

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Rock wren: pp 226-227.



## ROCK WREN

**Family** Xenicidae

**Species** *Xenicus gilviventris*

**Common name** Rock Wren

**Status** Endemic

**Abundance** Rare

**Size** 100 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Rifleman 80 mm)

**Habitat** Alpine areas above the tree line in “rock gardens” of scattered low vegetation along either side of the Southern Alps.

**New Zealand range** South Island only. It is found right along the Southern Alps but populations are higher in the Fiordland area.

**Discussion** The Rock Wren is difficult to find. It is an alpine bird and an example of a divergence from a common wren ancestor in a similar manner as the

Kea, an alpine parrot, diverged from the ancestral stock of the Kaka. Similar adaptations are known in the tree genus *Nothofagus* (beech) and in the insect genus *Maoricicada* (cicadas).

### **Description – male**

**Head** Olive-brown. **Eyebrow** White, edged with black. **Upperparts** Olive-brown.

**Underparts** Grey-brown. **Flanks** Yellow.

### **Description – female**

**Upperparts and underparts** Similar to the male bird but duller.

### **Conspicuous features**

- Larger than the Rifleman.
- White eyebrow.
- Yellow on flanks under folded primaries.
- Large toes, with prominent hind-toe.

### **Conspicuous characteristics**

- When birds are standing they continually bob their bodies.
- Birds will suddenly appear.
- Hops quickly from rock to rock with some use of wings.
- At times they undertake longer flights and have the appearance when in flight of that of a young sparrow trying its wings.
- Feed on moths and insects among the rocks.

**Call** A high-pitched three syllable “zit” sound, the first note being rather piercing. The call is not often heard but is distinctive. Do not muddle with the louder Pipit’s “scree” call which is often heard in Rock Wren territory.

**Nest** A hole in a bank or rock crevice on the ground. Up to 3 creamy eggs are laid.

### **Where to find – South Island**

**Canterbury** – Arthurs Pass National Park. P. 348.

**Otago** – Glenorchy. P. 358.

**Fiordland** – Gertrude Valley about 1 km before the Homer Tunnel on the Hollyford side. P. 371.

**Fiordland** – Homer Tunnel and Milford Sound side of tunnel. P. 371.