

THE FIRST RECORD OF A WHITE-WINGED TRILLER IN NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

The occurrence of a White-winged Triller (*Lalage sueurii*) at Macandrew Bay, Otago Peninsula, in February 1969, is documented, being the first record of this species for New Zealand.

The first sighting of a bird, subsequently identified as a White-winged Triller (*Lalage sueurii* (Vieillot, 1818)), was in a suburban garden at 27 Howard Street, Macandrew Bay, Otago Peninsula. The local gardens contain pockets of native bush with many planted shrubs and trees on a north-facing slope 50 feet above the Otago Harbour. On 26 February 1969 at 5.45 p.m. I heard an unknown song in my garden. It was a distinct rather liquid song, descending and with a similar pattern to the first part of a Chaffinch's song. The bird was traced to a willow tree 30 yards from the house where it was moving about on the outer foliage, and was visible for about ten minutes.

My description recorded at the time reads:

Black cap above bill straight back under eye. Black nape, wings and tail. Wings had distinct thick white bar. Bill thin and horny black. Legs black. Grey rump. Slim agile bird. Generally quiet — sang only twice. Large wings and quick wing beats. Smaller than a Bellbird, approx. 8 inches (200mm).

The bird moved quickly and fluidly with movements similar to a Bellbird hopping among foliage.

Next morning the same song was heard and later I saw an unfamiliar bird briefly silhouetted in flight. The bird sang again next morning in the same willow tree. Neighbours saw it at 10.30 a.m. that day and it was singing again at 5.20 p.m. The neighbour, Mrs F. A. de Hamel, agreed with my description which was checked against that in Cayley's *What bird is that?* (pp. 72-73, pl. XI, fig. 2A, as *L. tricolor*).

On 1 March Dr R. F. Smith (Otago Regional Representative, OSNZ) saw it at 6.30 a.m. in the willow tree and obtained a good view of the bird. The bird's song was also tape recorded.

By this time it was obvious that the bird, which we were now quite sure was a White-winged Triller, has a strict timetable. Almost without exception it sang at about 6.30 a.m. in our willow tree, and at about 10.30 it fed in the Hoheria trees on the de Hamel's section where it also frequently visited between 5 p.m. and 5.30 p.m.

On 5 March I had my best view of the bird. I watched it for ten minutes at ten feet away in a *Pittosporum* feeding quietly.



FIGURE 1 — White-winged Triller, profile, Macandrew Bay, Otago Peninsula, March 1969. Photo: R. F. Gledhill.



FIGURE 2 — White-winged Triller, back view, Macandrew Bay, Otago Peninsula, March 1969. Photo: R. F. Gledhill.

Its plumage was in perfect order, the black showing iridescent highlights at certain angles. The Triller showed deft manoeuvring in the outer branches. The bird adhered to its habits until early April when it decreased the frequency of its visits eventually to nil.

The next (and last) recorded observation of this bird was made on 21 June by Mrs de Hamel who watched it for a short period in a Kowhai tree. This return visit was surprising as the sighting was made less than a week after Dunedin's heaviest snowfall for 30 years followed by unusually hard frosts, hardly conditions suited to a migratory Australian bird.

A good account of the White-winged Triller has been given by Serventy & Whittell (1951: 280-281) and some fine illustrations and a distribution map can be found in *Birds of the World*, vol. 6, part 7; see also Mayr (1940) and Mayr & Ripley (1941).

Postscript by Jill Hamel:

Several other Australian stragglers were present in Otago at about this time. At Lake Hayes a Dusky Moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*) and an unidentified gallinule appeared in late 1968 and remained all summer. On another pond near Lake Hayes an Australian Dabchick (*Podiceps novaehollandiae*) had taken up residence much earlier in the year (March 1968) and remained for about 18 months. At Taieri Lake (near Waipiata) ten Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) and a snipe (probably *Gallinago hardwicki*) were seen in early February 1969.

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[Editor's note: This paper substantiates the inclusion of the White-winged Triller (as *Lalage sueurii tricolor* (Swainson, 1825)) in the 1970 OSNZ Annotated Checklist, p. 65.]