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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Yellowhead: pp 238-240.



YELLOWHEAD

Family Pachycephalidae

Species *Mohoua ochrocephala*

Common name Yellowhead, Mohua

Status Endemic

Abundance Rare

Size 150 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm)

Habitat A bird of old forests with a special liking for beech forests, but also lowland podocarp.

New Zealand range It is found in the South Island only, mainly confined to Fiordland National Park and further north in the Mount Aspiring National Park.

Other populations survive in the Catlins and Blue Mountains in Southland, the Hawdon River Valley in the Arthurs Pass National Park north-west of Christchurch and Mt Stokes in the Marlborough area.

Discussion A bird which has speciated from the common ancestor of both the Brown Creeper and the Whitehead and which has been variously grouped over the years with finches (Fringillidae), warblers (Muscicapidae) and tits (Paridae). Now they are placed in the family of Whistlers (Pachycephalidae).

Description

Head and underparts Yellow. **Upperparts** Olive-brown. **Bill and feet** Black. **Eye** Black.

Conspicuous features

- The yellow head and the black eye and bill.
- Bright yellow underparts.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Feeds in the middle to high canopy.
- Movements are urgent and often noisy with birds making buzzing notes.
- If birds are disturbed by a Long-tailed Cuckoo they become very agitated.
- When feeding, often hang upside down.

Call Sweet and gentle and less canary-like than the Whitehead. It is louder than the Brown Creeper. Because it shares a habitat with the Brown Creeper its song, although different, can sometimes be confused.

Nest In holes of old trees, usually above four metres, making a structure within the hole of twigs bound with cobwebs. Up to 4 pink, lightly speckled with brown eggs, are laid. The hole-nesting habit of Yellowheads could be the main reason for their decline. Not only are holes easy for predators like rats and stoats to access, but they have also become in short supply with the clearing of forests. Nests of Yellowheads are parasitised by Long-tailed Cuckoos which may be another cause for the bird's decline.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough – Mt Stokes. P. 341.

Canterbury – Arthurs Pass Follow Highway 73 from Christchurch. P. 348.

Otago – At Haast Pass try:

1. Makarora near the information centre. P. 372.
2. Blue Pools Track. P. 372.
3. Davis Flat 14 kms north from Makarora at the campsite/picnic area. A walking track leads along the Haast River and over a footbridge. P. 372.
4. Gates of Haast where an old bridal trail leads east at the north end of the Mount Aspiring National Park. P. 372.

Queenstown – From here try:

1. Glenorchy near the start of the Routeburn Track. P. 358.
2. Lake Sylvan near the start of the Routeburn Track. P. 359.

Fiordland – From Eglinton Valley to Milford Sound try:

1. Forest behind the Transit New Zealand depot. P. 370.
2. Forests behind Knobbs Flat. P. 370.
3. Lake Gunn walk at Cascade Creek. P. 370.
4. Milford Sound at forests before the Homer Tunnel. P. 371.

Southland – Owaka Valley. P. 363.

Southland – Chasland Forest. P. 363.

Southland – Blue Mountains. P. 363.