

GETTING CLOSER

by Paul Sorrell



Last summer, there were lots of baby birds at Ōrokonui Ecosanctuary. All of them looked cute, but the cutest were the tomtits (kōmiromiro). They were tiny, with big dark eyes and fluffy feathers.

The young birds were very curious. They had just left the nest and wanted to explore the world around them. Unlike their parents, they weren't scared of humans. That was good news for me as a photographer. I knew they would come over to check me out. When they did, I'd be able to get the close-up shots I wanted.

I found a good spot just off one of the tracks, and I went there many times over the summer. As a result, I came away with lots of photos of the beautiful little creatures.

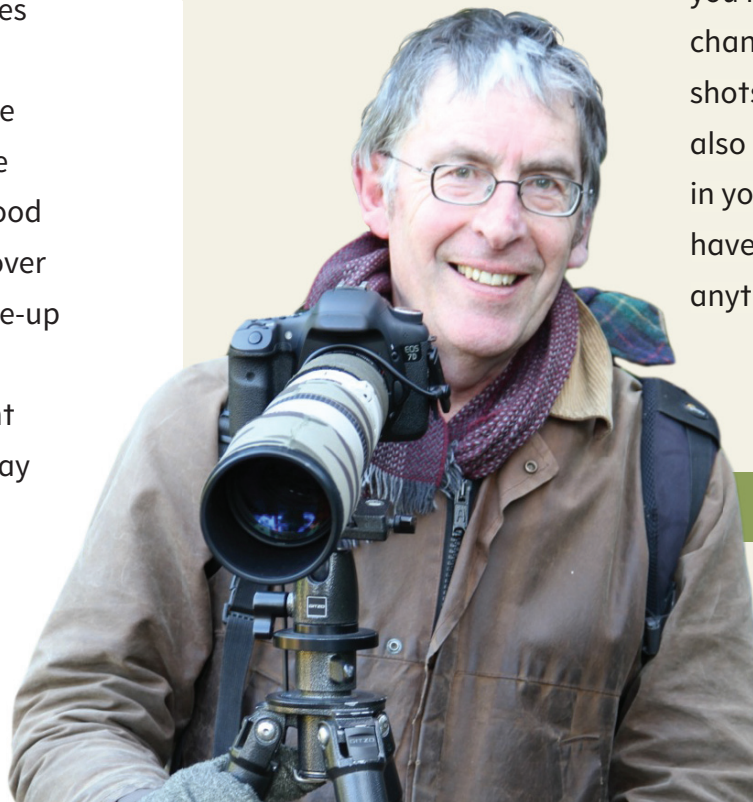


Fieldcraft

There are secrets to getting good photographs of wild birds. You can't just go outside with your camera and hope you'll be lucky. To get good shots, you need some fieldcraft skills – those skills that get you close to birds and animals in the outdoors. First, you have to find out where the birds are and what they are doing. That depends on the time of year. In the autumn, they might be feeding on berries. In the spring, they might be looking for mates.

Once you've found the bird you want to photograph, you've got to go back to the same spot many times. That way, you get to know the bird's habits and behaviour. The more

you know about the bird, the better chance you have of getting good shots of it. Wildlife photographers also need patience. Once you're in your spot with a camera, you may have to wait a very long time before anything interesting happens!



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Last summer, I spent a lot of time under one tree – a makomako, or wineberry tree. The tree was growing at the edge of the bush, so the light was good for taking photos. I noticed that the young tomtits would hop around on the same branches. One branch in particular was very popular. The end was broken off, and the tomtits would walk along it until they couldn't go any further. Then they'd look at the broken end as if they were wondering what had happened to their perch. In the few seconds that they were still, I was able to snap their portraits!



Camera

Lens

Tripod

Tricks of the trade

My camera has a long lens. This lets me get closer shots of the birds. I also use a tripod to keep the camera steady.

Wildlife photographers have a few other tricks up their sleeve too. At home, you can put out a feeder filled with nuts or sugar water to attract the birds. In the bush, you need a different approach because you want photos of the birds behaving naturally.

I usually carry a small digital recorder that has bird songs on it. When I play one of these songs, birds often appear. They want to see the bird that's making all the noise! I also have a bird caller made from wood and brass that attracts all kinds of bush birds.

You can make your own bird "squeaker" by rubbing cork or polystyrene on wet glass. An easy way to do this is to fill a small glass bottle with water and put a cork in it. Take it with you when you go into the bush or to a local park.



Digital recorder



Bird caller

Tomtits

Tomtits are found in forest and scrub all over New Zealand. The most common are North Island tomtits (miromiro) and South Island tomtits (ngirungiru). Some other kinds can be found on a few offshore islands.

The male and female birds are different colours. Male miromiro are black and white, while male ngirungiru have beautiful yellow and orange chests. Females of both types are mainly brown and white, but female ngirungiru can have some light yellow colouring.

Tomtits feed mainly on insects. They sit on low branches, watching the ground for prey. Often they fly around a circuit in the bush, returning to the same spot every fifteen minutes or so. If you know where a hunting tomtit is going to land, you can be waiting there with your camera!



A male ngirungiru

Ōrokonui Ecosanctuary

Ōrokonui Ecosanctuary near Dunedin is a place where native birds and animals can live free from attack by rats, cats, stoats, and other predators. The **sanctuary** includes a river valley and 307 hectares of forest.

It's a good place to see bush and scrubland birds such as brown creepers (pīpīpi), robins (toutouwai), and fernbirds (mātātā). You can also see a few **species** that mostly survive on a few islands or in **remote** areas on the mainland. These include kākā – New Zealand's forest parrot – and the tokoeka or Haast kiwi.

The sanctuary is also home to three special reptiles – the tuatara, the Otago skink (mokomoko), and the mottled green jewelled gecko (moko kākāriki).

Ōrokonui Ecosanctuary has a special fence that keeps the predators out. Because of the danger from predators, the people who work at the sanctuary spend a lot of time checking the fence line. They also set hundreds of traps. This helps to keep the birds and animals on the inside safe so that their numbers can grow. Perhaps one day we'll be able to see these endangered species living throughout Aotearoa again.

Glossary

remote: out of the way; hard to get to

sanctuary: a place where something or someone can be safe

species: a group of animals or plants of the same kind

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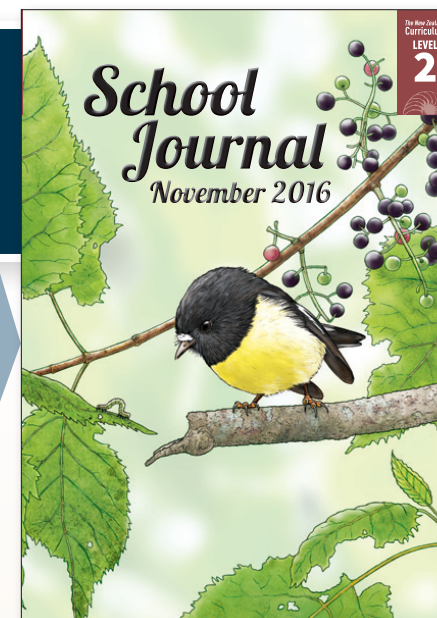
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