

KERERU NEWS No 50

KERERU NEWS No. 50 (4 October 2005)

Snippets of news about kereru. Thanks to those that provided contributions - it is a full edition this time.

Hey, would you please send me a reply that you have received this email newsletter; it seems as though some people are not getting KN even though they are on the list!

Cheers
Ralph

1. Kereru treated at the Whakatane Bird Rescue facility - Rosemary Tully

Date arrived	Species	Source location	Notes	Weight	Died	Put down	Number of days	Date	Released	Release date	Summary
8.1.05	pigeon native	ohope	adult	450g	no	yes	33 days	10.2.05	n/a	n/a	failed to recover
14.1.05	pigeon native	ohope hill	adult	600g	yes	no	3 days	n/a	n/a	n/a	paralysed/wing damage
24.4.05	pigeon native	otarawairere	hit window	625g	doa	no	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	hit window at 97 Otarawairere
30.6.05	pigeon native	mokorua gorge	hit car	650g	no	no	28 days	27.7.05	otarawairere	550g	wing damage
16.7.05	pigeon native	the strand	juv	450g							
26.7.05	pigeon native	ocean rd beach	window	500g	yes	no	5mins	n/a	n/a	n/a	internal damage (hit window)

The table lists the kereru that have been in care this year. The no yes column means died/put down), and one dead-on-arrival.

Every year a few kereru are brought into Whakatane Bird Rescue, most of which are found after either hitting windows or being hit by vehicles. So far this year I have had six birds brought in. One bird died shortly after being admitted. It had hit a window and when I gave it electrolyte by crop tube it threw up blood and died. One bird was dead on arrival after hitting a window. Most that hit windows seem to have wing damage or internal/head injuries. A kereru was found on the road in Whakatane unable to fly. After nearly four weeks at bird rescue it was released back into the wild.

I thought it unusual to have a juvenile bird handed in from the shopping area of Whakatane in July. Its beak was still rubbery. It is now eating on its own in an outside aviary. The hardest thing with looking after kereru is not letting them become too friendly. I keep the handling down to a minimum, just cleaning out, feeding and giving medication. With young birds I do a soft release and leave food out for them away from the house. While it is nice to have a bird returning to you for food it can lead to its downfall. They may think all people have food for them and fly into someone's house that has a cat or dog and then its "end of bird". Some birds that fail to recover have to be put down. Weights range from 500-650 g, with a few very sick birds below this mark. I have noticed in some years with very wet weather the birds are found in poor condition.

2. Interested in volunteering to do pink pigeon work on Mauritius - Shivananden Sawmy

The Pink Pigeon Project is now run by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation (MWF), a non-government organization based in Mauritius. This project was started 29 years ago by the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust to bring the pink pigeon back from brink of extinction. In 1975, when the captive

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breeding program commenced for the pink pigeon, the wild population was thought to be only 10 individuals in one small area in the south-west corner of Mauritius. Over the next 20 years, more than 200 pink pigeons have fledged in captivity and been released to establish 5 subpopulations within the Black River Gorges National Park. Predators, disease and cyclonic events have been responsible for high mortality within some of these subpopulations over the intervening years. Today the total population of pink pigeons in the wild has again been brought back to number just over 390 birds and is still rising. In addition planning is underway for the establishment of a sixth subpopulation within the Black River Gorges National Park.

As a volunteer you would be part of a team monitoring one of the pink pigeon subpopulations. The monitoring would be carried out at supplementary feeding sites and within pigeon breeding territories located in nearby forest. It would be a full time job for 2 people at each field station to achieve this, as three of the five subpopulations consist of between 70 and 100 tagged pigeons. The teams strive to locate and record results from all nesting attempts and follow the progress of fledglings. Feeding observations are recorded to add understanding of feeding ecology of pink pigeons. Predator control will also be part of the work carried out by volunteers.

Volunteers are trained in the ecology and habits of the pink pigeon and will be required to handle birds while identification rings and in some cases radio transmitters are fitted. The work of volunteers within the project would require them to be located at one of five field stations. Each field station is manned by a minimum of 2 people at all times but may have as many as 10 people based on site. Four of the five field stations are located within the Black River Gorges National Park in fairly remote and rugged terrain. All four of these sites have vehicle access. The fifth field station is located on Ile aux Aigrettes, a small offshore island accessible by boat. However, the work on Ile aux Aigrettes differs slightly from the other mainland sites. Staff based on Ile aux Aigrettes are normally volunteers that have worked on the mainland for several months and have acquired sufficient experience working with the pigeons. The pigeon project is the biggest of 4 current species projects being run on Mauritius by the MWF. There will be (ideally) 10 pigeon staff and a project coordinator spread through five field stations. During most Saturday afternoons and Sundays, staff travel to Black River where the MWF house is located for relaxation, socializing and catching up on washing of field clothes.

Ideally a volunteer would require bird handling and species experience from previous work or studying for or have at least a first degree (Diploma or BSc) in biology, zoology, or related field. All applications are assessed on an individual basis.

Mauritian Wildlife Foundation has to fulfil certain Governmental criteria when selecting volunteers to join our project teams. Mauritius and many other countries have a policy to promote employment of local people where possible. The Mauritian Government has stated that MWF may bring qualified staff (volunteer or paid) into Mauritius to fill vacancies only where these vacancies can not be filled by Mauritians. Therefore, to maintain the high standard of work and meet Government guidelines we need to show that volunteers have relevant skills/qualifications.

A volunteer must be prepared to stay for a minimum of 6 months and, with agreement between the volunteer and MWF, may be asked to stay for a further period. We do require a commitment of 6 months due to the type of work. Volunteers need to learn all the identification colour ring combinations, individual identification ring numbers and breeding territories for up to 100 birds. As you could imagine this takes some time. Normally the first 3 months a volunteer is working for MWF they would be placed with an experienced member of the team to be trained. The rotation of volunteers means that the experienced member of the team at your field station would leave about three months after you start. You would then be the experienced person training the next volunteer for that site. So you can see we need the six month commitment.

We annually have as many as 30 volunteers, short term staff and research students from 13 different countries working for MWF on Mauritius. Due to this diversity within the teams, all field

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notes, data sheets, database entries and correspondence within MWF is in English. Volunteers are required to work Monday – Friday and Saturday mornings and usually at unsociable hours.

It is preferred that volunteers have a valid driving licence and experience. A volunteer would be required to pay for their own return airfare and living expenses while in Mauritius. An open 12 month ticket is required. A comprehensive insurance policy is required which includes repatriation (most volunteers use their travel insurance). Volunteers are required to pay their own living expenses while in Mauritius. These are not high in Mauritius with an average cost of GB£ 140 per month. This includes going out for meals occasionally and some shopping at markets for clothes etc. Accommodation and transport is provided by MWF while you are working in Mauritius. Three jeeps are available to carry out the field work.

If you are thinking seriously of taking part in this programme and you want some more details, have a chat to Dave Wills at the Tauranga office, he spent a year there. Otherwise send your CV, including the names of 3 referees to Shivananden Sawmy shiva.nanden@gmail.com

3. Kowhai flowering - Bob Brockie

I recently had a phone call from Bob Brockie. He is doing phenology observations on kowhai in Wellington, and has noted that the flowering is c. a month ahead of the usual flowering time this year. Is that the case elsewhere around the country?

4. Kereru monitoring at Lake Rotoroa, Nelson Lakes National Park, 2000-2003 - Nic Etheridge

This study was conducted at Lake Rotoroa in the Nelson Lakes National Park around the base of Mt Misery and the mouth of the D'Urville River at the southern end of the lake. The survey replicates the sites and methods of Clout et al. (1986). The study involves counts along three transects; a 1.5 km stretch of lakeshore, a 300 m length of track passing through lakeside forest of matai, kahikatea and kowhai, and a 1.3 km length of track passing through beech/podocarp forest and stream bank vegetation. The only change along the transects since has been the removal of willows along the lakeshore.

Although it was intended to carry out monthly counts for a year this was not possible. Counts were undertaken in December 2000-February 2001, April-May 2001, June-August, and October 2001, August-October 2002 and January-April 2003. Kereru were counted along each transect in mid-morning (0930-1100 NZST) and mid-afternoon (1430-1600) on at least one day at the end of each month. This involved two observers, each doing a morning and an afternoon count, for a total of four counts along each transect per month. The lakeshore part of the transect was observed from a motorboat and began at the D'Urville hut. The observer cruised at 6 km/h about 15m offshore. The forest tracks were traversed slowly on foot. For each kereru seen, location (closest 100m mark on transect), activity (feeding, flying, roosting, display diving) and (where applicable) the tree species it was using were recorded.

The following graph shows the mean monthly counts of kereru in 1983-1985 compared to 2000-2003. Numbers were high in winter, declined in spring, and few were present during summer and autumn. This trend is the same for all years.

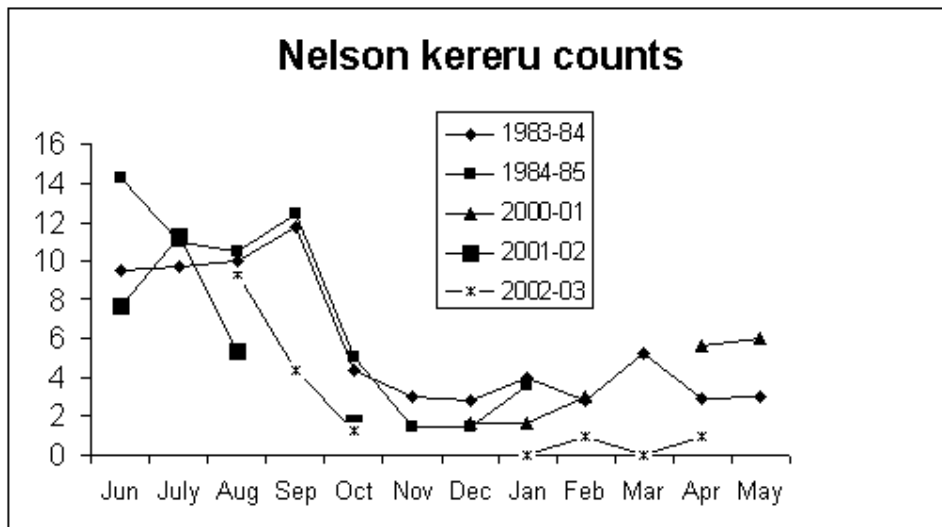
Numbers in September-October are lower in 2002 with a mean of 4.3 compared to a mean of 11.8 in 1983 and 1984. This decline in kereru abundance could be due to the removal of willows, an important kereru food source in spring when leaves are developing. The mean number in July 1984 and 2001 are similar, however fewer kereru were present from September-October 2001 and 2002 than previously. This suggests the kereru were leaving the Lake Rotoroa transects earlier in the year, perhaps to feed on willows and other exotic foliage elsewhere.

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The mean number of kereru present during December to May, are similar for all years, with means of 1.6 to 6.0. Fewer kereru were seen in 2003 with means of 0 to 1 present. Whether this is significant or not would need to be explored further as it is difficult to determine with this data set.

Overall the population appears to be relatively stable with the exception of a decline in September. We assume this is due to changed food availability, as numbers are similar for other months between years. Unfortunately, for the purpose of this comparative study, the willows present around the lake edge transect have been controlled post 1985, creating a major change in food availability.

There is a slight decline in numbers between January and April in 2003 which may or may not be significant. There is not enough data to determine this. In 1984 and 2000 the same month's numbers were higher. This may indicate a variable food source being available at this time of year.



5. Plant me instead - Auckland Regional Council

Are you aware of this useful booklet? It has been available for a while having been published in 2002 (ISBN 0-908 938-76-4). As the title suggests, it indicates weed plant species, and which species to replace them with. It includes at least two species that kereru feed on; monkey apple (*Acmena smithii*) and woolly nightshade (*Solanum maritimum*). It is applicable to the 'Northern Climate Zone' which includes Northland, Auckland, northern Waikato, and the eastern coastal strip down to the Bay of Plenty and East Cape. I presume it is available in libraries of the northern climate zone, but if you want to get a copy I suggest you try the Auckland Regional Council (0800 806040, biosecurity@arc.govt.nz, www.arc.govt.nz)

6. Drunken kukupa during July-August in Whangarei - Tony Beauchamp

Here is a summary about this event that Tony supplied to me, and later to an enquiry that came from an educational foundation in the US that got wind of the story.

Normally there is plenty of food for kukupa in the forests and suburbs of Whangarei. Kukupa come into town and eat guava each year, but this year the birds arrived in very poor condition (500-550 g). 20-30 kukupa were handed to the Whangarei Bird Recovery Centre and DOC. Their poor condition seemed to stem from the very poor fruiting of taraire, which is one of their main food sources in July-August. Also there are more kereru around than in the past due to predator control operations, and so perhaps more need for at least some kukupa to come into Whangarei to find food. Kukupa consume large amounts of guava fruit, and in some cases so much that they can't fly off until some are digested. It is not known why kukupa were falling out of trees, and as a result, in

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some cases, being attacked by cats. Possible reasons for their 'drunken' state are poor condition, having consumed so much fruit they couldn't fly off readily, impact of by-products of the fermenting fruit in their crops, or a combination of these.

7. Bubs is now nesting - May & Russell Evans

Here is an up-date on Bubs, the kereru that was released from captivity at Otatara, Southland (see Kereru News No. 48 for previous details). She was released on 26 March 2005, and survived that initial fortnight OK, which is the most likely period when she would have had problems finding sufficient quality food and recognising predators and obstacles. Once she realised where home was and that a free feed was available she appeared most days for food. However, there were periods of a few days when she didn't appear. The first indication that she had a mate was during late July, and he has accompanied Bubs to the Evans's and perched nearby as she has eaten her 'hand-out'. Then during the week of 12-16 Sept she was found on a nest a few 100 metres from the Evans's. Each day since she has appeared for a big lunch. So far so good.