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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Weka: pp 135-137.



## WEKA.

**Family** Rallidae

**Species** *Gallirallus australis*

**Common name** Weka

**Status** Endemic

**Abundance** Common in selected localities

**Size** 530 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Banded Rail 300 mm)

**Habitat** The Weka is a bird of forests, scrubland, fringes of estuaries, coastal beaches, roadside verges and rough pastureland.

**New Zealand range** In the North Island birds are confined to isolated areas such as Rakitu (Arid) Island, Kawau Island, the Raukumara Forest Park, Mokoia Island, Tolaga Bay, Gisborne and Kapiti Island. Breeding programmes have been undertaken and re-establishment in the Bay of Islands near Russell has been successful. Also a new population has established at Kawakawa Bay east of

Papakura.

In the South Island the bulk of the population is in the north-west corner, Westland and Fiordland. Also on Stewart Island and Ulva Island.

**Discussion** The Weka is a large flightless rail and shares a common ancestor with the smaller Banded Rail (*Rallus philippensis*). This ancestor evolved in predator-free New Zealand, to become larger in size and flightless, in common with some other New Zealand species such as the Takahē (Fleming 1982). Close allies of the Weka are the flightless New Caledonian Wood Rail (*Tricholimnas lafresnayanus*) which is possibly extinct, and the Lord Howe Island Wood Rail (*Tricholimnas sylvestris*) which survives on Lord Howe Island.

**Races** The Weka comes in four distinct races based on plumage colour patterns associated with their geographic areas. These are –

- The North Island race (*greyi*) which is distinguished by its greyish underparts and brown legs.
- The Eastern South Island race (*hectori*) known as the Buff Weka which is distinguished by its sandy-brown colouring and reddish legs.
- The Western South Island race or Black Weka (*australis*) which is distinguished by its dark blackish brown colouration although some birds lack the blackish colouring and appear instead deep chestnut-brown.
- The Stewart Island Weka (*scotti*) which is distinguished by paler colourings all over when compared with the western form. It has grey tonings on the abdomen.

### **Description**

**Upperparts and underparts** Brown with black markings. (See above under races for variations.)

### **Conspicuous feature**

- Not unlike a slim version of a domestic fowl but with a heavier bill.

### **Conspicuous characteristics**

- Slinks through the forest with head low to the ground and tail raised.
- An inquisitive bird which will warily approach humans.
- A flightless bird but it can raise itself into the air to about one metre.
- Capable of very fast running.
- Defends its territories with fast chases.
- North Island birds are less confiding than South, and Stewart Island birds.

**Call** A loud rapidly repeated “cooeet cooeet cooeet”, heard day or night.

**Nest** A bowl in grasses or low vegetation, on the ground, lined with fine grass. Up to 5 pinkish eggs are laid.

### **Where to find – North Island**

**North Auckland** – Kawau Island. P. 288.

**South Auckland** – Kawakawa Bay east of Papakura. P. 302.

**Rotorua** – on Mokoia Island. P. 324.

**Eastland** – Toatoa on Motu Road, east of Opotiki. Drive into the forests for about 25 kms.

**Wellington** – Kapiti Island. P. 337.

**Wellington** – Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. P. 340.

#### **Where to find – South Island**

**Marlborough** – Picton to Nelson area on Queen Charlotte Drive. P. 340.

**Marlborough** – Pelorus Bridge near Havelock on way to Nelson. P. 343.

**Fiordland** – Walking tracks throughout Fiordland have Weka. Recorded from The Divide further up the Eglinton Valley and near the Hollyford Valley. 370.

**Westland** – Regularly seen on roadside verges in many places in Westland including the Westport and Punakaiki districts. P. 374.

**Westland** – Cape Foulwind on Wilsons Lead Road south of Westport and south of the Bullers Gorge. This leads west to Cape Foulwind. P. 375.

#### **Where to find – Stewart Island**

**Ackers Point** – The track to Ackers Point on the arm of Half Moon Bay. P. 367.

**Ulva Island** – This small island in Paterson Inlet has many Weka. P. 367.