



## Chatham Island tui *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae chathamensis*

32 cm

CHATHAM ISLANDS ENDEMIC SUBSPECIES,  
NATIONALLY ENDANGERED

**Other names:** koko, parson bird

### Identification

Chatham Island tui have black plumage with green, bluish-purple and bronze iridescent sheens when seen in sunlight. Two tufts of white feathers curl at the throat. Sexes are alike. The Chatham Island tui is a subspecies of the tui found on mainland New Zealand; it is a larger bird with longer throat tufts. The song is quite different from the New Zealand tui, with more guttural coughing and whistles. Tui flight is energetic, with acrobatic dives and noisy, whirring wing beats.

### Distribution and ecology

Tui were formerly widespread on Chatham and Pitt Islands, Rangatira, and Mangere, and possibly Tapuaenuku. By 1938, tui were recorded as being less common on northern Chatham Island, common in southern areas, Pitt Island and Rangatira, but absent from Mangere (which had recently been cleared). By the 1970s, tui on Chatham Island were restricted to low numbers



When feeding on flax nectar, tui often have an orange dusting of flax pollen on their foreheads.

Chatham Island tui on flowering Chatham Island flax, Rangatira. Photo: Helen Gummer (DOC).



Chatham Island tui on ngaio, Rangatira. Photo: Dave Crouchley (DOC).

in the south, and by the early 1990s they had disappeared apart from the occasional bird crossing Pitt Strait in late summer and winter. Tui are now confined to Rangatira and Pitt Island, with a few birds present on Mangere.

The tui population on Rangatira is estimated to be around 250 birds. The size of the Pitt Island tui population is unknown. Breeding is known to occur on both Rangatira and Pitt Islands, but most breeding appears to take place on Rangatira. Many tui leave Rangatira during winter and move to Pitt Island, returning to breed on Rangatira the following spring. Tui feed on nectar, fruit and insects. They are important for the pollination and seed dispersal of native forest plants. The tui is the only remaining honeyeater in the Chatham Islands, following extinction of the Chatham Island bellbird in the early 1900s. Details of breeding are poorly known, but apparently more birds breed in good flax flowering years. On Rangatira, most nest in thick tangles of pohuehue vines over forest trees. The breeding season is November-January; 2-4 eggs are laid, and typically 1-3 fledglings are reared.



Chatham Island tui on flowering Chatham Island flax, Rangatira. Photo: Colin Miskelly.

### Threats and conservation

Loss of habitat, and predation by feral cats, rodents and possums are likely to have been the main causes of decline of tui. While there are significant areas of forest habitat remaining on southern Chatham Island, the combined pressure of predators and browsers appears to have been too much for tui to survive. The disappearance of tui from Chatham Island coincided with the spread of possums, and the associated loss or severe reduction of plant species that provide flowers and fruit important to tui.

The legal protection of Rangatira as a Nature Reserve, and measures to protect the island from the introduction of pests, has provided secure habitat for tui. Research conducted on Rangatira in 1995-98 provided information on tui ecology and breeding. The protection of forest habitat and reduction of predators and browsers on Chatham Island, and the revegetation programme on Mangere, should provide suitable habitat for the re-establishment of tui in the future.