

## SHORT NOTE

### A new record of marsh crake (*Porzana pusilla*) from the Waikato

MARTIN R. DAY

9 Conrad Place Cambridge, New Zealand.  
*mday@wave.co.nz*

BETTY H. SEDDON

11 Grey Street Cambridge, New Zealand.

The marsh crake (*Porzana pusilla*) inhabits the 3 main islands of New Zealand (Heather & Robertson 1996) and while it is sparsely distributed throughout, it is not considered rare. Distribution maps for the species (Bull *et al.* 1985; Heather & Robertson 1996) do not record marsh crake in the Waikato. Whether this indicates small numbers, difficulty in observing a secretive species, a lack of observers, or a combination of these factors is not known. We know of only 1 published record of marsh crake in the Waikato area since the 1970s, a bird found dead at the Whangamarino River bridge on 1 Feb 1989 (Nieuwland 1991). However 1 was seen and photographed by a New Zealand Department of Conservation officer (A. Bauke, pers. comm.) at Lake Ngaroto in June of either 1987 or 1988.

In June 2000, we surveyed Lake Ngaroto, the largest of the Waikato peat lakes, about 5 km northwest of Te Awamutu. On 27 June 2000 at about 1400 h, a small rat-sized animal scuttled from under the boardwalk bordering the lake and disappeared into the predominantly willow (*Salix* spp.) scrub. When we returned c.15 min later it was observed again and identified as a marsh crake (*Porzana pusilla*), on the basis of the bird's small size, and the contrast between the brown upper surface streaked with black and white and the black and white barring under the tail. A 2nd bird was also seen, but whether the birds were a pair was not determined. On the following day, 28 June, the birds were ob-

served by several OSNZ members, who confirmed our initial identification. Also on 28 June, 2 spotless crakes (*Porzana tabuensis*), which had not been seen the previous day, were also noted. On 30 June, MRD saw single birds of both species feeding about 1 m from each other, with no apparent interaction. Marsh crake will answer taped calls of spotless crake during the breeding season, and would appear to be quite territorial at this time (Kaufmann 1987). Further monitoring on 3 August 2000 by MRD gave the following numbers of birds spread over c.1 km of the lakeshore surveyed: marsh crake, 6 birds in 3 groups of 2; spotless crake, 4 birds in 2 groups of 2. As would appear normal for crakes, all birds seen so far have been under shelter, either willow scrub or the boardwalk. Although there are a few anecdotal records of sightings of marsh crake in the Waikato, this appears to be the first verified sighting of live birds.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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