

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.
Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.
Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.
Saddleback: pp 269-270.



SADDLEBACK

Family Callaeidae

Species *Philesturnus carunculatus*

Common names Saddleback, Tieke

Status Endemic

Abundance Rare

Size 250 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Blackbird 250 mm)

Habitat A bird of both old and secondary type forest.

New Zealand range Found on Hen Island and thirteen islands off the North Island, and on Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua. Found on 12 islands off the South Island and on Ulva Island, Stewart Island. In Queen Charlotte Sound, it is found on Motuara Island and Pickersgill Island.

Discussion Saddlebacks have been successfully bred in captivity and so their future now looks secure as long as their haunts remain predator-free.

Subspecies The North Island and South Island species of Saddleback represent two distinct subspecies. The North Island Saddleback (*P. c. rufusater*) is

characterised by having a faint yellow band across the top of its chestnut coloured saddle. The South Island Saddleback (*P. c. carunculatus*) lacks this and is distinctive in that its immature birds lacks the chestnut coloured saddle in the juvenile phase. The absence of the saddle on the juvenile South Island bird initially had this bird classified as a separate species known as the “Jack Bird”.

Description

Upperparts and underparts Glossy black all over. **Wing coverts and back** Chestnut, with a thin buff line above on the North Island subspecies, which is absent on the South Island bird. **Wing primaries** Black. **Rump** Chestnut. **Tail** Black, with undertail chestnut. **Bill** Black with orange-red wattles at the gape and below.

Conspicuous features

- The chestnut saddle on mature birds of both subspecies and on the North Island juvenile only.
- Orange-red wattles below gape.
- Buff line above saddle on the North Island bird.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Often seen on or near ground.
- Birds are territorial and will even challenge human intruders with song.
- Often seen running up branches.
- Generally very active and noisy among the vegetation.

Call Song, delivered by both birds, sometimes in duet, is a loud staccato “whuu huhuhu hook”, in one chattering phrase, or variations of this. Notes are usually rhythmic and uttered in a see-sawing fashion. Separate localities often have their own dialects. Birds sing from day break till dusk all the year.

Nest Is in tree and rock cavities and holes, usually close to the ground, the nest being made of twigs, grasses and leaves and lined with tree-fern hairs. Up to 4 white, brown-blotched eggs are laid.

Where to find – North Island

North Auckland – Little Barrier Island but permit required. P. 289.

North Auckland – Tiri Tiri Matangi Island (this is easiest place to see this bird). P. 292.

Auckland – Motuihe Island (this is an easy place to find it). P. 297.

Bay of Plenty – Mokoia Island in the centre of Lake Rotorua (can be found on tourist trips). P. 324.

Wellington – Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. P. 340.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough – Motuara Island. P. 341