



## Chatham Island warbler *Gerygone albofrontata*

12 cm

CHATHAM ISLANDS ENDEMIC, RANGE RESTRICTED

### Identification

The Chatham Island warbler is a small forest bird, with olive-brown upperparts, white sides and underparts and a short, fine bill. The male has a prominent white face, including forehead and throat, with a contrasting dark eye-stripe; the flanks and undertail are also whitish. Females are smaller with duller plumage; the face, underparts and sides being grey-white with a tinge of yellow, particularly on the throat. Only the male gives a full song. Warblers spend most of their time foraging under the canopy, gleaning invertebrates from leaves and tree crevices.



Chatham Island warbler sunbathing, Rangatira. Photo: Helen Gummer.



Chatham Island warbler in nest, Mangere, December 1982. Photo: Dave Crouchley (DOC).



Male Chatham Island warbler. Photo: Dave Crouchley (DOC).

### Distribution and ecology

The Chatham Island warbler is common in forests on southern Chatham Island, Pitt Island, Rangatira, Mangere, Tapuae-nuku, and Star Keys, and also occurs on The Castle, and possibly the inner Murumurus. There is no estimate of total numbers. Warblers have not spread into modified habitats, but inhabit the full range of native forest types. Warblers are

absent from the small forest remnants in northern Chatham Island. They occur at high densities on Rangatira and Mangere compared to southern Chatham Island. Nests are distinctive enclosed domes, with a small entrance on the side, generally suspended in trees or tall shrubs. The 2-4 eggs are laid in September-December and are incubated by the female, but both parents feed the chicks. A single brood is raised each year.

### Threats and conservation

Loss of forest habitat through burning and clearance for farmland, and habitat deterioration due to introduced browsers (particularly the loss of forest understorey), are likely to have caused the decline of warblers through much of their range. The fragmentation and degradation of forest habitat in north Chatham Island is likely to be the reason warblers are no longer found there. The presence of predators may explain the lower densities of warbler on southern Chatham Island compared to Rangatira and Mangere. Like the grey warbler (*G. igata*) in New Zealand, Chatham Island warblers occasionally act as unwitting foster parents for shining cuckoos. Protection of forest habitats throughout the Chatham Islands will assist warbler population recovery, although the ability of warblers to re-colonise isolated forest remnants unaided is uncertain. The maintenance of habitat free from browser pressure, allowing development of a dense understorey and deep leaf litter, will be essential for populations to establish and survive. During the early 1980s, warblers were trialled as foster parents during the black robin recovery programme on Mangere, but were found to be unsuitable.