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Stitchbird: pp 193-194.

Stitchbird (Hihi) *Notiomystis cincta* (Du Bus 1839), Endemic
1835 Bay of Islands, Northland

The Rev. W. Yate (1835) wrote a short account of the Stitchbird: “Kotihe - This bird is about the size of the goldfinch; but has a slender dark beak, nearly an inch long. The male is considerably larger than the female; and has a much more beautiful plumage, being variegated with white and yellow, upon a diversified ground of brown. Its legs are very strong, for the size of the bird, and its tail is forked. It lays four eggs, in the moss of the Puriri-tree; and the male always attends and waits upon the female during the season of incubation. Its voice is very pleasing; but it only sounds a few notes; then hops to another spray, and sings again.

Its food is berries and other wild fruits of the woods. It is a timid bird, and difficult to be taken alive. The males vary much in the brilliancy of their colours; some having a jet-black head and back, and others, again, a dusky brown. Those with the black feathers are, by far, the prettiest birds. They are all, however, as beautiful as the linnets in their plumage, and surpass him in the delicacy and elegance of their shape”.

Specimens were sent to France and Belgium prior to 1839, and Du Bus described the Stitchbird the same year.

Hihi have recently been found to be part of an ancient New Zealand radiation that includes the wattlebirds (Ewen et al. 2006). The Stitchbird is now believed to have split from the Wattlebirds c. 33.8 million years ago and to warrant its own family Notiomystidae (Driskell et al. 2007). It has been introduced to Kapiti Island, Tiritiri Matangi, Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary and the Waitakere Ranges. Less than 1000 adult birds exist.