

SHORT NOTE

Sightings of North Island tomtit (*Petroica macrocephala toitoi*) on Rangitoto Island, Hauraki Gulf, Auckland

SANDRA H. ANDERSON

School of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland
sh.anderson@auckland.ac.nz

A series of bird counts was made on Rangitoto Island in the Hauraki Gulf, Auckland, in 1998-1999, to monitor any long-term effects of a 1080 poison operation to eradicate possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) and rock wallabies (*Petrogale penicillata*) from the island in 1990 (Spurr & Anderson in press). In the course of a 5-minute bird count on 14 Oct 1999, a pair of North Is tomtits (*Petroica macrocephala toitoi*) was sighted. The male tomtit appeared near the Rangitoto wharf track on the cinder cone, c. 100 m below the crater. He was soon joined by the female, and the pair was observed feeding low and on the ground for several minutes. The vegetation on the cinder cone is secondary forest of manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*), kanuka (*Kunzea ericoides*), mapou (*Myrsine australis*), and rewarewa (*Knightsia excelsa*).

This is the 1st record for tomtits on Rangitoto Island. A male tomtit was sighted near the track in the same area during a subsequent visit on 14 Apr 2002, and Mel Galbraith (pers. comm.) also observed a male tomtit in the same area on 20 Dec 2001. Tomtits were not known previously on the island (Segedin 1985), and were not recorded in earlier bird counts made on Rangitoto Island at the time of the poison operation (Miller & Anderson 1992).

Tomtits are rare between Whangarei and the southern Waikato (Heather & Robertson 1997). Rangitoto Island is separated from the mainland by 3.5 km of open water, and the nearest source populations are in the Hunua Ranges, 30 km to the southeast; in regenerating forest at Orewa, 40 km

to the north (M. Galbraith, pers. comm.); and in the Waitakere Ranges, 30 km to the southwest (Bull *et al.* 1985). The Waitakere population has shown a trend of increasing numbers as a result of ongoing pest control in the area since 1997 (Hix & Lovegrove unpubl. data).

An individual sighting of a tomtit on Tiritiri Matangi Island (Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi bulletin 36, summer 1998/99), which lies 10 km north of Rangitoto Island, confirms that tomtits are able to disperse widely and across open water. It is predicted that under favourable circumstances, such dispersal would result in founder individuals establishing breeding populations. Tomtits are known to frequent 2nd-growth forest, and maintain a territory all year (Heather & Robertson 1997). The observations of a male within the same area of secondary forest on Rangitoto Island 2 and 3 years after the initial sighting, suggest the pair may be resident and possibly breeding. It will be of interest whether a population successfully establishes on the island given the continued presence of predators, including ship rats (*Rattus rattus*), cats (*Felis catus*), and stoats (*Mustela erminea*).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Tim Lovegrove for advice, and to Kevin Parker, Mel Galbraith, Brenda and Terry Greene, and an anonymous referee for comments on the manuscript.

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