

SHORT NOTE

New Zealand pipit (pīhoihoi, *Anthus novaeseelandiae*) preying on a gecko

DALLAS M. BISHOP*
GEOFFREY W. DE LISLE
244 Blue Mountains Road, RD 1, Upper Hutt 5371

On 16 Apr 2024, we departed Te Pākeka / Maud Island, Pelorus Sound (41.025 S 173.890 E) at about 0900 hours on the Department of Conservation (DOC) boat, with the ranger and family, and motored out along the northern coastline of the peninsula that extends to Harter Point. As we idled close to a spotted shag (kawau tikitiki, *Phalacrocorax punctatus*) nesting colony midway along the northern face, we observed a single New Zealand pipit (pīhoihoi, *Anthus novaeseelandiae*) with a gecko in its beak on the coastal rocks below the colony (Fig. 1). The pipit was bashing the gecko against the rocks, suggesting that the lizard was caught alive. The bird walked over the rocks, carrying the gecko, before disappearing from sight. A series of four photos were taken (G. de Lisle & D. Bishop, <http://ebird.org/atlasnz/checklist/S168992350>).

This was only the second pipit observed during our stay on the island (21 Mar–16 Apr 2024). Bird counts recording 34 species had been carried out over a wide area of the island. The only other pipit recorded was at the historic gun emplacement at the northern tip of the island on 28 Mar 2024 (G. de Lisle & D. Bishop, <http://ebird.org/atlasnz/checklist/S166210309>).

The New Zealand pipit's diet consists of a wide variety of invertebrates and seeds; however, there are previous accounts of lizards in the diet. Higgins *et al.* (2006) reported a food item identified as 'lizard', based on a February 1998 record from Mt Cargill (Otago) by Audrey Eagle (O'Donnell 2001). An earlier observation of 'lizards' being eaten by pipits was made on Kapiti Island (Wilkinson & Wilkinson 1952: 109). In April 2009 on Takapourewa / Stephens Island, a pipit was observed bashing a dead tail-less Raukawa gecko (*Woodworthia maculata*, formerly *Hoplodactylus maculatus*) on the ground (Powlesland & Moran 2010).

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*Correspondence: miromiro@xtra.co.nz



Fig 1. New Zealand pipit with a Raukawa gecko in its beak, Home Bay, Te Pākeka, 16 Apr 2024.

There are three gecko species recorded for Te Pākeka: Raukawa gecko, forest gecko (*Mokopirirakau granulatus*), and southern striped gecko (*Toropuku stephensi*). The uniform brown ventral surface of the gecko (Fig. 1) identifies it as a Raukawa gecko (N. Fisenzidis *pers. comm.*). Further support for this identification is provided by the short toes, general build, and relative tail length. The other two species have longer toes, a more elongated build, and a relatively longer tail (R. Hitchmough *pers. comm.*). The distribution of this gecko includes the northern South Island and many offshore islands (van Winkel *et al.* 2018). Although nocturnal, they are described as “cryptic sun-

baskers” that stay close to vegetation for cover (van Winkel *et al.* 2018). The Raukawa gecko was the most common gecko encountered on Te Pākeka while checking artificial covers for speckled skinks (*Oligosoma infrapunctatum*) (22 & 23 Mar 2024) and checking and re-baiting biosecurity traps (09–14 Apr 2024).

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