

Weighing in at just 6 grams Titipounamu/Rifleman is New Zealand's smallest bird and one of the few wren species surviving in NZ since the introduction of so many destructive hungry mammals. We are lucky to have a population of them in East Harbour Regional Park and though they are considered to be more comfortable at higher altitudes, they have been attracting attention in the media recently because of a nesting pair discovered in the hills behind Parliament after recent reintroduction to Wellington, via Zealandia ecosanctuary from a population of birds caught in the Rēmutaka forest. They can also sometimes be seen as low at the beech forest behind the Pavilion in Days Bay. Wellington photographer Don Laing captured this image in the park earlier this year.



Titipounamu in the Northern Forest—Don Laing

Titipounamu don't appear in great numbers in many of our bird counts probably because of their extremely high pitch call, making them very difficult to hear, especially as we get older and our capacity to discern higher pitch noises dissipates. So if you wish to hear or spot them it's recommended to ask for the company of a young person to join you in your search. It's important to sit still and quiet for up to five minutes, listen intently and watch the canopy for tiny movements, a great test in patience and attention span so perhaps it can be considered a form of forest bathing? If you wish to know what they sound like before you go or even when you're in the forest you can look up the link: <https://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/rifleman#bird-sounds>

They are a very rewarding bird to watch as they dart around and walk upside down, up the underside of branches with what seems to be some sort of spiderman super power, looking for small insects as they move. Such tiny, busy birds need to feed constantly to survive as they carry no fat reserves despite their feathered marshmallow appearance. As with many birds the females are slightly larger than the males.

They nest in small cavities, making them susceptible to introduced mammals that share the same spaces. This year a nest has been found on the Otago peninsula in a possum trap that has had to be secured without disturbance to the nest, something that proved a stressful task for the trap operator.

Would you be interested in a guided tour into the forest? MIRO would like to take a "forest foray" trip on a Sunday afternoon in March if there are enough people interested (15 max.), please contact Secretary@miri.org.nz to register your interest. Steep hill climbing will of course be unavoidable so a good level of fitness will be required.

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