

SHORT NOTE

North Island Piopio – a possible 1930s record

My brother, Ian Olsen, now lives at Piha but in the early 1930s he and a companion spent all their spare time in the Ruahine Range in the area west of Norsewood and Takapau, covering the watersheds of the Mangatewaiiti, Mangatewainui, Manawatu and Makeretu rivers; also the headwaters of the Pohangina, Oroua and Tukituki. Ian shares a family interest in birdlife and has always been a keen and competent observer.

In 1992, shortly after he had been visiting the Museum of New Zealand, I received a letter from him which reads, in part, as follows:

“I was interested in the extinct native birds . . . of special interest to me were the Native Thrushes, and to see them confirmed (to me) that the bird Braby [Arthur Brabazon] and I saw up the Mangatewainui in about 1933 was indeed a Native Thrush (*Turnagra capensis tanagra*).

“It was in the area which carried through behind the ‘Elephant’s Head’ to the Grant (Makeretu) River, where we have seen Riflemen and parakeets, and it seemed to be the best area in the Ruahines for birds, being bush that to this day has not been burnt.

“The bird was in a wineberry tree (*Aristotelia serrata*) by the river, and the first thing that attracted our attention was its song, which included very clear bell notes. We were very close to it and watched and listened to it for some time, and I thought at the time it was a (Native) Thrush.

“Seeing the ones in the museum brought it all back to me. Perhaps Braby and I were the last people ever to see and hear this bird. Sad thought!”

At that time, the Makaretu River was commonly called the Grant River, and the ‘Elephant’s Head’ was a local name for a prominent foothill (998 m) immediately north of the source of the Manawatu River. The area in question is a low-lying basin formed by the headwaters of the Mangatewainui coming in from the south and the south branch of the Makaretu coming in from the north. The watershed between these two is a very low saddle. The basin comprises a fairly extensive area of bush with, among others, some fine specimens of red beech (*Nothofagus fusca*). A secondary range separates this basin from the headwaters of the Pohangina further to the west. The centre of the basin is at 40° 01’ 15”S and 176° 06’ 30”E.

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