

Campbell Island snipe (*Coenocorypha* undescribed sp.) recovery following rat eradication

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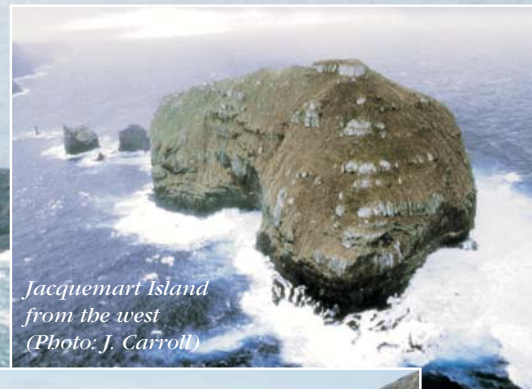
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Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku (11 268 ha) has long been recognised as having a depauperate landbird fauna compared with other subantarctic island groups in the Pacific region. The reasons for this have only recently been identified. It is now clear that Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) colonised the main island well before the first naturalists arrived in 1840, and were the single reason for local or global extinctions of up to seven species of landbirds or waterfowl. Three of these taxa (a teal, a snipe and a pipit) survived on rat-free offshore islets. Rats were eradicated from Campbell Island by the New Zealand Department of Conservation in 2001, and snipe began to recolonise naturally within 2 years. Here, we report on a snipe survey undertaken in the Six Foot Lake catchment in January 2006.

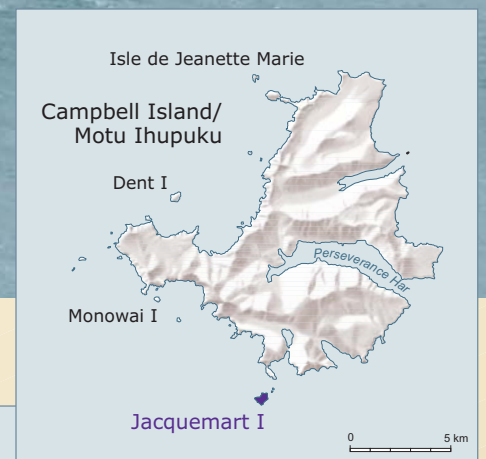
South coast of Campbell Island, looking East to Jacquemart Island.
(Photo: R. Peacock)



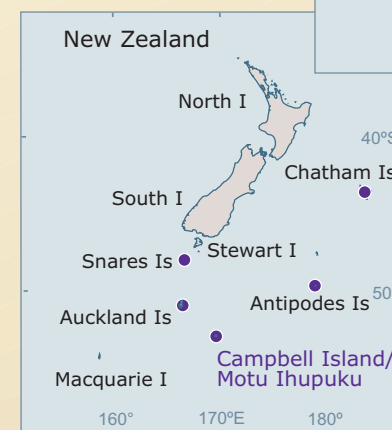
Jacquemart Island from the west
(Photo: J. Carroll)



Six Foot Lake viewed from the north. Snipe were found in the right foreground, and at the outlet to the lake in the distance.



Campbell Island and outlying islands.



Island groups supporting snipe populations (●).



Campbell Island snipe chick about 8 days old. (Photo: J. Fraser)

What is the Campbell Island snipe?

Snipe were discovered on Jacquemart Island (19 ha) by a teal survey team in November 1997; one bird was caught. This was only the third recorded landing on sheer-sided Jacquemart Island, which is accessible only by helicopter. There was no previous evidence of snipe occurring in the Campbell Island group. The Campbell Island snipe is physically most similar to both Auckland Island snipe (*C. aucklandica aucklandica*) and Antipodes Island snipe (*C. a. meinertzbagenae*), as would be expected from the geographical proximity of the three island groups and their similar geological history, landforms, and vegetation. Genetic samples were collected in January 2006, but their analysis has yet to be completed.

Discovery of snipe on Campbell Island

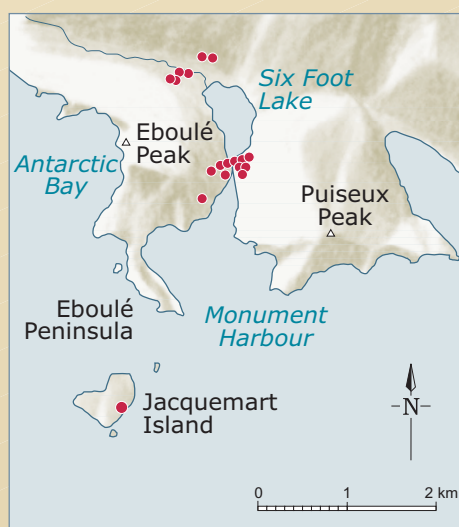
In May 2003, possible snipe footprints were found on Campbell Island near Jacquemart Island by a team searching for rat sign. The presence of snipe at this site was confirmed in March 2005, when two snipe were seen and one (a fully grown chick) was caught.



The only Campbell Island snipe nest ever found.

Findings of the 2006 survey

- We surveyed about 40 ha of Campbell Island during 7–15 January 2006, using a trained bird locator dog as our main search technique.
- Snipe were found at both the head and outlet of Six Foot Lake.
- We captured twelve adult snipe (six ♂♂ and six ♀♀) and five chicks, believed to be from three broods and with estimated ages of 8–37 days old.
- One nest was found.
- All aspects of breeding ecology were consistent with what is known for other *Coenocorypha* snipe.
- We estimated that at least 22 adult snipe were present in the areas surveyed.
- We recommend that snipe be left to recolonise naturally, without supplementary translocation.



Locations where Campbell Island snipe have been caught (●).

Ecological restoration of Campbell Island

The successful eradication of rats from Campbell Island in 2001 was a landmark in the conservation management of subantarctic islands globally. It has allowed pipit, snipe and grey-backed storm petrels to recolonise Campbell Island, and the reintroduction of captive-reared Campbell Island teal to commence. The full extent to which rats impacted on the original avifauna of Campbell Island remains unclear. It is likely that several landbird species died out before naturalists arrived. Investigation of bone deposits may help determine the diversity of the island's prehuman avifauna, facilitating the recreation of an avifauna similar to that which was present before the arrival of rats.



Poison baits were spread by helicopter. (photo: P. Tyree)

Acknowledgements

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Further reading

Barker, D.; Carroll, J.W.A.; Edmonds, H.K.; Fraser, J.R.; Miskelly, C.M. 2005: Discovery of a previously unknown *Coenocorypha* snipe in the Campbell Island group, New Zealand subantarctic. *Notornis* 52: 143–149.
Miskelly, C.M. 2000: Historical records of snipe from Campbell Island, New Zealand. *Notornis* 47: 131–140.