

Australasia, Psittaculidae: Split *Cyanoramphus hochstetteri* (Reischek's Parakeet) from *Cyanoramphus malherbi* (Malherbe's Parakeet)

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Current treatment:

Cyanoramphus hochstetteri (Reischek, 1889) is a proposed split from *Cyanoramphus malherbi* de Souancé, 1857. Current AviList treatment is as follows:

Malherbe's Parakeet	<i>Cyanoramphus malherbi</i> de Souancé, C, 1857	
	<i>Cyanoramphus malherbi malherbi</i> de Souancé, C, 1857	Nothofagus forest of northern South Island (New Zealand)
	<i>Cyanoramphus malherbi hochstetteri</i> (Reischek, A, 1889)	Antipodes Islands

This taxonomic decision was based on the following recommendation put forward by Richard Schodde: "Finally, *hochstetteri* in the Antipodes Islands where it is sympatric with all plain green unicolor Lear. It is red-crowned and resembles *erythrotis*, but was placed in the Orange-crowned *C. malherbi* by H&M, following the Boon et al. (2001) mtDNA analysis using control region and cyt b sequence. The same result was then recovered by the Rawlence et al. (2015) reference given in the first para. above. *C. malherbi* is mixed up in a lineage sorting complex with nominate *novaezelandiae* and *C. auriceps* (Yellow-crowned Kakariki) in New Zealand, Stewart and Auckland Islands, but is recognized as a species by the New Zealanders because of assortative mating. In this situation it seems safest to accept the species *malherbi*, as the New Zealand checklists and H&M do, and include *hochstetteri* in it as a red-crowned subspecies." This treatment follows that in the current Howard & Moore checklist (Dickinson and Remsen 2013, <https://www.aviansystematics.org/checklist>). However, given the considerable doubts about its appropriateness, neither Clements et al. (2025) nor the IOC checklist (including the final version, Gill et al. 2026) have adopted this treatment.

Rationale for proposed change:

As was mentioned late in the AviList voting process, the phylogeny in Smith et al. (2023) does not support a particularly close relationship between *malherbi* and *hochstetteri*. Nor do other types of data support conspecificity, as detailed below.

Morphology: These two taxa are roughly as dissimilar from each other morphologically as are any of the “crowned” *Cyanoramphus* taxa (most of which are now considered species, including by AviList). First, they are quite different in size—Greene 2013 in *New Zealand Birds Online* (NZBO; <https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/reischeks-parakeet>) gives 19–22 cm and 30–52 g for *malherbi*, but 28 cm and 140 g for *hochstetteri*. While accurate length measurements are difficult to obtain, and weight varies depending on several factors, this degree of difference would be extraordinary for two conspecific taxa not connected by other subspecies of intermediate size, even if they were otherwise similar (which they are not; see below). In life, *malherbi* gives the impression of a small, slim bird, while *hochstetteri* is large (larger even than *novaeseelandiae*, but smaller than *unicolor*) and stout.

In coloration, *hochstetteri* closely resembles Red-crowned Parakeet *C. novaeseelandiae*, with its red crown and ear patch, while the yellow-crowned *malherbi*, with its greenish auriculars, is the only *Cyanoramphus* with an orange frontal band and rump patches. There is nothing in their plumage to link the two, other than generic characters. In overall plumage, the green of *hochstetteri* is more yellow-toned, while that of *malherbi* is a colder shade of green.



hochstetteri, [ML629675337](#) *malherbi*, [ML629316260](#)
P. Rasmussen, 13 Dec 2024 P. Rasmussen, 12 Jan 2025

Note also that *malherbi* was long considered a color morph or variant of Yellow-crowned Parakeet *C. auriceps*. In contrast, *hochstetteri* was long considered a subspecies of Red-crowned Parakeet *C. novaeseelandiae*. To my knowledge, the two (*malherbi* and *hochstetteri*) were never considered conspecific with each other prior to the mtDNA results of Boon et al. (2001) and Rawlence et al. (2015).

Ecology: Taxon *malherbi* is a beech forest bird, which has rarely been found in tussock but does sometimes forage on the ground. In contrast, trees are lacking on Antipodes (though there are some megaherbs), and along with the larger *unicolor*, *hochstetteri* habitually forages in the tussock grass and cliffs of the Antipodes. In fact a feasibility study for replacement of the recently extinct Macquarie subspecies *erythrotis* of Red-crowned Parakeet https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/media/q0xh2csi/4-2-3-macquarie-island-parakeets-findings-factsheet_v7.pdf determined that *hochstetteri* would be the best reintroduction candidate to similarly treeless Macquarie, based on its ecology.

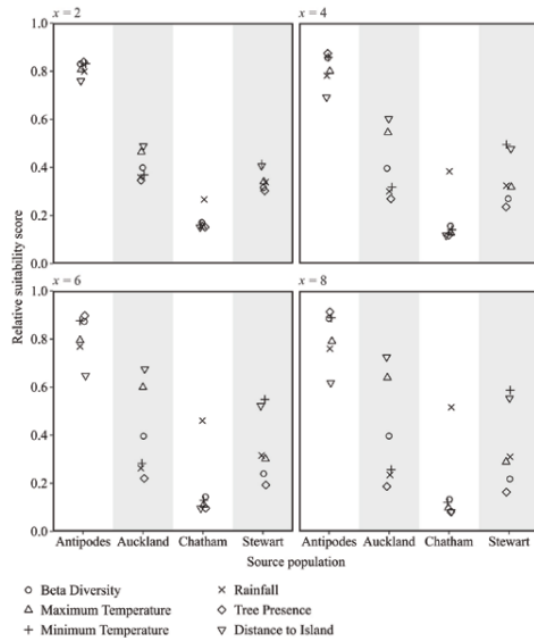


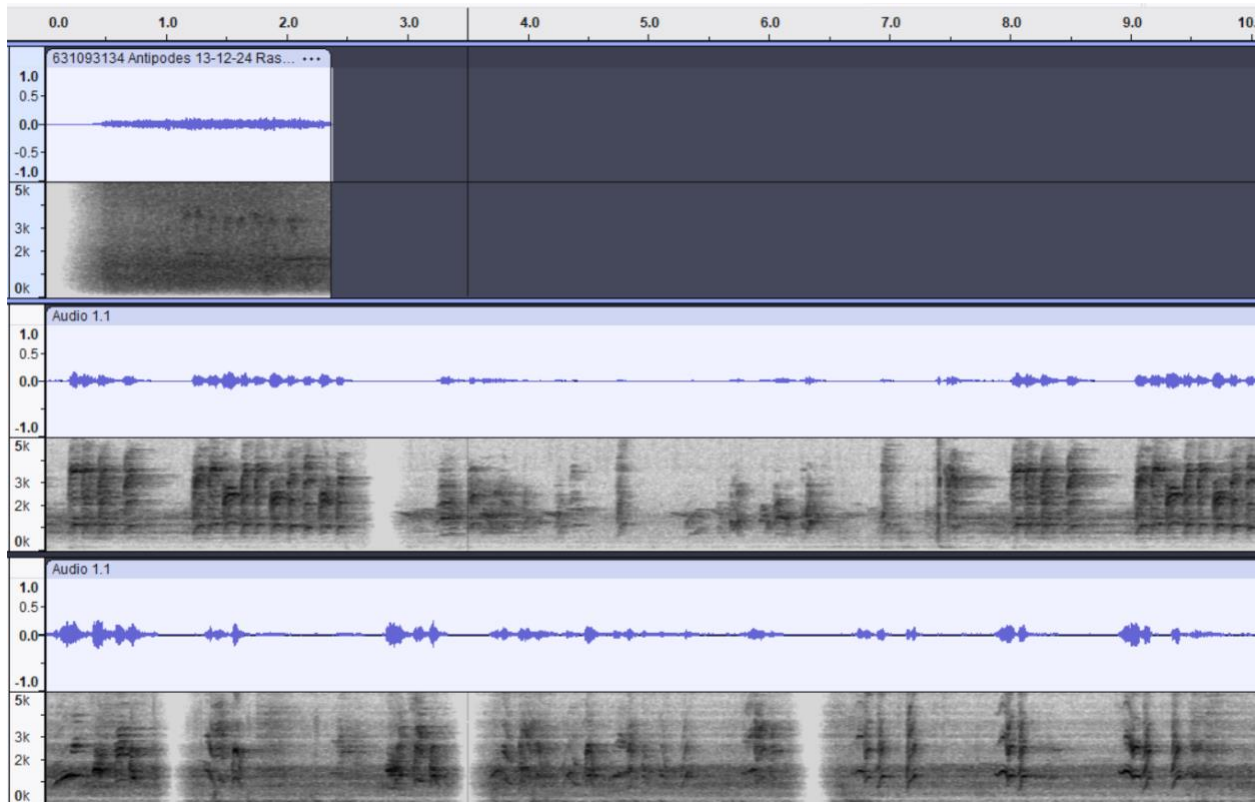
Figure 2. Relative suitability scores of four potential source populations of *Cyanoramphus* species parakeets being considered for a conservation introduction to Macquarie Island. The higher the score, the greater the suitability for translocation between that source and Macquarie Island, relative to other sources. As it is unknown

Biogeography: Taxon *malherbi* is naturally restricted to the mountains of northern South Island (except where translocated), and has declined dramatically and is now very hard to find in the wild there. Fortunately, it has been translocated successfully to Blumine Island in the Marlborough Sounds (while at least three other attempted island translocations have failed), and has recently been translocated to Anchor Island (in Fiordland National Park, off Southland) at least.

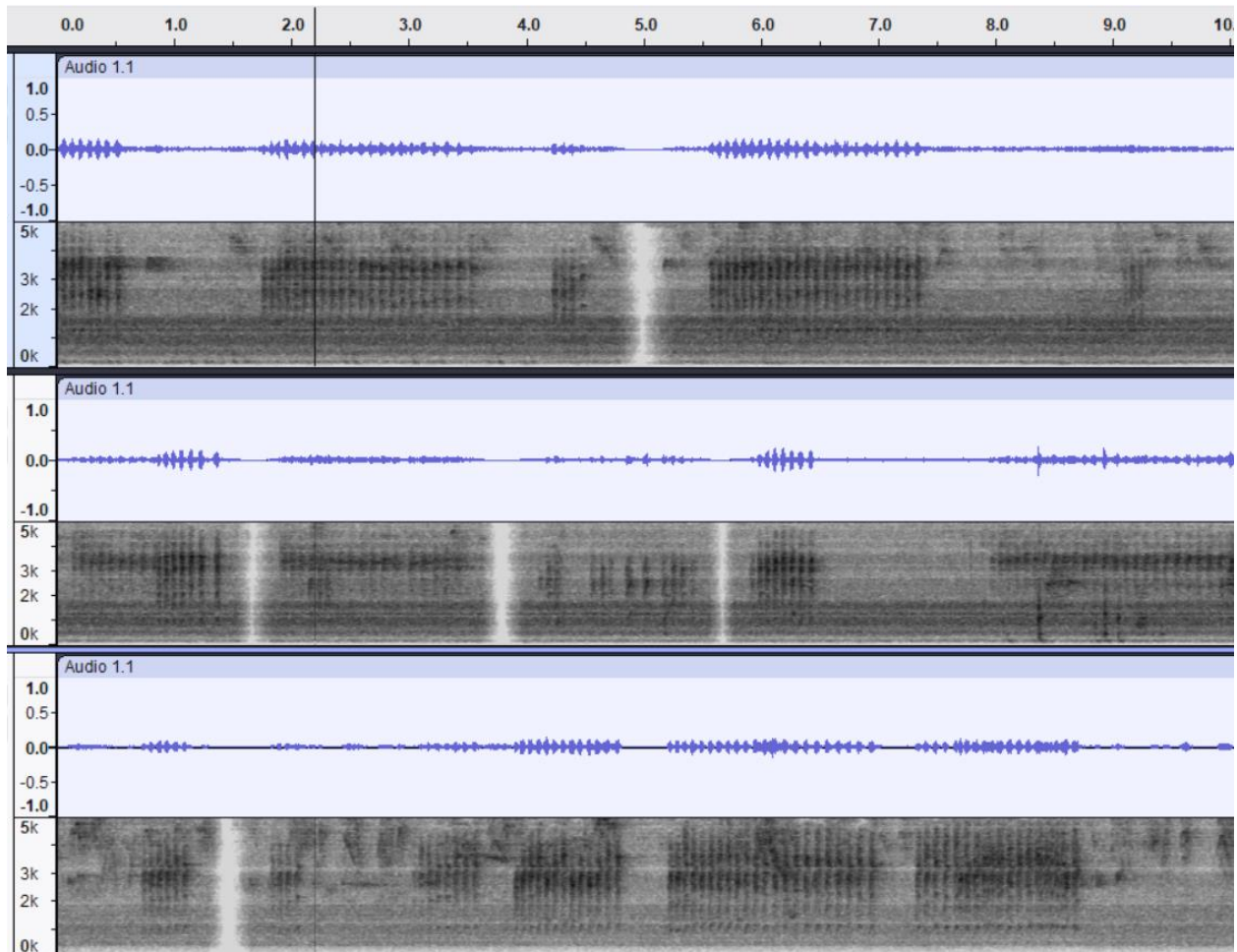
The very distant, isolated, tiny Antipodes group has an impoverished avifauna (<https://ebird.org/barchart?r=L11171613&yr=all&m=>), consisting of seabirds, the two parrots (*unicolor* and *hochstetteri*), and the NZ Pipit, which on the Antipodes clings to

vertical rock faces to forage at the water's edge (!!!). There is no discernible biogeographic link between the Antipodes and the montane beech forest of South Island.

Vocalizations: Between xeno-canto and Macaulay Library, there is just one non-captive recording online of *hochstetteri*, a poor one I made on my iPhone from a running Zodiac (landing is not generally permitted on the Antipodes) with a tour group. There are two captive recordings of *hochstetteri* on NZBO as well:



These are not similar to the chatter typical of *malherbi*, of which there are several examples on ML. I rerecorded those on NZBO, and here are three:



To sum up, *malherbi* and *hochstetteri* differ markedly in morphology, habitat, ecology, and vocalizations, and do not appear to be especially closely genetically (Smith et al. 2023). Their merger also creates an unprecedented biogeographic scenario.

Conclusions: Taxa *malherbi* and *hochstetteri* should be considered separate species. It is possible, however, that further study may support the conspecificity of *hochstetteri* with another taxon, but surely not with *malherbi*.

English names will require consideration by the ENC. It has been noted by an external commenter that Reischek was a “grave robber” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andreas_Reischek), but since Antipodes also hosts Antipodes Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus unicolor*), no alternative non-eponymous names readily suggest themselves.

References

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