

A diverse group ranging in size from the Shining Cuckoo to the Channel-billed Cuckoo. Generally grey or brown, often with conspicuous barring, especially on the underparts; long tail with transverse bars and white notches; short bill and short legs. Sexes alike. Most lay 1 egg in nests of other insectivorous species. Young cuckoos make insistent penetrating begging calls. The adults are vocal when breeding and are more often heard than seen.

SHINING CUCKOO (Pipiwharau) *Chrysococcyx lucidus* Common native

16 cm, 25 g. Short-tailed *metallic bronze-green cuckoo*, barred dark green on white face and underparts. Juvenile duller and less distinctly barred. Song a distinctive series of high-pitched upward-slurring whistles: 'coo-ee, coo-ee . . .' followed by 1-2 downward-slurring notes: 'tsee-ew'; the latter often given when flying at night. Usual host is Grey Warbler. **Habitat:** Native forest, scrub, parks and gardens from Sep-Apr. Migrates to Solomon Is and Bismark Archipelago for NZ winter. **Breeding:** Oct-Feb.

[Sp 271]



CUCKOOS

Cuculidae

About 120 species worldwide; 2 breed in New Zealand and 4 are vagrants.

Most cuckoos are parasitic, laying their eggs in nests of other insectivorous bird species and then letting the host rear the young, fledging often well after it is capable of flying well. Cuckoos lay their eggs while the host's clutch is being formed, or a day or two after completion of that clutch. The cuckoo removes one of the host's eggs and replaces it with its own. The cuckoo egg develops very rapidly and usually hatches first. The cuckoo chick then ejects all other eggs and chicks from the

nest, or simply dominates the smaller chicks and they starve to death. Young cuckoos make persistent, high-pitched begging calls even after leaving the nest, and this stimulates its foster parents and other birds of the same or different species to feed it, thus causing confusion about the true identity of the foster parents.

Cuckoos are strong fliers, and most migrate between temperate and tropical regions. During the breeding season, they are conspicuously vocal, but at other times they remain silent and cryptic.

271. SHINING CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx lucidus* Plate 62

Size: 16 cm, 25 g
Other name: Pipiwharau
Geographical variation: Four subspecies are currently recognised, of which the nominate *lucidus* occurs in New Zealand.
Distribution: Breeds in southwestern and eastern Australia (including Tasmania), Vanuatu, New Caledonia and New Zealand. In New Zealand, they breed throughout the mainland and offshore islands, mainly in scrub and forest habitats (to about 1200 m asl) where Grey Warblers, their main host species, lives, but they are also heard in suburban gardens. A few Shining Cuckoos reach the Chathams each summer, and stragglers have reached the Kermadecs, The Snares, Auckland Islands and Rarotonga. In March, they migrate north to winter in western Indonesia, New Guinea and the Bismark Archipelago (New Britain, New Ireland and Bougainville) and the Solomons. It is believed that many New Zealand birds migrate through eastern Australia to or from their wintering grounds in the Bismark Archipelago and the Solomons, but many are recorded on passage at Lord Howe Island, which suggests that some take a more direct route. A few birds overwinter in New Zealand, especially in the northern North Island, but they remain quiet and inconspicuous in winter. Shining Cuckoos return to New Zealand in late September and early October, and adults return to the same site year after year.

Population: Widespread and locally common, especially conspicuous in late spring and early summer.
Conservation: Protected native. Numbers appears to be moderately stable, as their main host, the Grey Warbler, has adapted well to human settlement in New Zealand. However, continuing clearance of large tracts of subtropical rainforest at the wintering grounds of Shining Cuckoos could have a severe impact.
Breeding: Like other cuckoos, Shining Cuckoos parasitise other breeding birds by laying in nests of other species, and so take no part in the incubation of their eggs or in raising their young. Despite anecdotal reports of Shining Cuckoos laying eggs in the nests of a wide variety of birds, the only good evidence is that Grey Warblers are the host species on the mainland, and the Chatham Island Warbler is the host on the Chathams. Shining Cuckoos return to the same general area each year and establish a territory that encompasses several Grey Warbler territories. The male frequently feeds his partner during the spring, and the birds are often seen together. Exactly how Shining Cuckoos lay their eggs in the dome-shaped nest of Grey Warblers has not been observed, but the nest is not damaged in the process. One of the host's eggs is removed and replaced with a single cuckoo egg, usually laid a couple of days either side of the host clutch being

completed and incubation starting.
 Eggs are laid from mid-October to mid-January, usually into the second or replacement clutches of Grey Warblers, whose first clutch is usually laid in September before Shining Cuckoos arrive back from their wintering grounds. The olive-green egg (18.5 x 12.5 mm, 1.8 g), which is slightly larger than those of the Grey Warbler and stands out clearly by its different colour, hatches after 14-15-17 days, c. 4 days faster than those of the host. When the cuckoo chick is 3-4-7 days old, it evicts the other Grey Warbler eggs or chicks in the nest and is then raised alone. Fledging period is 19-21 days, and the fledgling begs incessantly - 'eee-eee-eee' - and is fed by both Grey Warblers for at least 4 weeks, before becoming independent. Juvenile Shining Cuckoos migrate to winter in the tropics, and they possibly remain there until 2 years old, when they have been recorded back in their natal area.
Behaviour: The arrival of Shining Cuckoos in spring is often heralded by clear, descending 'tsee-ew' calls heard at night as birds fly

overhead. They advertise their territory in spring with a loud and far-carrying, highly distinctive song: 'coo-ee coo-ee . . . coo-ee', usually repeated 10-20 times, followed by one or two descending notes: 'tsee-ew'. They become silent after December, their continued presence known only from occasional sightings and as a relatively common casualty from flying into windows. Although usually a solitary bird, small groups sometimes gather in spring and summer to display excitedly with wing-flicking and uttering trilling notes and the descending 'tsee-ew' notes from the territorial song. Large pre-migratory flocks of several hundred birds have been reported in autumn.
Feeding: Diet is mainly invertebrates, especially the small green caterpillars that feed on kowhai leaves and the black hairy caterpillars of the Magpie Moth - Shining Cuckoos are often killed by cats among the cinerarias.
Reading: Gill, B.J. 1982. *Notornis* 29: 215-227. Gill, B.J. 1983. *Ibis* 125: 40-55. Gill, B.J. 1983. *NZ J Zool* 10: 371-381.