

## SHORT NOTE

### An historical record of bush wren (*Xenicus longipes*) on Kapiti Island

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Historically, bush wrens (*Xenicus longipes*) were recorded only from the 3 main islands of New Zealand, plus Big South Cape and Solomon Islands south-west of Stewart Island (Oliver 1955; Turbott 1990). The species is considered extinct following an irruption of ship rats (*Rattus rattus*) on the 2 latter islands in the early 1960s, and the failure of an attempted rescue translocation of bush wrens to nearby Kaimohu Island (Bell 1978; Higgins *et al.* 2001).

Although there are no recognised records of bush wrens on islands off the coast of the North Island, Hill & Hill (1987: 306) listed bush wrens among the birds that Richard Henry recorded on Kapiti Island. Richard Henry was the caretaker on Kapiti Island from August 1908 to July 1911 (Wilkinson & Wilkinson 1952), and was an astute observer of wildlife, including bush wren (Don Merton, epilogue in Hill & Hill 1987). Henry arrived on Kapiti Island soon after completing 14 years of fieldwork in Fiordland (1894 to 1908; Hill & Hill 1987), where he was familiar with the bush wren. While at Dusky Sound, Henry collected bird specimens for the Earl of Ranfurly, who was procuring specimens for the British Museum (Natural History) (Ogilvie-Grant 1905; Hill & Hill 1987: 263). Among the specimens Henry provided were 2 bush wrens collected at Dusky Sound in March 1901 (Ogilvie-Grant 1905; Hill & Hill 1987: 264). These specimens are still in the Natural History Museum, Tring (BMNH 1902.2.21.37, 1902.2.21.38), although they no longer bear the collector's name (Knox & Walters 1994; Joanne Cooper pers. comm.).

The evidence for Richard Henry having seen bush wrens on Kapiti Island is from his annual report to William Kensington (Under-Secretary for Lands) dated 31 March 1911 (Lands & Survey file 4/53, vol. 1; March 1909 to May 1911), as follows:

"It has been a grand season here for everything, with little wind and any amount of fine weather. A pair of bellbirds near my place reared two families, and I think it was the same with some tuis, they were so long catching insects to feed them. The pigeons are holding their own well but they are too tame. The few kakas that are here are very wild and quite safe on those rough hillsides. White-heads are very plentiful, also robins. There are a good many tits and fantails and a few bush wrens. Woodhens are widely scattered and safe now so long as no ferrets come."

Attempts to locate Henry's work diaries for 1908-1911 were unsuccessful, and therefore no further details are available. However, given Henry's proven reliability as an observer and his familiarity with the bush wren, I suggest that the record should be considered valid. There are no other species on Kapiti Island that could be confused with bush wren, as riflemen (*Acanthisitta chloris*) are not known from the island. Even if riflemen were present on Kapiti Island in 1911, Henry was familiar with them from Dusky Sound (Ogilvie-Grant 1905).

It is likely that the bush wren became extinct on Kapiti Island as a result of the combined impacts of habitat destruction (for farming) and predation by introduced cats (*Felis catus*) and Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*). Unfortunately the removal of all introduced mammals from Kapiti Island (completed by 1996) was too late to save the bush wren.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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