

## ENDEMIC SPECIES FEATURE

### PĪPIPI

#### Brown creeper

#### *Mohoua novaeseelandiae*

In the last species profile, Robert wrote about long-tailed cuckoos. This month we'll look at their primary host species in the South Island, the brown creeper or pīpipi. Pīpipi are distributed throughout the South and Stewart Islands. They are the smallest and most abundant of the three species of the endemic genus *Mohoua*. The other two species are the mohua (or yellowhead), also of the South and Stewart Islands, and the whitehead of the North Island.

There have been occasional sightings of pīpipi within the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary, though it should be noted they are easily overlooked. Their brown, grey and light buff plumage is not showy, though the colours are sharply demarcated. Males, females and juveniles are similar in appearance. In autumn and winter, pīpipi frequently travel in mixed flocks with silvereyes, grey warblers, fantails and, where present, kākāriki and mohua. One is more likely to hear pīpipi than see them. They chatter to one another as they flit through the canopy. In addition to contact calls, they have a song which, to my ears at least, sounds like someone whistling while doing cartwheels.

Pīpipi feed on invertebrates and occasionally fruit, typically foraging anywhere from a height of 2m to the upper canopy. They seldom feed on the ground. Breeding season extends from September to January.

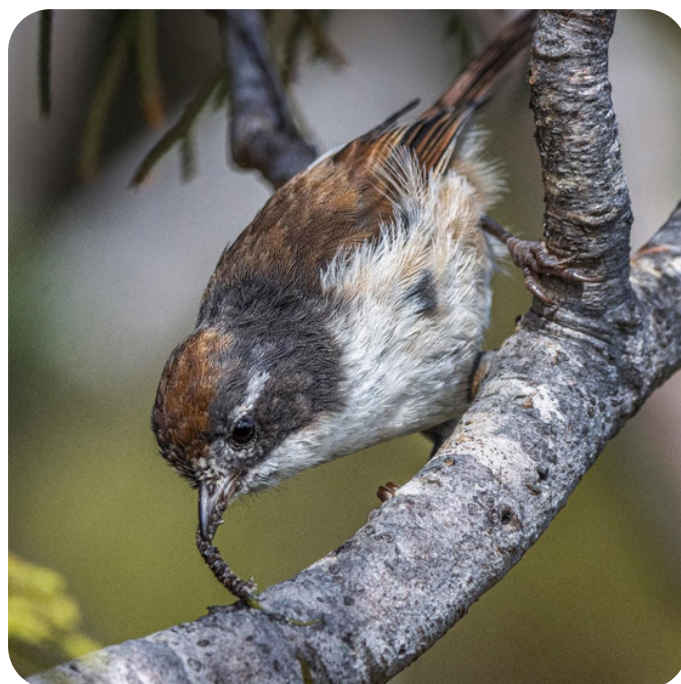
Pīpipi are monogamous and loyal, usually only acquiring a new mate in the event one dies. Females build small, deep nests, often high in the canopy, in which they lay 2-4 eggs. The female alone does the incubation and brooding, but both parents feed the young. Chicks fledge at 18-22 days and are fully independent at 35 to 65 days of age. As the female re-nests, her mate takes care of the fledglings, sometimes with assistance from non-breeding birds. Pairs may make four nesting attempts per season, however usually only two broods are successful. If hit by drought, unsuccessful pairs sometimes engage in cooperative breeding, bringing food to the nests of others.

Evidently, pīpipi were abundant during the 19th century with flocks often seen alongside tīeke during winter. Their numbers declined due to forest clearance, especially on the eastern side of the South Island. Currently their numbers appear to be stable.

Katherine Chamberlain, Bird Count Coordinator



Juvenile brown creeper



All featured pīpipi photos are by: [Oscar Thomas](#).