



Title: *“Eye of the Hunter”*

Description: South Island tomtit hunting, Orokonui Ecosanctuary.

Photographer: Paul Sorrell

Where, when: Orokonui Ecosanctuary, Otago, May 2018

Sustainability? Like fernbirds, tomtits have long been present in the area where Orokonui Ecosanctuary now sits, and have benefitted greatly from the escape from predation provided by the reserve. Modelling of predation rates on tomtits and robins predicts that they can just hold their own against the ravages of rats, stoats and moreporks if egg and chick losses can be reduced by 70% to 80%. This suggests that a very effective predator-control campaign would be required every four to five years to trigger positive population growth. The Department of Conservation often uses poisons (usually 1080) to achieve this protection in remote areas, but this is very expensive and poses other environmental risks, as well as sparking community opposition from some quarters. Trapping demands much continuous effort and usually lots of willing volunteers.

There are also a growing number of fenced reserves like Orokonui where rats, stoats and feral house cats can be excluded. Such fenced reserves are expensive to set up and maintain, but produce spectacular results for many species, including tomtits. We are lucky indeed to have one such predator-proof fenced reserve near Dunedin – the Orokonui Ecosanctuary – where visitors can see and hear the birds, insects and lizards that once were abundant everywhere. Reserves like Orokonui play an important role in education and conservation advocacy, obviating the problem of “sinking baselines” where we begin to accept the depleted ecosystems around us as “normal” rather than damaged. Orokonui is our local “lest we forget” project.

Capturing considered, intimate portraits of a bird is never easy. In 2018, my “photo buddy” Neale and I located “Bung-eye” (he was blinded in his right eye) in a small clearing which was part of his territory and followed him and his mate around for several months, as often as we could visit. As tomtits follow a predictable hunting round, often alighting on the same perches, we could predict the pair’s movements and get some satisfying shots. In this image, Bung-eye is perched on a cabbage tree or tī kōuka, resting on the skirt of dead leaves that help protect the tree from harsh weather.

Bung-eye's dramatic demise is described in my book *Getting Closer: Rediscovering Nature through Bird Photography* (Exisle Publishing, 2021).

Photo notes: *Camera:* Canon EOS 7D. *Lens:* EF400mm f/5.6L USM. *Settings:* 400mm f/6.3 1/100 sec ISO 640.

Digital specs: 5184 × 3456 pixels (11.5 MB).

Key words: Birds, forest birds, New Zealand tomtit, South Island tomtit, tomtit, ngirungiru, *Petroica macrocephala*, Orokonui Ecosanctuary, fenced reserve, forest ecology, feeding behaviour, biodiversity, Paul Sorrell, Aotearoa, New Zealand, sustainability

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

Visit 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)

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Paul Sorrell (paulsorrell.co.nz)
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