

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.  
Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.  
Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.  
Fernbird: pp 235-236.



**FERNBIRD**

**Family** Sylviidae

**Species** *Bowdleria punctata*

**Subspecies** These are recognised for the North Island species, the South Island species and for those on Codfish Island, Stewart Island, Chatham Island and Snares Island.

**Common names** Fernbird, Matata

**Status** Endemic

**Abundance** Common in selected areas but secretive

**Size** 180 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm)

**Habitat** Found in wet swampy areas and semi-wet tidal verges on the main islands. Also in low fern and rush, away from wet areas such as on Great Barrier Island.

**New Zealand range** In the North Island found from Tongariro north and on Great

Barrier Island. In the South Island found from north-east Marlborough down the west coast to Otago and Southland. It is also found on Stewart Island.

**Discussion** The Fernbird is considered a derivative of the Australian genus of grass birds, *Megalurus*. It shares some similarities such as a wetland habitat, similar colouration and its manner of song delivery. The Fernbird's habit of climbing high among the vegetation and peering out, and its habit of flying above the vegetation for short distances with tail held down, are also obvious similarities. It differs in the structure of its tail feathers, which are scrawny and possess disconnected barbs not unlike a kiwi feather.

**Name** Buller W L 1873, has the Fernbird's habitat as the vast areas of fern-covered hills of much of New Zealand. The Fernbird was in those days a bird of the fern-lands and so hence its name. It is possible, though, that the birds "fern-like" tail also had something to do with its name.

### **Description**

**Upperparts** Brown, streaked with dark brown. **Eye** White. **Underparts** White streaked with brown from throat to abdomen.

### **Conspicuous features**

- Spiky fern-like tail.
- Vertical brown streaking on the breast.

### **Conspicuous characteristics**

- Makes short low flights above the vegetation.
- Tail is often held in a downwards position when in flight.
- Birds often just arrive and seem to peer from the vegetation at head height.
- Feeding birds have a habit of fossicking quickly through the vegetation, appearing and disappearing at speed.

**Call** Usually a rather feeble "tick tick tick" or "uu-tik uu-tik" or a melodic "too-tok too-tok", with the last note on a descending scale. Pairs are known to duet with one bird singing the first note, the second bird finishing the second note.

**Nest** A cup of woven grasses among rush stems or raupo. Up to 4 pale pink, brown-blotched eggs are laid.

### **Where to find – North Island**

**Northland** – Kerikeri at Aroha Island. P. 282.

**Northland** – Bay of Islands in swamp areas around Paihia and Waitangi. P. 283.

**Great Barrier Island** – On the Mount Hobson track. P. 290.

**Tiri Tiri Matangi** – From the road to the visitors' centre. P. 292.

**South Auckland** – Whangamarino wetland. P. 308.

**South Auckland** – Hauraki Plains at Torehape East Road. P. 307.

**Bay of Plenty** – Matata Lagoon. P. 320.

**Taupo District** – In southern areas near Turangi and Tokaanu. P. 316.

**Taupo District** – Waiotaka Reserve. P. 316.

**Tongariro** – The Chateau near the Department of Conservation camping ground.  
P. 317.

### **Where to find – South Island**

**Otago** – Lake Waihola and Lake Holm. P. 361.

**Otago** – Sinclair Wetlands. P. 362.

**Southland** – Manapouri at Horseshoe Bend on the Waiau River 8 kms from Te Anau. P. 369.

**Southland** – The Redcliff Wetland Reserve on Blackmount Road. P. 369.

**Southland** – Awarua Bay. P. 365.

**Southland** – Bushy Point. on the New River Estuary. P. 366.

**Southland** – Lake Murihiku. P. 366.

**Southland** – Otatara at Fosbender Park off Dunns Road. P. 366.

**Westland** – Lake Brunner in swampy areas near the lake. P. 374.