

ENDEMIC SPECIES FEATURE

TITIPOUNAMU

the rifleman

Acanthisitta chloris

The Brook Waimārama Sanctuary is blessed with the presence of New Zealand's smallest bird, the tiny titipounamu or rifleman (*Acanthisitta chloris*).

Titipounamu have many claims to fame: With a weight of merely 6 grams and only 8 centimetres long it is our smallest bird. Chicks are smaller than a bumblebee when they hatch!

The other remarkable natural history fact is that titipounamu is one of only two surviving species of the ancient New Zealand wren (*Acanthisittidae*) family (the other is the rock wren). There are at least three extinct species, the most well-known are Lyall's wren and the bushwren, the latter only became extinct less than 50 years ago. The term New Zealand wrens is somewhat misleading as they are not related at all to the wrens of the old world. As so often happened with the naming of flora and fauna in New Zealand by Pākehā, they were called so due to similarities in appearance and behaviour of an English or European species, in this case to the true wrens (*Troglodytidae*).

It is thought that titipounamu evolved with the separation of New Zealand from Antarctica 82–85 million years ago. In comparison, the well-known suborder of songbirds (*Passeri*) with its 6,500 identified species that spread all around the world evolved only 20–30 million years ago. One could hence say (albeit somewhat crudely) that titipounamu is to songbirds what tuatara is to reptiles!

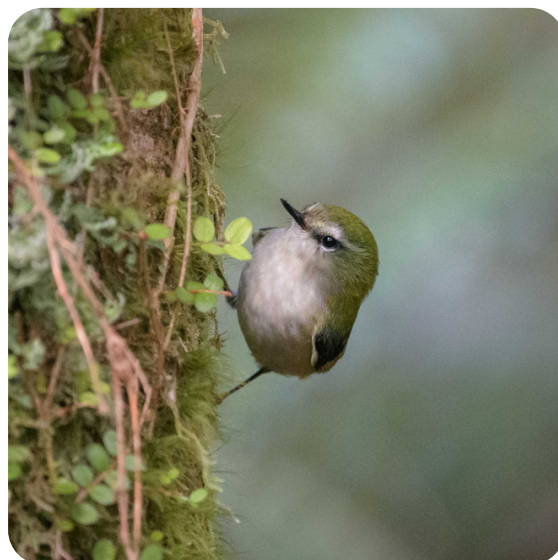
Most other sanctuaries have had to or are trying to reintroduce titipounamu. Due to the higher altitude where pests are less prevalent and the good quality mature forest habitat providing plenty of nest holes, titipounamu survived here at the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary. Now that the Sanctuary is free of pests titipounamu numbers are expected to increase dramatically over time and hopefully visitors can enjoy their high-pitched "zipt zipt zipt" calls soon in the lower parts of the Sanctuary - if one can hear them that is, as their 7–10 kilohertz frequency call is so high pitched that it is out of hearing range for some people!

Written by:

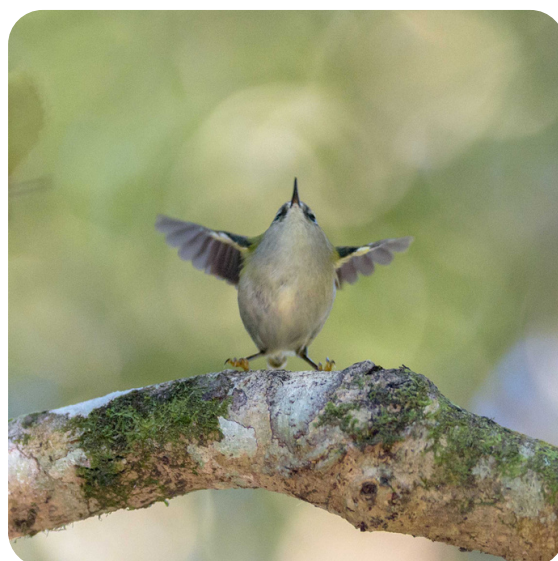
Robert Schadewinkel, Ecologist



titipounamu, rifleman (male) Photo credit: Rebecca Bowater



titipounamu, rifleman Photo credit: Leon Berard



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