

MYCOPHAGY BY NORTH ISLAND ROBIN

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Two recent articles by Simpson (1998, 2000) consider available information on the little-known but important subject of mycophagy by birds in Australia and overseas. The following observation of mycophagous behaviour by an uncommon New Zealand endemic passerine is a further contribution to current knowledge in that regard.

On 25 April 1996, a North Island robin *Petroica australis longipes* was observed feeding on rotting basidiomata of the agaricoid fungus *Armillaria limonea* (G. Stev.) Boesew. (Family Tricholomataceae) in the South Waitaanga Conservation Area in eastern Taranaki in the North Island of New Zealand. The basidiomata in question had dropped on to a forest track from a rotting tree-trunk which had fallen across it. The robin was observed and photographed as it repeatedly fed on the ground among the fallen basidiomata.

Simpson (1998) noted that decomposing fungi of all kinds commonly contain large populations of larvae and adult invertebrates. Initially, it was thought the robin at Waitaanga was taking insects or other invertebrates off the surface of the rotting basidiomata. However, closer observation revealed that it was actually taking small pieces of the fruiting body itself, an action which is shown clearly enough in the accompanying photograph (Plate 1).

A search of the New Zealand ornithological literature has not revealed any records of fungi among items eaten by the North Island robin. Heather & Robertson (2000) note that its food is mainly invertebrates, supplemented with small fruits in summer and autumn. Ralph

Powlesland, of the New Zealand Department of Conservation, cannot recall seeing North Island robins feed on fungi at any time during his intensive studies of that bird in the forests at Pureora in the central North Island (pers. comm. 4/10/2000). This, therefore, would appear to be the first recorded observation of mycophagy by the North Island robin. It is of some interest to note that the North Island robin belongs to the same Family *Eopsaltriidae*, the Australasian robins, as the eastern yellow robin *Eopsaltria australis* which Simpson (2000) recorded has been seen feeding on freshly-dug sporocarps of a species of *Gymnomyces* Masee & Rodway, a hypogeous fungus.

Acknowledgements

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References

- Heather, B.D. & Robertson, H.A. (2000). *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*, revised edition. Viking, Auckland.
- Simpson, J.A. (1998). Why don't more birds eat more fungi? *Australasian Mycological Newsletter* **17**, 67–68.
- Simpson, J.A. (2000). More on mycophagous birds. *Australasian Mycologist* **19**, 49–51.



Plate 1. North Island Robin feeding on a rotting basidiomata of *Armillaria limonea*, South Waitaanga Conservation Area, 25 April 1996. Photo: D. Medway.