

A diverse group ranging in size from the Shining Cuckoo to the Channel-billed Cuckoo. Generally grey or brown, often with conspicuous barring, especially on the underparts; long tail with transverse bars and white notches; short bill and short legs. Sexes alike. Most lay 1 egg in nests of other insectivorous species. Young cuckoos make insistent penetrating begging calls. The adults are vocal when breeding and are more often heard than seen.

**CHANNEL-BILLED CUCKOO** *Scythrops novaehollandiae* Rare Australian vagrant

61 cm. Huge grey cuckoo with a long black and white-tipped tail, and large powerful yellow bill. Red skin round the red eye. **Habitat:** Breeds Australian forests. Winters in Indonesia. Rarely seen in NZ, spring and summer. [Sp 273]



**CUCKOOS**

**Cuculidae**

About 120 species worldwide; 2 breed in New Zealand and 4 are vagrants.

Most cuckoos are parasitic, laying their eggs in nests of other insectivorous bird species and then letting the host rear the young, fledging often well after it is capable of flying well. Cuckoos lay their eggs while the host's clutch is being formed, or a day or two after completion of that clutch. The cuckoo removes one of the host's eggs and replaces it with its own. The cuckoo egg develops very rapidly and usually hatches first. The cuckoo chick then ejects all other eggs and chicks from the

nest, or simply dominates the smaller chicks and they starve to death. Young cuckoos make persistent, high-pitched begging calls even after leaving the nest, and this stimulates its foster parents and other birds of the same or different species to feed it, thus causing confusion about the true identity of the foster parents.

Cuckoos are strong fliers, and most migrate between temperate and tropical regions. During the breeding season, they are conspicuously vocal, but at other times they remain silent and cryptic.

**273. CHANNEL-BILLED CUCKOO**

*Scythrops novaehollandiae* Plate 62

**Size:** 61 cm, 700 g  
**Distribution:** Breeds in northern and eastern Australia, parasitising nests of magpies, crows and currawongs. After breeding, they migrate north to winter in eastern Indonesia, New Guinea and the Bismark Archipelago. Rare vagrant to New Zealand; with a minor influx in spring 1996; six records: Invercargill (December 1924), Aupouri Peninsula,

Northland (October 1986 to January 1987), Raglan (October 1996), Pukerua Bay (November 1996) and Mangawhai (October 2002).  
**Behaviour:** Channel-billed Cuckoos are usually found in open country with scattered trees. In Australia, they fly with slowly flapping wings in small noisy groups and are often harassed by corvids. They have a loud, melodious, trumpet call.