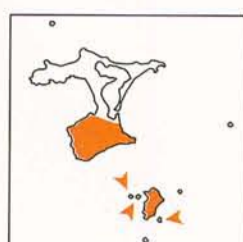


Passerines are the largest group of birds. They are small to medium sized land birds found worldwide, except on Antarctica. All species have four toes, three pointing forward and one back, well-adapted for perching. Most species are song-birds, with complex musical calls, but there are exceptions (e.g. crows). They show great diversity of form, behaviour and breeding biology.

**CHATHAM ISLAND WARBLER** *Gerygone albofrontata* Locally abundant endemic

12 cm; ♂ 10 g, ♀ 8.5 g. Like large Grey Warbler but browner and bill much larger. Male has olive-brown head and upperparts, darker on wings and tail; prominent white forehead, eyebrow and underparts; flanks and undertail pale yellow; red eye. Female lacks white forehead and has duller greyish-white underparts and yellowish eyebrow, face and throat. Juvenile like female, but upperparts olive grey; underparts yellower; eye brown. Gleans invertebrates from leaves and crevices in trunks and branches; rarely hovers. **Habitat:** Forest and scrub. Builds a distinctive domed hanging nest, with small side entrance hole. **Breeding:** Sep–Jan. [Sp 302]



**AUSTRALASIAN WARBLERS** Acanthizidae

59 species in Southeast Asia, Australasia and the southwestern Pacific; 2 endemic species in New Zealand.

A diverse group of very small or small forest and scrub birds. Many, like the thornbills and

warblers, have short, fine bills for gleaning insects in foliage, or more distinctively, by hovering and picking insects from leaves. Most species have a distinctive, loud and beautiful song.

**302. CHATHAM ISLAND WARBLER** *Gerygone albofrontata* Plate 66

**Size:** 12 cm; male 10 g, female 8.5 g  
**Distribution:** Chatham Islands only. Subfossil remains and records in the first half of the 1900s indicate that they used to be throughout all of the Chatham Islands. They are now confined to the forested areas of the southern half of Chatham Island, Pitt, Mangere, Little Mangere and South East Islands, and the Star Keys.

**Population:** Locally common, and abundant on South East and Mangere Islands.

**Conservation:** Protected endemic. Chatham Island Warblers do not seem to have adapted to human-modified habitats as well as Grey Warblers have done on the New Zealand

mainland. Those on Chatham Island have declined during this century and have disappeared from the northern half of the island, but they remain the commonest native bird in the southern forests and scrub. On predator-free offshore islands, such as South East and Mangere, they are abundant in native forest and scrub, and their future seems assured so long as these islands remain free of rats and cats. Chatham Island Warblers are sometimes parasitised by Shining Cuckoos, and so they were used to host broods of Black Robins in the early stages of the recovery of that critically endangered species. However, although able to success-

fully hatch Black Robin eggs and raise the Black Robin chicks through the first couple of weeks, they were unable to fledge them successfully.

**Breeding:** Pairs establish territories in August, and the female takes up to 13 days to build the enclosed hanging nest. It has a 3 cm diameter hole in the side and is made of rootlets, mosses, lichens, leaves, bark, twigs, grass stems, flowers, cobwebs, spider egg-cases and feathers, and is lined with a thick layer of feathers. On Chatham Island, most nests hang in the open, often on terminal branches of *Dracophyllum arboreum* about 6 m above the ground. On offshore islands, however, they are only 2–3 m above the ground and in dense foliage, presumably to protect them from damage from petrels landing at night. Most eggs are laid in September–December, and only one brood is raised each year, but some replacement clutches are laid late in the season.

They lay 2–3–4 white eggs (18 x 13 mm; 1.8 g) with reddish speckling concentrated near the larger end. Eggs are laid at 2-day intervals. The female alone incubates for 17–19.5–21 days and broods the chicks, but both parents feed the chicks. The fledging period is 19–20–23 days, and chicks are fed by their parents for up to 24 days after leaving the nest; normally the male and female split their brood and care for one or two chicks each. When the population density is high, small juvenile flocks form late in the breeding season. First breeding is probably at 2 years old, because 1-year-old birds are in subadult

plumage and are non-territorial in the following breeding season. The oldest bird recorded in the wild lived over 7 years.

Some nests late in the season are parasitised by Shining Cuckoos.

**Behaviour:** Males defend their territory with long chases interspersed with bouts of loud and prolonged singing; females occasionally join in the chases but have only a weak subsong.

**Feeding:** Diet is entirely invertebrates, especially spiders, caterpillars, flies, beetles and bugs. They glean most of their food from leaves and from crevices in trunks and branches. Unlike the Grey Warbler, they seldom hover to catch food, but quite often feed on the ground in the leaf litter.

**In the hand:** Sexes are told by colour and size, the adult male having white underparts and a prominent white face with contrasting dark eyestripe, and the adult female having grey-white underparts and a face with a yellow tinge, especially on the throat. Only females develop a brood patch. Males are larger in all measurements, with little overlap in wing length: 60–64–67 mm cf. 57–60–62 mm. Juveniles are like females, but their upperparts have an olive-grey tone rather than brownish olive, underparts are yellower, outer webs of primaries are green-yellow not buff-yellow, and their iris is brown, not red. Juveniles moult into adult plumage in November–January, while adults probably do not moult until January–March, several weeks after breeding.

**Reading:** Dennison, M.D. *et al.* 1984. *Notornis* 31: 97–105. Robertson, H.A. & Dennison, M.D. 1984. *Emu* 84: 103–107.