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Weka: pp 110-113.

North Island Weka *Gallirallus australis greyi* (Buller 1888), Endemic
1835 Bay of Islands

Yate (1835) described this Weka: "Pukunui – A bird so called from the largeness and rotundity of its breast, about the size of the crow, and remarkable for the deep red with which the feathers are tinged upon the back and under the wings. Its legs are about five inches long, and rather slender for the size of the body. Its beak is like that of the fieldfare; and the eye of a light-brown colour, with a ring of white round it. These birds are never found in the woods; but on the sides of brooks, and in barren land, amongst the stunted fern.

By the natives' account, they seek for their food by turning over the pebbles or small pieces of dried marl, under which they discover worms, which are their favourite food. The female lays four eggs, spotted with brown upon a light-brown ground; and makes her nest in the shrub called Kahikatoa (*Leptospermum scoparium*). They are here well sheltered from the wind and rain, on account of the thickness of the foliage and the strength of the plant".

Buller (1888) wrote about the circumstances of renaming the North Island Weka: "In my former edition, I treated the North-Island Woodhen (as every one else had done before) as the *Ocydromus earli* of Mr. G.R. Gray's 'List' of 1862, and under that name I both described and figured it.

Dr. Finsch was the first naturalist to raise any question about it; for in a communication to the Otago Institute, in June 1874, he said:— 'Dr. Buller, in his great work, unfortunately does not mention the typical specimen of *O. earli*, Gray, and not having compared it myself, I am unable to make out whether the true *earli* is indeed the bright cinnamon-red bird as Captain Hutton and I believe, or whether it is the same as *O. australis* figured under the name of *earli* by Dr. Buller'.

In 1878 I published a revision of the group, in which I adhered to the nomenclature I had adopted, and added a fourth species (*O. brachypterus*) to the list.

In the autumn of 1885 I had an opportunity of examining at Auckland a large collection of birds brought by Mr. Reischek from the South Island. Among the most interesting of these was a species of Woodhen, closely resembling the North-Island bird, but distinguishable by its more cinnamon-coloured plumage and its brighter legs and feet. Of this Woodhen, Mr. Reischek had obtained five specimens, two of which (male and female) I was fortunate enough to secure.

On coming to England I hunted up the type of Mr. G.R. Gray's *Ocydromus earli* at the British Museum, and then discovered to my surprise that this was identical with the new bird brought by Reischek from the South Island, which must therefore stand as *Ocydromus earli*. This specimen was brought from New Zealand by Mr. Percy Earl, in 1845, but there is no locality assigned to it in the British-Museum register; and its general similarity in plumage to the present species has led to a very natural mistake.

It thus follows that the common Woodhen of the North Island is still without a distinctive name. I find, on looking over the old type-collection of birds in the British Museum, that Sir George Grey, K.C.B., was one of the earliest and most liberal contributors of specimens from New Zealand. I have therefore decided to distinguish this form as *Ocydromus greyi*. In thus dedicating the species to that veteran statesman and scientist,

I feel sure that I shall have the approval of my ornithological brethren, both in this country and abroad. I do this the more readily because I have been compelled to destroy the only other connecting-link of the kind by expunging *Stringops greyi* from our list of species” (Buller 1888).

Western Weka *Gallirallus australis australis* (Sparman 1786), Endemic
March 1773 Dusky Sound, Fiordland

The woodhen was discovered at Dusky Sound on Cook’s second voyage (Cook 1777). Lysaght (1959) dates the painting by G. Forster to March 1773. Cook described them as “Water or Wood Hens...very tame...foolish...dirty black or brown...knock them down with a stick...eat very well in a pye or fricasee”. There are morphological differences between Fiordland birds and the birds found in Westland and the northern South Island.

Buff Weka *Gallirallus australis hectori* (Hutton 1874), Endemic
1874 Canterbury

Percy Earl bought a live specimen to England in 1844. Hutton described it from an Eglinton Valley specimen in 1874. It had died out on the mainland by the 1920s, but luckily it had been introduced to the Chathams in 1905, where it thrives. It may just be a colour phase of *G. a. australis*.

Stewart Island Weka *Gallirallus australis scotti* (Ogilvie-Grant 1905), Endemic
January 1888 Stewart Island

It was recorded in 1850 by Captain Stokes of the *Acheron* but not described until 1905. Reischek (1888) also noted this weka as being different when he visited in January 1888.

“A small species of weka, not yet described, was caught peeping out between the rocks. Its plumage is rust-red; each feather has a blackish-brown streak in the centre; wings rust-red with black bars; throat yellowish-grey; breast rust-red; abdomen slaty-grey; bill and feet pink, the ridge of the former brown; eyes chestnut-brown” (Reischek 1888).

Guthrie-Smith described the call as being very different from the North Island Weka.