

Distribution and Habitats of Spotless Crakes in Canterbury

Spotless Crakes (*Porzana tabuensis*) are common in many parts of the North Island (e.g. Hadden 1970, Ogle & Cheyne 1981, Moore *et al.* 1984, Kaufmann & Lavers 1987) but are rarely reported in the South Island. Hadden (1993) drew attention to the rarity of Spotless Crakes in Canterbury; he also speculated about the preferred habitat of Spotless Crakes, suggesting that an overstorey of willows (*Salix* spp.) may be a critical habitat requirement.

Between 1978 and 1982, the New Zealand Wildlife Service (now incorporated into the Department of Conservation) surveyed all wetlands in Canterbury. Tape recordings of Spotless Crakes were used to detect them in each swamp as this has proved successful elsewhere (e.g. Ogle & Cheyne 1981). In some areas much time was put into the survey. For example, 35 person-days were spent surveying the Ashburton Lakes wetlands in January 1979 and tapes were used many times each day. Even greater efforts were made at Lakes Ellesmere in 1980 and 1981. Some of the results of this survey have been published (O'Donnell & Moore 1983, Robertson *et al.* 1983, Robertson *et al.* 1984, O'Donnell 1985) but much remains unpublished. In this note I collate records of Spotless Crake for Canterbury and describe the habitats in which they were found.

I know of records of 23 Spotless Crakes from ten localities in Canterbury since 1967 (Table 1). In addition there are two specimens in the Canterbury Museum, one from Alford Forest in 1893 (AV4608) and one from Chaney's, Christchurch (AV10218, undated). All the records are on, or close to, the coast except those from St Anne's Lagoon, Lake Pearson, Alford Forest and Lake Alexandrina. At Lake Ellesmere, Spotless Crakes were recorded only at Kaituna Lagoon and near the Halswell rivermouth. They were very rare there although Marsh Crakes (*P. pusilla*), which are far more difficult to detect, appeared to be more common (Tunncliffe 1973, O'Donnell 1985). Spotless Crakes are clearly very rare in Canterbury.

Of the 20 birds where habitat was recorded, 11 were found in pure stands of raupo (*Typha orientalis*) on the edge of ponds. Three were found in pure *Scirpus pungens* reedbeds and only three were in mixed associations of raupo, *Carex secta*, *Juncus canadensis* and willows. Habitat details for the remaining four birds were not recorded.

This information suggests that willows are not critical for Spotless Crakes as suggested by Hadden (1993). They may require a tall overstorey of vegetation (Kaufmann 1987, Kaufmann & Lavers 1987) but this type of habitat may also be provided by raupo dominated reedbeds. Clearly, more information is needed on Crake habitats in Canterbury. However, it appears that Spotless Crakes inhabit vegetation types similar to Marsh Crakes, which are common in raupo reedbeds (Tunncliffe 1973, O'Donnell 1985).

It appears that Spotless Crakes are replaced as the dominant rail in swamps by Marsh Crakes in the South Island. In many places both seem

TABLE 1 – Distribution and habitats of Spotless Crakes in Canterbury (Locations are listed north to south)

Location	Number of birds	Date	Habitat	Source
St Anne's Lagoon	1	1982	Raupo	NZWS files *
St Anne's Lagoon	1	Oct, 1992	Willow, raupo, <i>Carex</i>	Hadden (1993)
Unnamed swamp (Grid ref 4597-4509)	1	Feb, 1992	Raupo, <i>Juncus canadensis</i>	NZWS files
Amberley Beach Wetland	2	Sept, 1980	Raupo	NZWS files
Leithfield Beach Lagoon	6	Sept, 1980	Raupo	NZWS files
Woodend Lagoon	1	1980	Willow, <i>Carex secta</i>	NZWS files
Lake Ellesmere	2	Jan, 1976	<i>Scirpus pungens</i>	O'Donnell (1985)
Lake Ellesmere	1	Sept, 1980	Raupo	O'Donnell (1985)
Lake Ellesmere	1	Nov, 1981	Raupo	O'Donnell (1985)
Lake Ellesmere	1	Nov, 1981	<i>Scirpus pungens</i>	O'Donnell (1985)
Lake Pearson	?	Oct, 1974	?	Bull <i>et al.</i> (1985)
Wainono Lagoon	1	1970	?	Pierce (1980)
Pareora River	1	Oct, 1967	small stream	Pierce, CSN (1972)
Lake Alexandrina	?	Jan, 1979	?	Bull <i>et al.</i> (1985)
Pareora River	2	June, 1968	small stream	Pierce, CSN (1972)

* New Zealand Wildlife Service files

to use similar habitats and may compete directly in some localities (Kaufmann & Lavers 1987). Perhaps Marsh Crakes are more tolerant of the colder climate; they are common in high altitude wetlands (e.g. Ahuriri River catchment, Robertson *et al.* 1983; Ashburton Lakes, Pearson Lakes, C. O'Donnell unpubl.), but Spotless Crakes are mainly found in warmer coastal localities. Marsh Crakes may simply tolerate a wider range of habitats including high altitude wetlands, damp agricultural land and saltmarshes (e.g. Robertson *et al.* 1983, Elliott 1989). There may not be enough suitable habitat for Spotless Crakes in Canterbury. Raupo beds, while widely distributed, are not nearly as common as they are in many central North Island areas.

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Birds and mammals of Solander (Hautere) Island

Visits to the Solander Is are rare, thus during our survey of the Fiordland Crested Penguin *Eudyptes pachyrhynchus* on and around Solander I. from 21-23 August, 1983, we kept notes about all bird and mammal species seen and present a summary here (for details of the penguin survey, see Studholme *et al.* 1994).

Bird species seen either on the island or immediately offshore are listed in Table 1. Seven Red-crowned Parakeets (*Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*) were positively identified, some individuals being independently identified by two observers, and no Yellow-crowned Parakeets (*C. auriceps*) were seen. Large numbers of Buller's Mollymawk (*Diomedea bulleri*) nests were scattered across the cliffs; the chicks were fully feathered and were close to fledging. No seabirds were heard flying over at night other than species also seen during the day.