

# KUAKA



## Welcome to the newsletter of the South Auckland Branch of Birds NZ

Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa

Issue 56 – **MAY 2024**

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Tena koutou *Kuaka* readers. Last chance to get those night counts in for the Atlas – the project finishes at the end of the month. Thanks to everyone who has responded to our call for counts so far.

The great tui image above was taken by Auckland branch member Geoff Shepherd. As for the cartoon, well, what can I say!

**Our next meeting will be on Tuesday  
11 June at 7.30pm**

If you are able to help with any or all of the censuses in June, please let Sue know. We need to ensure that there are enough people to cover all of the sites, and Sue also needs to distribute some forms and maps to the counters before the census day.



## PROGRAMME FOR 2024

**Monthly Meetings:** held on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Papakura Croquet Club, 1 Chapel Street Papakura. Meetings start at 7:30. Visitors welcome. \$3.00 donation to cover costs please

<b>Jun 11</b>	Monthly meeting	Alex Wilson on the fairy tern captive breeding programme
<b>Jun 23</b>	Manukau Harbour winter wader census and spoonbill survey – details TBA	
<b>Jun 29</b>	Coromandel winter wader census and spoonbill survey – details TBA	
<b>Jun 30</b>	Firth of Thames winter wader census and spoonbill survey – details TBA	
<b>Jul 9</b>	Monthly meeting	Lucy Hawley on the work of Ak Airport wildlife rangers
<b>Aug 13</b>	Monthly meeting	Taneal Gulliver on bellbirds, dabchicks & mallee fowl

## WADER AND SPOONBILL CENSUS

If you are able to help with any or all of these, please let Sue know ASAP (thanks to those who let me know at the meeting). We need to ensure that we have enough people to cover all of the sites, and I also need to distribute some forms and maps to the counters before the census day.

## HOW MANY ROYAL SPOONBILLS ARE THERE IN NZ?

Kōtuku ngutupapa or royal spoonbill is a species that has successfully, naturally colonised NZ from Australia.

They have become a spectacular and enjoyable addition to our estuary birdlife. They are striking large white wading birds which hunt for small fish and aquatic crustaceans and insects by swinging their characteristic long, spoon-shaped bill from side-to-side through the water.

You may think they are more common than they used to be, and you are right. Fifty years ago, there were no more than 50 spoonbills in NZ. Birds NZ has been monitoring their increase here and at the last count, in 2012, there were 2,361!

If you would like to help to find out how many spoonbills live in NZ you are welcome to join one of the teams of counters during June and July to help with the 2024 nationwide census – just let Sue know you are interested.

**SO MANY WAYS TO HELP OUR BIRDS**



NZ Conservation Trust  
Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri

Wildlife New Zealand  
Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri

The Birds New Zealand Research Fund helps fund research on our endemic seabirds to help improve evidence-based conservation and management.

[www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/online/](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/online/)

**JOIN US NOW**

**BIRDS**  
BIRDS NEW ZEALAND  
Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri

## SPEAKER FOR MAY

Sandra Anderson works at the School of Biological Sciences at Auckland Uni where her areas of expertise include bird-plant interactions, invasive species, ecology, paleo-ecology and current ecosystem processes. In 2023 Sandra received the 'Ecology in Action Award' from the NZ Ecological Soc.



At our meeting Sandra gave us a none-to-positive rundown on the effects of weakened pollination and dispersal of seeds of our larger native plants due to loss/reduction of the native avian populations.

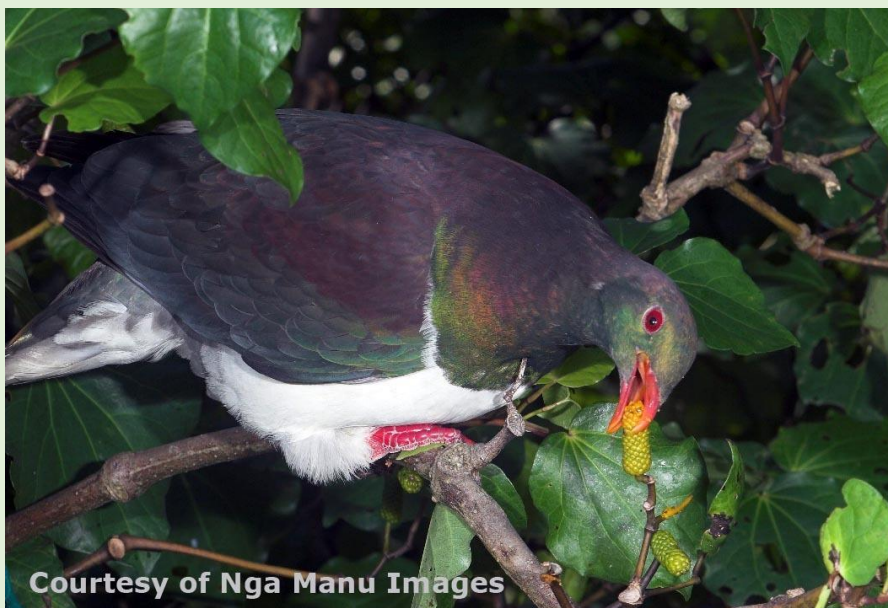
Native manu interacting with the flora in our ecosystems have a mutualistic relationship – that is, they both benefit from the relationship. Birds are the primary pollinators and seed dispersers in the bush and while the bird receives nectar or fruit from the plant it visits, the plant benefits from pollination and/or seed dispersal. Many native trees cannot perform these processes without the intervention of birds. Many of our manu who would have performed these services are either extinct or confined to predator free islands and reserves.

That leaves tūī, korimako and tauhou to perform the majority of pollination by all birds in our native bush. Over 70% of plants in the bush have fleshy fruit and are dependent on birds for successful seed dispersal

and regeneration. Once a seed has passed through the digestive tract of a bird, it will often be dropped far away from the host tree's location, enabling the tree to potentially colonise a new area. As many of our native manu are now confined to small predator-proof mainland sites or offshore islands, what might the future hold for our native flora, which is so dependent on them?

Trees that produce the largest fruit (>14mm diameter) almost solely rely on the kereru for seed dispersal; these include miro, pūriri, tawa and taraire. Within any species, there is variation, and on any given tree, there will be a variety of fruit sizes along with variation in the size and gape of a bird's beak. This factor will allow the smaller tūī and korimako to disperse some of the seeds from these trees. Whilst starlings, and others, may do an adequate job of pollination, they do not spread seed, especially large seeds like karaka.

Sandra's research has demonstrated that honeybees are not doing an adequate job when it comes to cross-pollination of native trees, often staying on one bunch of flowers or one tree. Her work has shown that seedling survival is constantly higher in outcrossed seedlings as compared with self-pollinated. If cross-pollination is happening in a haphazard manner, and the resultant seedlings are not resilient, what does that mean for the future of our native plant survival in the future.



Courtesy of Nga Manu Images

## SIGHTINGS

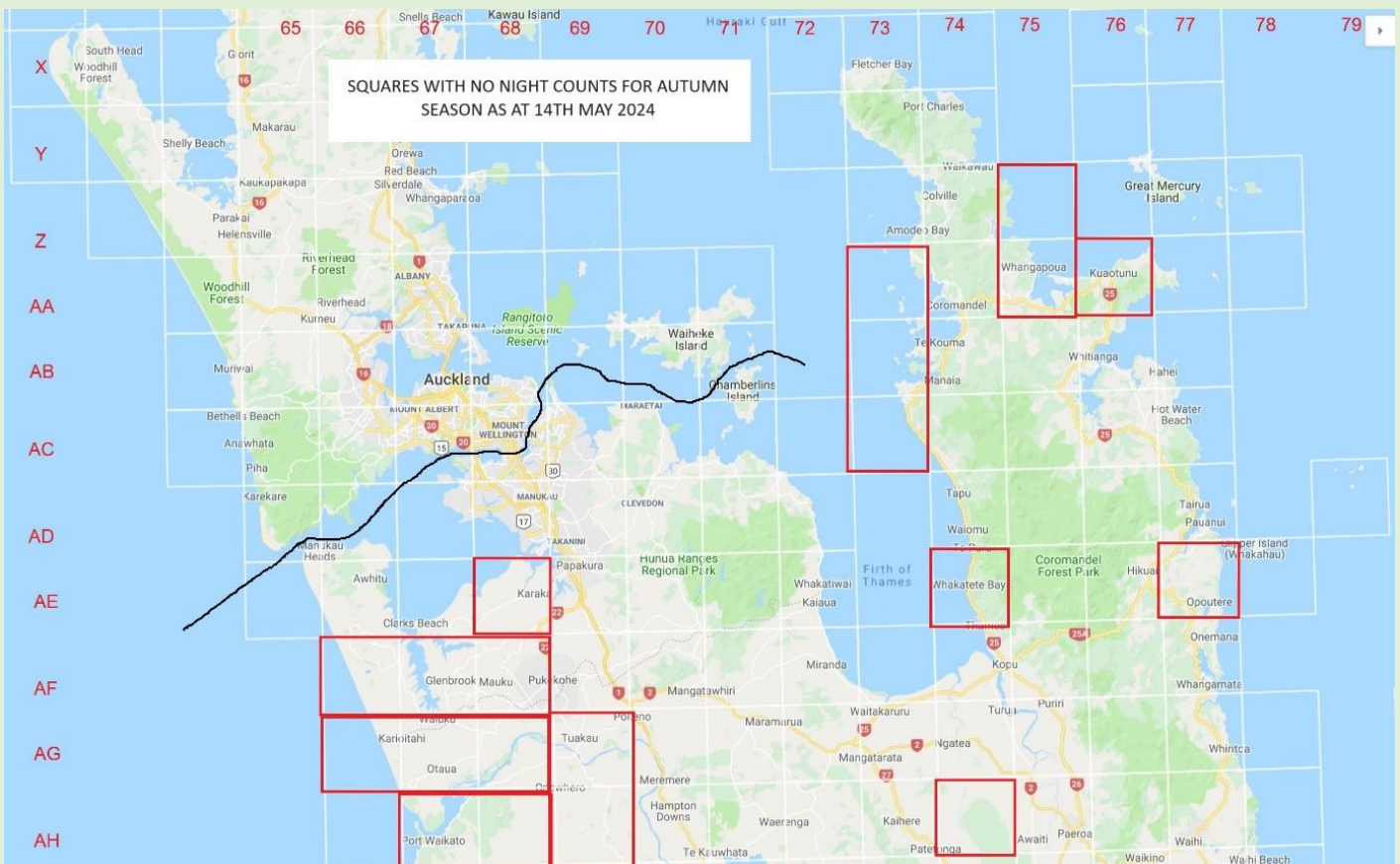
- Kaka have been heard at Kawakawa Bay and three of the manu appear to be resident near Matakawau on the Awhitu Pen.
- 16 taranui/Caspian terns were spotted in one flock on the W coast of the Awhitu Pen. An unusually large flock for the location
- A matuku hurepo/bittern was spotted near the road on the way to Port Waikato
- A tarapuka/blackbilled gull banded at Miranda in 1997 has been resighted – 26 years later
- There is a tuturiwhatu at Omaha that was banded nearly 30 years ago

## NZ BIRD ATLAS PROJECT

We have about two weeks left for the five-year Atlas project but it's not too late to make a contribution! Below is a map showing squares outlined in red that have had no night counts for the autumn season.

Nocturnal *checklists start earlier than 40 minutes before sunrise, or later than 20 minutes after sunset*. If you live in or near any of these squares, take 5-10 minutes to have a listen out for birds, especially ruru/morepork. Even if you see or hear nothing, let me know as that is also useful information. Make a note of the details below and send through to Sue:

- Exact location of sighting, Date, Start Time, duration of count, Species, Number of birds seen/heard





Adrian asks us to keep looking for tuturiwhatu and report the flag details to him

## NOT SO USUAL MANU COLOURING



Brown tui at Muriwai in 2021 (above left - photo: Sheryll Freeth). The brown colour mutation is caused by a qualitative reduction of eumelanin, such that the normally black feathers appear brown, and often become paler with exposure to sunlight.



Leucistic tui at Maeraiti in 2021 (above centre - photo: Mitch de Beer). Leucism is a genetic mutation resulting in a loss of melanin. It differs from albinism which is a partial loss of pigmentation (like can often be seen in blackbirds), whereas albinism is a complete lack of melanin and the manu have red eyes.



Leucistic tui near Ohiwa Beach in March 2024 (above right - photo: Trevor Howie)



Leucistic moho pereru chick on the Coromandel (above – photo: Peter Drury)



Courtesy of Mike Clark

## SUPERB FAIRY WRENS

Whilst walking along a boardwalk in a wildlife refuge in Tasmania recently, I came upon a sign that talked about fairy wren parents teaching 'codes' to their chicks in an attempt to avoid raising cuckoo chicks.



Using several sources the following explanation was found.



A pair of superb-fairy wrens return to their nest with food for their newborn chicks. As they arrive, the chick makes its begging call. It's hard to see in the darkness of the domed nest, but the parents know that something isn't right. Whatever is in their nest, it's not their chick –

It doesn't know the secret password!

The parents abandon the nest, flying off to start a new nest and a new family somewhere else. It was a good call, the chick in the nest was a Horsfield's bronze-cuckoo (similar to a shining cuckoo).

Bird ecologists have shown a wren mother's signature call to her eggs whilst incubating helps to give the newborns a distinctive call for food, and also helping them to bond. The mothers produce a vocal signature element to their embryos that is later produced by their nestlings as a begging call. Nestlings produce calls with greater vocal copy similarity between their mother's signature call and their begging call when mothers called slowly to the embryo.

Each female has a unique password. The cuckoo chicks often try to guess the fairy wren code – but they usually fail.

Perhaps this is a trait that our small native birds could try.

(Sources of text, and images, included: Australian Geographic, Flinders University, and Tamar Wildlife Sanctuary)



Z F photography  
1 May at 04:29 · 🌐

Why Being A Nature Photographer Is The Best Job In The World.

## A STORY FROM THE FRIENDS OF TE WAIROA CATCHMENT FACEBOOK PAGE.

We appreciate it might be upsetting, but we also know, and wish to highlight, how damaging feral cats are to our native species. This story illustrates that.

"This time of year, we typically have anything up to 12 kererū fighting over the Guava berries on the trees behind our house. A few weeks ago, I found some feathers over the back yard. The fights between birds can get quite heated with lots of wing flapping and hilarious to watch – but have not seen any feathers lost – up until now. Found some more clumps of feathers – and feared for the worst, so started night patrols with a spotlight and set a live trap.

I baited the trap with tinned cat food on an ice-cream container lid at the back of the trap and located the trap undercover on our front deck. The trap was tripped one night – and I had attached a salmon skin to a wire hook above the treadle as an extra treat. The lid had been dragged to the back of the cage and the food eaten and the wire that the skin was hanging off had been straightened, so I knew I was dealing with a large and crafty unit.

I placed the cat food back on the lid but placed the trap over the food so it sat under the trip plate and under the weight of the cage. Yesterday we found a significant number of feathers again around the Guava trees – but last night this chap got overconfident.

He was an intact male Tom-cat. His body is over 600mm long (+ tail) and stood over 350mm high at the shoulder.

I am elated to catch him – but devastated at the loss of my kererū, as there are now none feeding on the trees. I am confident we lost at least 3 kererū - possibly more. Feel free to share if you need any evidence on how damaging these animals are to the rural area."

If you are concerned about the safety of your pet cat, we recommend a collar and a microchip to easily identify any pets caught in live traps. Please also fix pet cats, so that they do not contribute to our wild cat populations.



## YOUNGSTERS CAN BE SOOO TIRESOME



Courtesy of Mike Clark

Hope you enjoyed the read. Don't forget to check out our Facebook page

