



**Title:** “In Full Voice”

**Description:** Fernbird calling, Orokonui Ecosanctuary.

**Photographer:** Paul Sorrell

**Where, when:** Orokonui Ecosanctuary, Otago, November 2015

**Sustainability?** Elusive, and more often heard than seen, mātātā (fernbirds) are found in scrubby (chiefly wetland) habitats throughout New Zealand. Near Dunedin, they can be found on the hills above the city and in the Sinclair Wetlands near Berwick on the Taieri Plain. Here, 2000 hectares of swamplands, with plenty of thick low cover, make an ideal habitat for fernbirds.

Swamplands are generally not appreciated by New Zealanders, perhaps in part because few people have spent time in them observing the diverse creatures and plants that live there, or experiencing the light and textures of areas that are not quite water and not quite land. Conservationists sometimes draw attention to one species that is emblematic of unappreciated habitats – if people aren’t much stirred by the place, maybe they’ll love one of its inhabitants enough to protect its habitat? Fernbirds are the obvious candidate for being the swamp “flagship species” in New Zealand. Certainly, going in to bat for this appealing bird, with its comically splayed stance when perched between reeds or branches, flitting movements and odd stitching vocalisations, is an easier proposition than advocating for a hidden mudfish!

Actually, I photographed this bird at Orokonui Ecosanctuary near Waitati, coastal Otago, where fernbirds were present before a predator-proof fence was wrapped around the reserve. The protection they receive here has enabled them to thrive. Apart from the lack of enemies, the open forest margins and maturing shrublands, combined with an abundance of song perches for territorial defence, are all aiding the species’ spread.

I had seen and heard a fernbird calling from the top of a *Coprosma* bush and was determined to capture the action against a very simple backdrop. I manoeuvred myself so that the background was a distant hillside, rather than a bright sky, and the scene was free of other distracting elements.

Choosing a fast shutter speed (1/1000 second), I took multiple shots so that some at least would show the bird with its beak wide open, pouring out its staccato song.

**Photo notes:** *Camera:* Canon EOS 7D. *Lens:* EF400mm f/5.6L USM. *Settings:* 400mm f/5.6 1/1000 sec ISO 800.

**Digital specs:** 5184 × 3456 pixels (13.2 MB).

**Key words:** Birds, fernbird, māātātā, *Bowdleria punctata*, bird song, Orokonui Ecosanctuary, fenced reserve, scrubland, biodiversity, Paul Sorrell, Aotearoa, New Zealand, sustainability

**Price:** \$200 (incl. GST) for use of the digital image.

Visit [www.ecosystemsphotography/sales](http://www.ecosystemsphotography/sales) for details & to order, and to get a quote if you want a high-quality print.

**Donation:** The price includes a \$100 donation to a sustainability organisation or project of your choice, or otherwise for *Orokonui Ecosanctuary*.

I recommend that the donation goes to *Orokonui Ecosanctuary*, “the flagship biodiversity project for the South Island where multiple species of plants and animals are protected from predators.” (Orokonui website)

**Image Ref:** PS#001 (Please refer to this reference in orders and correspondence).

**Paul Sorrell** (paulsorrell.co.nz)

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