

# BIRD OF THE YEAR



by Iona McNaughton

Every year, people vote for their favourite New Zealand bird in the Bird of the Year competition. The bird that gets the most votes is the winner. The competition is run by Forest & Bird, an organisation that helps look after New Zealand's birds and wildlife.

I asked Megan Hubscher from Forest & Bird some questions about the competition.



Iona



Megan

## Why does Forest & Bird hold the Bird of the Year competition?

We want people to know more about the wonderful birds we have in Aotearoa New Zealand and to learn how to keep those birds safe.

## Can people vote for any bird?

No, the competition is only about native birds. That means birds that have always lived in New Zealand or birds that have flown here from other countries, but not birds like blackbirds and sparrows that have been brought to New Zealand by people.

## Why native birds?

New Zealand has 168 kinds of native birds, but most of them are in danger of becoming extinct. This means they may die out. The fairy tern, the 2014 Bird of the Year, is our most endangered bird. There are only twenty of them left. We want people to know how they can help stop native birds like the fairy tern from dying out.

Some of our native birds can be found in other countries as well. For example, the pūkeko and kororā (little blue penguin) also live in Australia, but they have different names there. These birds flew or swam to New Zealand many years ago.

Ninety-three of our native birds are also endemic. This means they live only in New Zealand. The kiwi, the kākāpō, and the tūī are all endemic – you won't find them anywhere else in the world.

The Bird of the Year competition helps people to understand what makes our native birds special and why we need to look after them.



A fairy tern – tara iti

## Why are New Zealand birds in danger?

There are three main reasons why New Zealand birds are in danger. The biggest danger is from animals such as possums, rats, and stoats. These animals are predators. They kill the birds and eat their eggs.

Another danger is from changes to the birds' habitats (the places where the birds live). For example, many birds live in forests, but people often cut down the trees to make space for houses. People also use a lot of plastic, and that can get into the ocean and kill seabirds.



Kea live in the mountains.



Kākā live in forests.



Tarāpuka (black-billed gulls) live on the seashore.



Whio (blue ducks) live in rivers.

Changes in the weather can also be dangerous for birds. For example, in Northland, hot weather has made the ground so hard and dry that some kiwi have been starving because they can't get their beaks into the ground to eat the bugs and worms that live there.

### **Do you think the Bird of the Year competition is helping to save our birds?**

I'm sure it is. Every year, more and more people take part. In 2018, around 50,000 people voted in the competition. All those people are learning more about our native birds.

Forest & Bird also has the Kiwi Conservation Club (KCC) to help Kiwi kids learn about New Zealand's birds and other wildlife. KCC members get together to find out more about places such as the bush and the beach and the birds and animals that live in these places. They also get a magazine called *Wild Things* four times a year.

### **When did the Bird of the Year competition start?**

Bird of the Year started in 2005. When it began, it was the only competition in the world where people could vote for their favourite bird.

### **Who can vote?**

Anyone can vote. The only rule is that you can vote only once. You can vote online, by email, or by posting a letter.



Kiwi Conservation Club members

## Can you tell me more about the competition?

Bird of the Year takes place in October every year. A list of the birds that people can vote for is put up on the Forest & Bird website.

The competition gets people very excited. They make videos and posters to try to get other people to vote for their favourite bird. They write songs, make speeches, and take photos. In 2018, the prime minister asked people to vote for the black petrel. And former All Black captain Richie McCaw painted a picture of his favourite bird, the kākāriki (orange-fronted parakeet), on his helicopter.

## How can school students get involved?

The best way is for a class to choose their favourite native bird and find out all they can about it. Then they can tell their friends and family why it should be the winner and try to get everyone they know to vote for it.

## Which bird has won the most times?

It's really interesting – no bird has won more than once. I think we have so many amazing birds that people like to share first place around. It's hard to pick just one favourite bird!

## Me pōti – Vote for me

In 2018, some students from Bethlehem School in Tauranga wanted the kakaruaia (black robin) to win Bird of the Year. They made a video about why people should vote for it.

Their main message was “Ahakoa he iti noa, he pounamu”, which means although it is small, it is a treasure to the world.

The students also made biscuits and soap in the shape of black robins. They sold these to raise money to help the birds.

Although the black robin didn't win, the students now know much more about this beautiful little native bird. They've also learnt a lot about other New Zealand native birds and what people can do to help keep them safe.



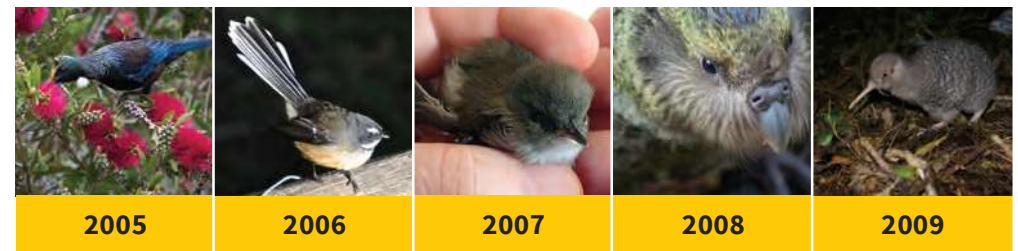
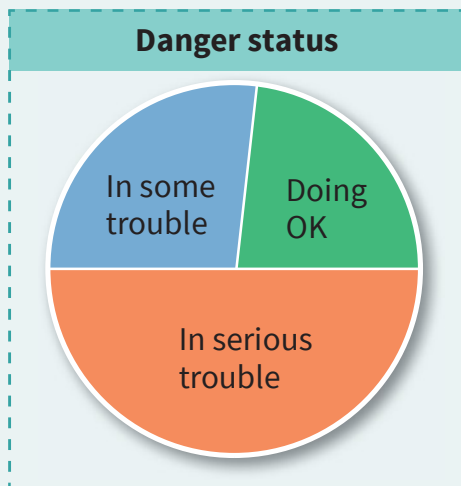
# AND THE WINNER IS ...

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The Bird of the Year competition was started as a way of making people more interested in native New Zealand birds. Many of our native birds are endangered, so if people know more about them, they can help to keep the birds safe.

New Zealand native birds are given a “danger status”. This shows how much danger they are in of becoming extinct. The birds are either “doing OK”, “in some trouble”, or “in serious trouble”. Sadly, only about 20 percent of New Zealand native birds are “doing OK”.

This article has information about some of the birds of the year – including their danger status.



2005 2006 2007 2008 2009

## The Winners So Far

- 2005:** Tūī
- 2006:** Pīwakawaka – Fantail
- 2007:** Riroriro – Grey warbler
- 2008:** Kākāpō
- 2009:** Kiwi
- 2010:** Kākāriki karaka – Orange-fronted parakeet
- 2011:** Pūkeko
- 2012:** Kārearea – New Zealand falcon
- 2013:** Mohua – Yellowhead
- 2014:** Tara iti – Fairy tern
- 2015:** Kuaka – Bar-tailed godwit
- 2016:** Kōkako
- 2017:** Kea
- 2018:** Kererū – New Zealand pigeon



2010



2011



2012



2013



2018 2017 2016 2015 2014



**Bird of the Year 2005: Tūī**

<b>Danger status</b>	Doing OK
<b>Description</b>	Endemic A large bird (up to 32 centimetres long) with shiny green-black feathers and a tuft of white throat feathers
<b>What it eats</b>	Insects. Also sucks nectar from flowers
<b>Habitat</b>	Forests, orchards, and gardens
<b>Where it's found</b>	Widespread (found in many places)
<b>Interesting facts</b>	An amazing mimic, it can copy sounds including other birds' calls. Long ago, some Māori kept pet tūī that they trained to speak.



**Bird of the Year 2006: Pīwakawaka – Fantail**

<b>Danger status</b>	Doing OK
<b>Description</b>	Endemic Small body with a long tail that it can spread out like a fan About 16 centimetres long
<b>What it eats</b>	Insects
<b>Habitat</b>	Forests and gardens
<b>Where it's found</b>	Widespread
<b>Interesting facts</b>	The fantail is very active and often uses its fanned tail to disturb insects so it can catch them. It may also fly around people to catch any insects they stir up. Fantails are often found in pairs or groups.



### Bird of the Year 2008: Kākāpō

<b>Danger status</b>	In serious trouble
<b>Description</b>	Endemic A large, flightless parrot with green feathers and a pale, round face Nocturnal (awake at night and asleep during the day)
<b>What it eats</b>	Fruit, seeds, leaves, buds, flowers, bark, roots
<b>Habitat</b>	Native forests
<b>Where it's found</b>	Only on three small New Zealand islands
<b>Interesting facts</b>	The kākāpō is the world's heaviest parrot. The male can weigh up to 2.2 kilograms. When in danger, the kākāpō stops moving or "freezes", which makes it very easy for predators to catch. This is one of the reasons there are not many kākāpō left. In the 1990s, there were only about 50. These birds were put on three predator-free islands, and now there are over 200.



### Bird of the Year 2012: Kārearea – New Zealand Falcon

<b>Danger status</b>	In some trouble
<b>Description</b>	Endemic A large hunting bird with long legs and talons (claws)
<b>What it eats</b>	Small birds and animals
<b>Habitat</b>	Forests and farmland
<b>Where it's found</b>	Widespread, but in low numbers
<b>Interesting facts</b>	Adult kārearea can fly at 100 kilometres per hour and can kill birds and animals bigger than they are. One of the reasons kārearea are "in some trouble" is that predators eat the young birds in their nests.



### Bird of the Year 2015: Kuaka – Bar-tailed Godwit

<b>Danger status</b>	In some trouble
<b>Description</b>	Native A large bird (around 40 centimetres long) with long legs and a long beak. It has brown and grey feathers on its body and bands (or bars) of brown on its tail.
<b>What it eats</b>	Snails, crabs, and sea worms
<b>Habitat</b>	Places with water, sand, and mud, such as harbours and river mouths
<b>Where it's found</b>	Widespread
<b>Interesting facts</b>	Every March, the kuaka flies more than 11,000 kilometres to Alaska, where it breeds. About 80,000 kuaka return to New Zealand every September to feed and grow strong, ready for their long journey back to Alaska.



### Bird of the Year 2018: Kererū – New Zealand Pigeon

<b>Danger status</b>	Doing OK
<b>Description</b>	Endemic A large green pigeon with a white chest and a long tail
<b>What it eats</b>	Leaves, buds, flowers, berries, and fruit
<b>Habitat</b>	Trees
<b>Where it's found</b>	Widespread
<b>Interesting facts</b>	The kererū can swallow large fruit and berries. The seeds pass through its body, which is an important way for the seeds of our native trees to spread.