

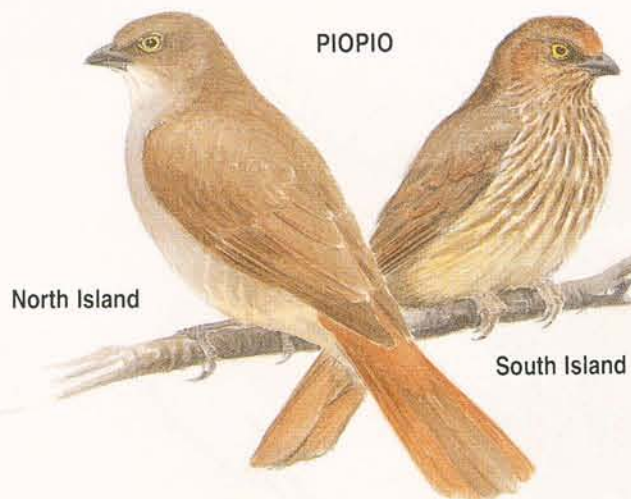
Passerines are the largest group of birds. They are small to medium sized land birds found worldwide, except on Antarctica. All species have four toes, three pointing forward and one back, well-adapted for perching. Most species are song-birds, with complex musical calls, but there are exceptions (e.g. crows). They show great diversity of form, behaviour and breeding biology.

New Zealand, like many other isolated island groups, has a long history of bird extinction. About 32 species died out in the 800 years between the arrival of Polynesians and the arrival of Europeans, most notably all the moa species. In the 200 years since European contact, 9 further species have become extinct, 5 of which have probably died out since 1900. The main factors that contributed to extinction were loss of habitat, introduced mammalian predators and overharvesting.

HUIA *Heteralocha acutirostris*

Extinct endemic

♂ 45 cm, ♀ 48 cm. Glossy black with bluish iridescence, last 3 cm of long tail white; rounded orange wattles at base of ivory-white bill with greyish base: *male had stout straight 60 mm bill, female had slender curved 105 mm bill*; legs bluish grey. Immature had duller plumage, white tip of tail tinged reddish buff, wattles small and pale. Call a soft clear whistle; also a whistling note of higher pitch. **Habitat:** Native forest of southern North I since 1840. Last accepted record 1907. [Sp 323]



WATTLEBIRDS

Callaeidae

3 species, all endemic to New Zealand.

The origin of the wattlebirds and their relationship with other perching birds are obscure and ancient. They have colourful fleshy wattles at the gape, short, rounded

wings, limited flight and prefer to progress with leaps and bounds on strong legs. The tail is long and drooping. The bill size and shape is highly variable within the group, but all feed on forest invertebrates and fruits. Their calls are loud and varied.

323. HUIA *Heteralocha acutirostris*

Plate 74

Size: Males 45 cm (bill 60 mm), females 48 cm (bill 104 mm)

Distribution: Extinct; formerly North Island only. Subfossil and midden remains have been found from North Cape to Wellington. Huia were recorded after European settlement only from forests from the Raukumara Range and the Turakina River south to the Wairarapa and the Rimutaka Range, near Wellington. The last accepted record was of three birds seen by W.W. Smith in 1907, but quite credible reports were made up to c. 1920.

Likely causes of extinction: A long period of Polynesian settlement, during which the birds' range shrank markedly, followed by extensive destruction of prime habitat of lowland forest after European settlement, especially in the Manawatu, the southern Hawke's Bay and the Wairarapa. Introduced predators, especially ship rats, cats and

mustelids, probably killed many birds. The final demise of Huia may have been brought by the collection of many specimens for museum skins; e.g. 646 skins were collected from the southern Hawke's Bay in a month in 1888.

Breeding: Little is known. The nest was a large structure of sticks and twigs with finer material lining the cup. The clutch was 2-4 (45 x 30 mm) eggs, greyish with brown and purplish markings.

Behaviour: Huia were almost always in pairs, readily attracted and easily caught or shot. They travelled on the ground or in the canopy in long leaps and bounds, flying only short distances on their rounded wings. Their alarm call was a shrill whistle, which was easily imitated, bringing them to investigate.

Feeding: Huia were one of the few birds in the world whose sexes differed in bill shape.

The male had a short, chiselling bill and concentrated on the outer surfaces of wood; it had a special ability to insert its bill into rotting wood and then force it open to split the wood. The female probed its long, decurved bill deeply so as to retrieve insects

unobtainable to the male. They were seen to take huhu grubs and weta, and took other insects, spiders and berries.

Reading: Medway, D.G. 1968. *Notornis* 15: 177-192. Phillipps, W.J. 1963. *The Book of the Huia*. Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs.