



Kākāriki / New Zealand parakeets

Native birds

Kākāriki, meaning 'small green parrot' in Māori, are beautiful forest birds. There are five main species of kākāriki: yellow-crowned parakeet, orange-fronted parakeet, red-crowned parakeet, Forbes's parakeet and Antipodes Island parakeet.

Kākāriki are basically bright green in colour but can be identified by the distinguishing coloured areas on the head (although in the case of the Antipodes Island species, the head is entirely green). The red-crowned parakeet is distinguished by a bright crimson forehead, crown and a streak extending back beyond the eyes. The

yellow-crowned parakeet has a yellow patch on the head and a red frontal band above the beak, whereas the orange-fronted species has a pale yellow patch on its head with an orange band above the beak. Forbes parakeet looks similar to a yellow-crowned parakeet but is only found on Mangere island in the Chatham group of islands.

The Antipodes Island parakeet is the largest species, followed by the red-crowned parakeet, which is in turn larger than the yellow-crowned and orange-fronted species.

The orange-fronted parakeet – long thought to be a colour variation of the yellow-crowned parakeet but now confirmed as a distinct species – is described in more detail on a separate fact sheet.

Where are they found?

The yellow-crowned parakeet, although rare, can be found throughout forested areas of the North, South and Stewart Islands as well as the sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands. Yellow-crowned kākāriki prefer tall, unbroken forest and scrub.

The red-crowned parakeet was widespread throughout the mainland last century but today is very rare on the mainland and only common on islands free of mammalian predators. There are a number of other sub-species of red-crowned parakeets that are found on various islands around New Zealand including the Chatham Islands, Antipodes Islands, Macquarie Island, Norfolk Island, Lord Howe Island and New Caledonia. The red-crowned prefers to inhabit relatively open spaces in and around forest areas and frequently forages on the ground. It also prefers lower altitudes than the yellow-crowned species.

The Antipodes Island parakeet occurs only on the Antipodes Islands.

Red-crowned parakeet
J. L. Kendrick



Did you know?

Red- and yellow-crowned kākāriki are the only native bird species able to be held and bred in captivity. Breeders of kākāriki require a permit from the Department of Conservation. Captive breeding has contributed to the preservation of kākāriki, and captive-reared birds have been successfully liberated on Cuvier, Tiritiri Matangi and Whale Islands.

Kākāriki facts

- Kākāriki feed on berries, seeds, fruit and insects. It is not unusual to see kākāriki foraging on the ground.
- Kākāriki generally nest in holes in trees. Red-crowned parakeets also sometimes nest in crevices in cliffs or among rocks, in burrows in the ground or in densely matted vegetation.
- Nesting generally occurs from October through to December, although they will nest through winter if food is abundant. The female incubates 5–9 eggs for around 20 days until they hatch. Both birds assist with the feeding of the young.
- During incubation, the male calls the female off the



Orange-fronted parakeet

nest and feeds her by regurgitation. Both parents feed the chicks but the male usually transfers the food to the female, who then passes it along to the chicks. Red-crowned fledglings are fed on the ground for a period before they can fly, making them especially vulnerable to predators.

- Kākāriki are usually solitary or found in pairs, although in autumn and winter they may form small flocks.
- In flight they make a loud rapid chatter that sounds like 'ki-ki-ki-ki'.

Threats

During the 1800s, kākāriki were common and at times flocks would emerge from forests to feed on grain and fruit crops. Farmers and orchardists considered them pests and shot thousands of the birds in an attempt to protect their harvests. Culling – as well as destruction of their old-growth forest habitat – were primary reasons for the birds' near demise.

Today, attacks by introduced predators such as mustelids and rats are the main threat to kākāriki. Like other hole-nesters (for example, the yellowhead/mohua and kākā), female kākāriki and chicks are vulnerable while they are in the nest since there is no escape route from predators that enter the tree hollows.

How can you help?

Support your local Department of Conservation office in its efforts to control mammalian predators in habitats where kākāriki live. The protection of old-growth forest habitats and the reforestation of areas that have been previously cleared will also help protect the kākāriki.

Further Information

For further information about kākāriki you can access the Department of Conservation web site at www.doc.govt.nz or contact your nearest Department of Conservation office.



Orange-fronted and yellow-crowned parakeet
P Jansen