extinct.

Description – male (above)

Head Bright yellow-green with white eye-stripe. **Upperparts** Bright yellow-green. **Wings** Green with a noticeable yellow bar. **Underparts** Whitish. **Tail** Brown and white-tipped.

Description – female (below)

Head Brown, slightly “zebra-striped” with white. **Eyebrow** White. **Upperparts** Brown slightly “zebra-striped” with white. **Wings** Brown with faint yellow bars on the secondary feathers and faint white markings on the inner edges of primary feathers. **Underparts** Whitish. **Tail** Brown and white-tipped.



Conspicuous features

- The smallest bush bird.
- Smaller than the Grey Warbler.

- Appears tailless in comparison to the Grey Warbler.
- White eyebrow on both male and female birds.
- White tip to tail and pale yellow wing-bars.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Has a habit of working up tree trunks hopping from one side to the other.
- Sometimes it “wing-flicks” as it feeds.

Call A high-pitched “zit zit zit zit” which is difficult to hear.

Nest A hole or cavity in an old tree. Up to 4 white eggs are laid.

Where to find – North Island

Auckland – Tiri Tiri Island – recently transferred there. P. 292.

King Country – Pureora Forest. P. 314.

Taupo – Opepe Reserve on Highway 5 about 14 kms from Taupo. P. 326.

Taupo – Lake Rotopounamu over Te Ponanga Saddle. P. 316.

Urewera – Lake Waikaremoana. P. 327.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough – Pelorus Bridge on Highway 6 north of Blenheim. P. 343.

Marlborough – Lake Rotoiti. P. 344.

Canterbury – Akaroa at Hinewai Reserve. P. 351.

Canterbury – Alford and Peel Forests. P. 353.

Dunedin – Ross Creek Reservoir Reserve off Cannington Road and Burma Road north. P. 359.

Southland – Greenhills and Omaui Bush located near the Invercargill to Bluff road. P. 365.

Fiordland – Eglinton Valley at Cascade Creek. P. 370.

Fiordland – Eglinton and Hollyford. P. 370.

West Coast – Haast Pass forests. P. 372.

Where to find – Stewart Island

Oban – Rifleman are in the tall inaccessible forests beyond Oban. P. 367.

Ulva Island – Have been reintroduced here. P. 367.