

First record of a Black-faced Monarch (*Monarcha melanopsis*) in New Zealand

A Black-faced Monarch (*Monarcha melanopsis* (Vieillot)) was caught by Robin Turner's cat at Cross Road in Stratford, Taranaki (39°20'S 174°20'E) on 19 April 1996 and brought in by Mr Turner to the local office of the Department of Conservation. The bird was alive when retrieved from the cat but died soon afterwards. Department office Matt Cook then forwarded the specimen to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington for identification. Using Boles (1988), I identified the bird on the basis of its blue-grey dorsal surface, head and throat, its orange ventral surface, its size (see Table 1) and its broad bill surrounded by well-developed bristles. Comparison with three specimens loaned by the Museum of Victoria, Melbourne (immature female B17927, adult female B1640 and adult male B1638) confirmed its identification. The New Zealand bird was an immature because it lacked black on the face (see Figure 1 and photo in Boles 1988: 289) and, on dissection, its gonads showed it to be a male (the testes each measured 1-1.5 mm long). All its plumage was fairly fresh, without active moult.

The specimen (see Fig. 1) has been prepared as a study skin, spread wing and part skeleton and is registered in the Museum's collection as number 25151. One

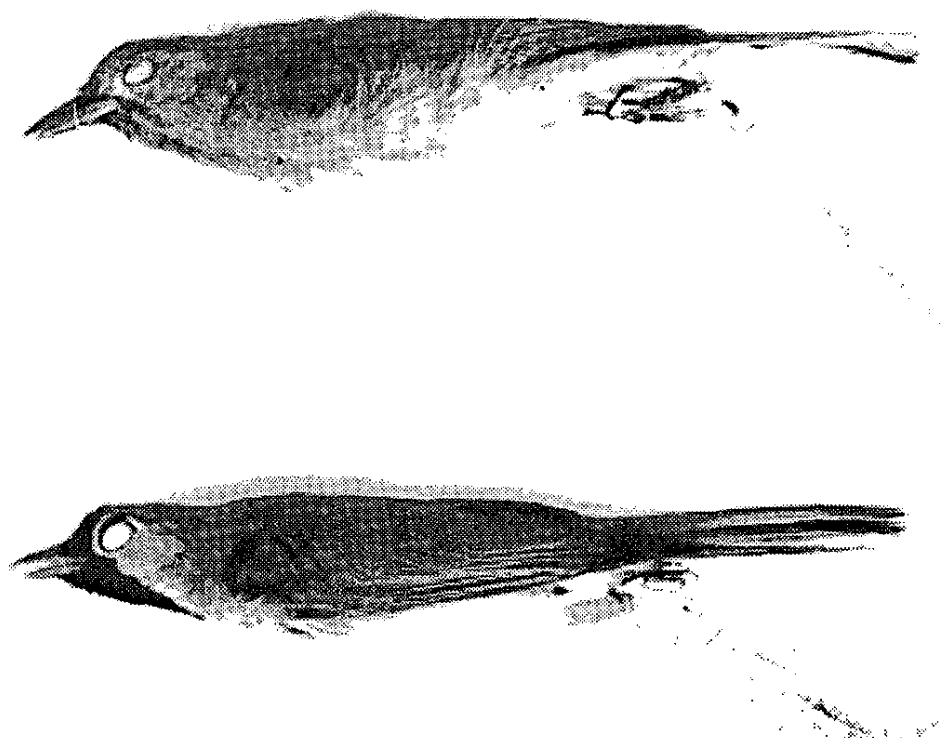


FIGURE 1 – Top: The immature male Black-faced Monarch from Taranaki (Museum of New Zealand 25151).
Bottom: Adult male from Australia (Museum of Victoria B1638).

TABLE 1 – Measurements (mm) of the Taranaki (25151) and Australian specimens (following methods described in Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Character	Specimen, age & sex			
	25151 imm M	B17927 imm F	B1638 ad M	B1640 ad F
Culmen length	16.2	15.3	15.5	14.8
Wing length	86	85	91	92
Tail length	69.6	62.6	71.3	70.0
Tarsus	19.4	19.4	18.9	18.7
Body mass (g)	26	-	20.9	22.3

female louse of the widespread passerine-louse genus *Brueelia* was collected and identified by Ricardo Palma (pers. comm.). It is also held in the Museum's collection.

Black-faced Monarchs are a common breeding insectivorous bird in coastal Southeast Australian forests (Blakers *et al.* 1984, Boles 1988, Pizzey & Knight 1997). the species undergoes an annual post-breeding northwards migration to Queensland and New Guinea in February-April. It seems likely that the New Zealand specimen was blown over the Tasman Sea during its northward migration. Ricardo Palma (pers. comm.) had several reports of Blue Moon butterflies (*Hypolimnas bolina nerina*) in New Zealand between 17 April and 23 May 1996. These sightings were concentrated in the first two weeks of this period and suggest that most of the butterflies and probably the bird were blown across the Tasman Sea at the same time, arriving about 17 April. A similar arrival of Australian butterflies in New Zealand occurred the previous April after a period of easterly airflow across the Tasman (Early *et al.* 1995). Despite its long flight, the bird was relatively heavy (see Table 1) and had obvious subcutaneous fat. Its stomach contained only some tiny chitinous fragments.

Black-faced Monarchs are in the family Dicruridae, which includes various flycatcher species (Christidis & Boles 1994). Only two species of this family have previously been recorded in New Zealand: the common, breeding Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) and the Satin Flycatcher (*Myiagra cyanoleuca*), which breeds in eastern Australia, migrates northwards for the winter and is a rare vagrant to New Zealand (Heather & Robertson 1996).

Species in the genus *Monarcha* are distributed from eastern Indonesia through New Guinea and Australia, into Micronesia and the Solomon Islands, with seven closely related genera on Pacific islands considered to be derived from a *Monarcha*-like ancestor (Boles 1988). the occurrence of a vagrant *Monarcha* in New Zealand demonstrates that the ancestors of species that evolved on Pacific islands were probably also capable of surviving long oceanic flights leading to colonisation. Such dispersal has led to considerable radiation amongst the group in the Pacific as far east as the Marquesas and as far north as the Hawaiian Islands (Olson 1980).

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