



White-throated Needletail
Hirundapus caudacutus
Auckland War Memorial Museum
Left wing, shown at actual size

Specimen found by R. D. Meredith, 30 November 1942
27 miles south of *Te Awamutu*, Waipa Ecological District
Waikato Ecological Region, North Island, New Zealand



am_media-v-448297.jpg
Digital image file, 8688 × 5792 pixels, 8 Bits/Channel
Colour profile sRGB IEC61966-2.1
Shown at full pixel dimensions, 300 dpi

Photograph taken by J. Carol, 11 August 2016, 16:25:39
Canon EOS 5DS camera, EF100mm f/2.8L Macro IS USM lens
1/125 second exposure, f/14, ISO 100

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Rare bird economics

What are the signifiers of meaning in graphic design? Some are obvious: choices of colours, symbols, typefaces, images, formats, materials. When designers make such choices they appeal to a consensus of received interpretations of their significance. Green signals natural, ecological, virtuous. A stock photograph of an emaciated polar bear invokes narratives of climate crisis. A certain kind of sans-serif typeface appears European, contemporary, ironic. Such connotations are assumed at many levels, from the culturally-specific to the global and generic.

So much for the obvious. What about the abstract and the invisible: the raw ingredients of an ink, the speed of a printing press, the price of a digital typeface, the ethics of a collaborator, or the geopolitical location of a data server? Are these meaningful? If so, how and when do such meanings become *legible?* This seminar makes the claim that even an apparently uncomplicated graphic design decision implicates cultural norms, labour, resources, and infrastructure whose communicative significance is potentially neglected, or actively concealed. In this context, we will expand the scope of our graphic design decision-making.

This book represents three White-throated Needletail birds: two preserved in the collections of New Zealand museums, and a third that was the subject of a rare European sighting on the Outer Hebridean island of Harris in June 2013. Printed in New Zealand, 250 copies were transported by air to the United Kingdom, corresponding and coinciding with the annual migration of the White-throated Needletail during the Northern Hemisphere summer. This book is a *teaching object*. The processes that produced it — editorial, technical, material, and distributive, *with graphic design as the practice that unites them* — are explicated within and without.

