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SHORT NOTE

New Zealand pigeons (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) feeding on *Korthalsella* plants

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On 29 May 2010, I observed a New Zealand pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) feeding in *Erica lusitanica* in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery (45° 51′ S, 170° 31′ E). I could not see any other plant in the tree, so I thought the pigeon was eating *Erica* foliage, though it seemed an odd choice of food. On 21 May 2011, I again saw a pigeon feeding in an *Erica* in the cemetery. Whereas I observed the first pigeon from below in poor light, I was looking at this one from the side, and the *Erica* was in sunlight. I was able to see that the pigeon was eating not the *Erica* but small mistletoes, *Korthalsella salicornioides*. On 13 May 2012, I was again able to watch a pigeon eating *K. salicornioides* plants in an *Erica* in the cemetery. I have also seen a pigeon eating the other *Korthalsella* species native to Dunedin, *K. lindsayi*. This was in a mapou (*Myrsine australis*) on 29 July 2000 in the Dunedin Botanic Garden.

Because of their small size and shape, *Korthalsella* plants are difficult to distinguish from their hosts in all but the best viewing conditions. My experience with the *Erica* has led me to reconsider some previous pigeon feeding observations. I have reported pigeons eating leaves of kanuka (*Kunzea ericoides*) and mapou (Baker 1992, 1999, 2001). Both are unusual pigeon foods and both species are *Korthalsella* host plants (Allen 1994). Possibly those pigeons also were feeding on mistletoes.

I am not aware of any other records of New Zealand pigeons eating *Korthalsella* plants. One of the reviewers suggested that the pigeons could be dispersing these native mistletoes. That would be possible if a pigeon ate a fruiting plant. I did not see any fruit on the plants, but as the fruit of *K. salicornioides* is only 1.5 mm long (Eagle 2006), it would be difficult to detect. Anyone investigating this question would need to look very closely.

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