

## SHORT NOTE

### A relict population of Rifleman in Northland

The Rifleman *Acanthisitta chloris* has long been considered extinct in Northland (e.g. Oliver 1955, Turbott 1990), but their presence has recently been confirmed in Warawara Forest north of Hokianga Harbour. During a survey for bats on 15-16 April 1993, at least two pairs of Rifleman were found in a 4-5 ha area of kauri *Agathis australis* forest on the plateau of Warawara. The area had been partly logged by the former Forest Service in the 1970s, but was contiguous with an unmodified kauri remnant of approximately 200 ha.

The area was surveyed more extensively on 6-8 April 1994 when Rifleman were found at six locations in the mature kauri forest at altitudes of 420-500 m asl. Ten five-minute bird counts were carried out in the kauri forest, five of which produced a total of seven Rifleman. This forest was dominated by emergent kauri with a canopy of podocarps (particularly Hall's totara *Podocarpus halli*, miro *Prumnopitys ferruginea* and rimu *Dacrydium cupressinum*), and a variety of broadleaf species including tawa *Belschiemedia tawa*, tarairē *B. tarairi*, pukatea *Laurelia novaezelandiae* and rata *Metrosideros robusta*. Fifty species of trees and shrubs were found.

No Rifleman were found outside of kauri forest. Searches, including 15 five-minute bird counts, in cut-over kauri forest at the same altitude and in unmodified podocarp-broadleaf forest at altitudes of 320-500 m in the Wharerimu Stream catchment, failed to locate further Rifleman. In 1979 the former Wildlife Service surveyed extensively in broadleaf-podocarp forest containing some kauri of the northern Warawara and no Rifleman were recorded (Moynihan 1980).

The survival of this small population of Rifleman in Northland is surprising. Similar kauri forest remnants occur in Waipoua-Mataraua, Puketi-Omahuta and Raetea Forests and parts of each were surveyed by the Wildlife Service in 1979 and by Department of Conservation in 1993 (Pierce *et al.* 1993), but there have been no confirmed records of Rifleman from them. However, single, unconfirmed, recent reports of Rifleman have subsequently come from each of the above forests and some additional site-specific survey is warranted.

The Warawara population is currently the only mainland population of Rifleman known north of Te Aroha (Turbott 1990), 330 km to the south, or perhaps Coromandel (Bull *et al.* 1985). Island populations do, however, occur on Little Barrier Island, Great Barrier Island (Turbott 1990) and apparently formerly on Hen Island (Oliver 1955).

#### LITERATURE CITED

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