

KERERU NEWS No. 27 (21 August 2001)

Bits and pieces about kereru, kuku, kukupa and parea.

1. Kereru in Ngaruawahia - John Gumbley

John (TSM, Waikato) reports that for 3 years now a pair of kuku have given his family great pleasure in visiting their garden that adjoins the Hakarimata Range forest, near Ngaruawahia. During the winter the pair spend many days in 2 ribbonwood trees. On 17th June for example they were completely nonplussed by both the noise of a lawnmower under the tree, and a chainsaw that was cutting down 2 adjoining trees. They spent the whole day either eating the leaves of the ribbonwood, preening/cooling, chasing each other in the tree (crashing and flapping to within 1 metre of us at times) or circling in a tight radius (25m x 5-10 times). The ribbonwood is almost defoliated and about 10 m high.

During late summer they feed on kawakawa shrub seed in the garden, moving when you get to within 2 metres of them. January-February we see them doing their diving /swooping act over the garden during the day repeating this many times. We look forward to a possum/rodent control programme that is commencing in September.

2. Kereru eating crab apples - Chris Smuts-Kennedy

A report of a kereru feeding in a crab apple tree for the last 3 days in north Cambridge. The crab apples were the size of marbles so quite small, which it swallowed whole. It has just eaten the last crab apple so may now head for my place in south Cambridge for a feed of Tagasaste (hopefully). The property owner is trying to keep it on site. When the kereru had eaten nearly all of the crab apples and was looking for more, he put some other red berries (Idesia and probably cotoneaster from his description) out in a basket. The pigeon got stuck into them straight away, attracted by the red colour I guess, but lost interest when it tasted them. Kereru are normally conspicuous by their absence in Cambridge.

3. Pathology reports on kereru - Maurice Alley, vet faculty, Massey Uni

Here are some of the reasons kereru die!

- a. Found dead July 01, no weight, from Bird Rescue, Wanganui. Bird found caught by cat after falling out of a tree, partially paralysed. Diagnosis - systemic aspergillosis (fungal disease). Aspergillus is usually a secondary invader which follows an episode of immunosuppression.
- b. Found dead May 99, 430 g (poor condition), from Pureora Forest. Found dead on ground, probably dead a day or two. Diagnosis - poxvirus ingluvitis (pigeon pox). This disease in other pigeons and doves is usually associated with overcrowding and a contaminated environment - not how you would describe Pureora Forest. Oral lesions are frequently seen but the severe crop infection that this bird had is uncommon.
- c. Found dead June 01, 415 g (poor condition), from Pureora Forest. Found dead on ground, probably dead a day or two. Diagnosis - starvation, granulomatous fat necrosis (which is a symptom of starvation). It doesn't explain why kereru die of starvation when surrounded by foliage they exist on in winter/spring. Perhaps old age had something to do with its demise.
- d. Found dead on main road near Massey University May 01, 620 g (good condition). Diagnosis - trauma, particularly of thorax. Injuries were consistent with a motor vehicle collision.
- e. Found dead Nov 00, 579 g (moderate condition), supplied by DOC Masterton. Four kereru found dead within 2 months in area where talon was present in bait stations. Diagnosis - suspected brodifacoum poisoning. The presence of haemorrhage (blood clots) in some tissues supports a diagnosis of brodifacoum poisoning, but confirmation by toxicology testing has still to be done.

This result is very interesting to me since I hadn't expected kereru to eat bits of cereal bait from or about a bait station. Anyone seen or heard of kereru feeding in that manner?

4. Kukupa at Trounson - Alan Saunders

Kukupa have been monitored at Trounson (a DOC mainland island where intensive predator control has been occurring), Northland, since August 1996 in order to measure population trends. Six consecutive 10-minute counts are made on 2 separate days each month. Data from counts up to June 1998 have been analysed: 1995 - 2 kukupa, 1996 - 37, 1997 - 80. Increased numbers of kukupa and breeding activity have been observed. The populations of several other forest bird species have also increased in the block. For more details see: Saunders, A. 2000. Mainland island review.

5. Pigeon papers

- a. Hampe, A. 2001. The role of fruit diet within a temperate breeding bird community in southern Spain. *Bird study* 48: 116-123.

Author looked at the significance of fruit in the diet of adult and recently fledged birds (robin, blackcap, blackbird and blue tit). "Adult robins always foraged solitarily, and accounted for only 4% of the tree visits (to fruiting trees), while 96% were realised by recently fledged birds of the first brood. In all species, young birds foraged as efficiently as adults. *F. alnus* fruits are not part of the regular nestling diet, but they are a significant part of the diet for recently fledged robins during their postnatal dispersal. Conversely these are the most important and effective seed dispersers while adult robins scarcely take part in the dispersal of *F. alnus* seeds." I wonder if juvenile kereru are better dispersers of seeds than adults?

- b. Millener, P.R.; Powlesland, R.G. 2001. The Chatham Islands pigeon (parea) deserves full species status; *Hemiphaga chathamensis* (Rothschild 1891); Aves: Columbidae. *J Royal Soc NZ* 31: 365-383.

The title is self explanatory.

- c. Holdaway, R.N.; Worthy, T.H.; Tennyson, A.J.D. 2001. A working list of breeding bird species of the New Zealand region at first human contact. *NZ J Zoo* 28: 119-187.

Essential reading for all interested in taxonomy of NZ birds.

The authors give full species status to each *Hemiphaga* race, rather than subspecific status as currently in the checklist:

Norfolk Island pigeon - *Hemiphaga spadicea*

NZ pigeon (kereru) - *H. novaeseelandiae*

Chatham Islands pigeon - *H. chathamensis*