

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Cirl bunting: pp 257-259.



### CIRL BUNTING

**Family** Emberizidae

**Species** *Emberiza cirlus*

**Common name** Cirl Bunting

**Status** Introduced

**Abundance** Uncommon

**Size** 160 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Yellowhammer 160 mm)

**Habitat** A bird of open pastureland and low vegetation.

**Worldwide range** Europe and into Asia.

**New Zealand range** North Island records come from Whangarei, Rotorua, Gisborne, Hawkes Bay and Wellington areas. Most South Island records come from eastern areas from Nelson, south to South Otago and occasionally Westland.

**Discussion** The Cirl Bunting is the least known of the introduced passerines mainly because it has not spread widely, its main populations being confined to

the north of the South Island.

**Description – male (above)**

**Crown and nape** Dark grey striped with black and yellow. **Face** Yellow with bold black stripe through eye. **Chin and throat** Black with yellow band below. **Neck and upper breast** Pale brown. **Wings** Brown edged with dark brown. **Underparts** Pale yellow, lightly streaked with brown. **Rump** Olive-brown. **Tail** Olive-brown with black outer feathers, edged white.

**Description – female (below)**

**Upperparts and underparts** Dull yellow streaked heavily with dark brown on the crown and light brown elsewhere. **Rump** Olive-brown.



**Conspicuous features**

- Yellowhammer size.
- At first sight similar to a Yellowhammer.
- Overall a darker Yellowhammer.

**Conspicuous characteristics**

- Feeds on the ground, especially among fed out hay.
- Hops while feeding on ground.
- Often crouches close to ground like a Yellowhammer.

- Twitters in flight when in family parties.

#### **Differences between female Ciril Buntings and female Yellowhammers**

- Ciril Buntings have olive-brown rumps.
- Yellowhammers have rufous rumps.
- Ciril Buntings are darker with less yellow.

#### **Differences between male Ciril Buntings and male Yellowhammers**

- Ciril Buntings have greyish crowns.
- Yellowhammers have yellow crowns.
- Ciril Buntings have yellow face separated by a bold black eye-stripe.
- Ciril Buntings have black chins.

**Call** Song made by the male bird is a thin, metallic high-pitched rattle, “tirree tirree tirree tirree” delivered from a conspicuous perch. It is not unlike the Yellowhammer’s song. Song period is from October to March, this bird still singing when all the other introduced songsters have stopped. Birds also call when in flight and have a variety of “zit” type communication calls.

**Nest** Is a cup of dried grass and moss in thick vegetation at about two metres above the ground. It places its nest higher up than does the Yellowhammer. Up to 4 bluish green, streaked with black, eggs are laid.

#### **Where to find – North Island**

**Northland** – Whareora near Whangarei on Mount Tiger Road. P. 285.

**Other localities** – No reliable localities are known. Odd birds turn up in North Auckland (Muriwai), Rotorua (Okere Falls), Gisborne (Kaiti Hill), Hawkes Bay (Mangakuri Beach and Clive).

#### **Where to find – South Island**

**Marlborough** – Most of the pastureland around Nelson has this bird. It is especially easy to find during winter when farmers are feeding out hay. Try Polestead Road near Stoke. P. 343, 344.

**Marlborough** – Motueka on Beach Road and the sandspit area. P. 344.

**Marlborough** – On pastures prior to the Abel Tasman Park. P. 344.

**Marlborough** – Blenheim on pastures south of the town.

**Marlborough** – Before Seddon at Dashwood take the Awatere Valley Road and search the area.

**Marlborough** – Lake Grassmere and Lake Elterwater south of Seddon. P. 345.

**Kaikoura** – South Bay Reserve and beach front of Kaikoura Peninsula. Regularly seen here. P. 345.

**Otago** – Oamaru at racecourse. This is about 4 kms north of the town on Highway 1, located between Redcastle Road and Russell Road on the left. It is a consistently good locality. P. 357.