

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Whitehead: pp 237-238.



WHITEHEAD

Family Pachycephalidae

Species *Mohoua albicilla*

Common names Whitehead, Bush Canary

Status Endemic

Abundance Common in selected areas

Size 150 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm)

Habitat Found in a range of forests including podocarp, beech, secondary forest and exotic pine forests.

New Zealand range North Island only and on Little Barrier Island, Tiri Tiri Matangi Island and Kapiti Island. Absent from forests north of Mount Pirongia to the west, and Table Mountain, behind the town of Thames, to the east. Widely spread through the forests of the central North Island south to Wellington.

Discussion Unlike its close relative the Yellowhead the Whitehead has increased in numbers over the last fifty years. This spread has continued along the Coromandel Peninsula in a northerly direction. It has also spread through many of the man-made pine forests (*Pinus spp.*) of the central North Island where it thrives on the large moth-food resource to be found there.

Description

Head and underparts White, male birds being whiter than female birds. **Wings, back and uppertail** Pale brown. **Bill, legs and feet** Black. **Eye** Black.

Conspicuous features

- White head and underparts.
- Black eye.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Has a habit of working up tree trunks usually in a hurry.
- Often sings in short melodic bursts as it feeds.
- Makes short, almost hopping-like flights, from tree-top to tree-top.
- In winter it forms noisy flocks which move through forests in a mass.

Call Has two songs. One is a canary-like chatter made up of “swee swee chir chir chir” notes. The other is a tri-syllabic “chu chu chueeee chit”. Some of these notes could be confused with the introductory notes of a Chaffinch song. Its other song is melodic and carrying, not unlike some notes of the Bellbird and the Robin.

Nest Cup-shaped made of twigs bound with cobwebs and lined with feathers, wool or tree-fern hair, usually built towards the end of branches, about four metres above the ground. Up to 4 white, brown-speckled eggs are laid. Nests are parasitised by the Long-tailed Cuckoo, this bird laying 1 creamy-white egg in the Whitehead’s nest.

Where to find – North Island

North Auckland – Tiri Tiri Matangi Island. P. 292.

Waikato – Kaimai Range on Highway 29. P. 311.

King Country – Pureora. P. 314.

King Country – Waitomo and the Ruakuri Caves Track. P. 313.

Bay of Plenty – Mount Otanewainuku. P. 319.

Rotorua – Mamaku at Galaxy Road. P. 325.

Rotorua – Blue Lake. P. 325.

Rotorua – Central Plateau forests at Atiamuri. P. 315.

Taupo – Opepe Reserve. P. 326.

Taupo – Lake Rotopounamu. P. 316.

Wellington – Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. P. 340.