

SHORT NOTE

First record of dusky woodswallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*) in New Zealand

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The dusky woodswallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*) is a medium-sized forest passerine belonging to the Family Artamidae (Higgins *et al.* 2006). This species is distributed in eastern and southern Australia and Tasmania. Whereas some populations of the dusky woodswallow are resident, other populations migrate to southeastern Australia and Tasmania for breeding in spring (Pizzey & Knight 2007). In this short note, we report the first record of the dusky woodswallow in New Zealand.

At 08:41 h on 27 September 2014, we found one dusky woodswallow near Traill Park, Golden Bay Road, Stewart Island (46.9011°S, 168.1242°E). The bird was perching on a power-line along the road at first (Fig. 1a). The bird was observed flying up and gliding back to the power-line several times, probably for catching insects. After moving to a harakeke/flax flower stalk (Fig. 1b), the bird landed on the grass across the road and caught an earthworm. Soon after, the bird flew southward behind a house, while carrying the earthworm (Fig. 1c). We observed the behaviour of the bird for less than 2 minutes and took 5 photographs. At the time, we realised that the bird was a woodswallow, and that the species is not resident and very rare in New Zealand. After this observation, we tried to search for the bird on

the afternoon of 27 September and morning of 28 September, however could not find it again.

From the photographs (Fig. 1), we identified the bird as a dusky woodswallow based on the following morphological characters: (i) dark brown feathers from its abdomen to its back, whereas other species of woodswallows except for the little woodswallow (*A. minor*) lack such coloration and instead have white feathers in their abdomen, (ii) a prominent white stripe on the leading edge of the outer wing, which is lacking in the little woodswallow, and (iii) the bird appeared starling-sized, which is bigger than the little woodswallow (12-14 cm; Pizzey & Knight 2007). Because the dusky woodswallow has quite similar coloration between males and females, we could not identify the sex of the bird. The Birds New Zealand Records Appraisal Committee accepted our submission of our photographs and notes, and approved the bird as a dusky woodswallow, providing a new species record of New Zealand (UBR 2014/58).

An unofficial record of the dusky woodswallow in New Zealand has previously been reported from the Snares Islands (Miskelly *et al.* 2001). Murray Schofield observed 2 individuals of probable dusky woodswallows, hawking insects over Ho Ho Bay 10-13 October 1983, but did not take photographs of the birds (Miskelly *et al.* 2001). The Snares Islands are located about 100 km south of Stewart Island. The timing of both our observation on Stewart Island and

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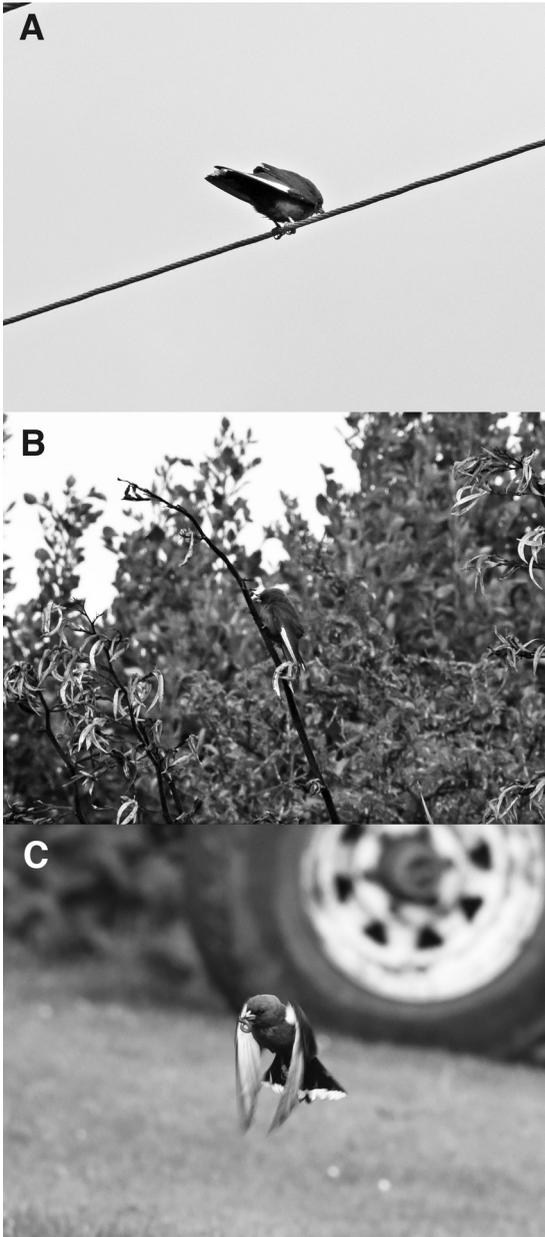


Fig. 1. A dusky woodswallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*) in Stewart Island on 27 September 2014. (a) Perching on a power-line along Golden Bay Road. (b) Perching on a harakeke/flax flower stalk. (c) Flying away with an earthworm in its bill. Photographs by S. Kakishima & T. Morimoto.

this unofficial record on Snares Islands corresponds with the season of southward migration from southeastern Australia to Tasmania. Thus, it is possible that records of dusky woodswallow in New Zealand represent individuals that have strayed from their normal spring migration route across Bass Strait.

A total of 11 species of woodswallows belong to the genus *Artamus*, but apart from vagrants, no species are distributed in New Zealand (Higgins *et al.* 2006). There have been a few previous records of 2 species of woodswallows in New Zealand, a masked woodswallow (*A. personatus*) and a white-browed woodswallow (*A. superciliosus*) (Gill *et al.* 2010). Both species are highly nomadic and distributed in mostly inland areas of mainland Australia (Pizzey & Knight 2007). A pair of masked woodswallows was recorded at Naseby Forest, in central Otago from January 1972 to August 1973 (Darby 1972; Child 1974, 1975). Four individuals of white-browed woodswallows were also recorded at Naseby Forest from December 1971 to July 1973 (Darby 1972; Child 1974, 1975). These white-browed and masked woodswallows were observed to form a mixed species association. Another individual of a white-browed woodswallow was recorded at Miranda, Firth of Thames in September 1991 (Guest 1992). Therefore, this short note provides the fourth official record among woodswallows in New Zealand.

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