

Kākā in the neighbourhood – a taonga returning home



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Thanks to conservation programmes across the North Island, you may be noticing more kākā in your area than ever before. Kākā populations are growing, and birds are returning to places where they have been absent for many years. You can already find kākā in areas such as Wellington, Waikato and Waiheke Island.

Imagine a future for the Lower North Island where kākā thrive throughout the Kaweka, Ruahine, Taranaki and Remutaka forest parks.

As a taonga (treasure) species, kākā are an important part of our natural heritage. Their return is a conservation success story and one you can support.

This brochure has tips to help you protect and enjoy kākā.



Photo: Judi Lapsley Miller



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

How to spot a kākā

Kākā are large native parrots. They have olive-brown feathers, grey-white colouring around their head, yellow highlights near their eyes and beak, and bright orange-red feathers on their belly and underwings. They typically measure about 38 cm to 45 cm in length.

You'll often hear them before you see them. Their distinctive calls include loud 'ka-aa' cries, musical whistles and harsh screeches. Kākā are most noticeable at dawn and dusk when they fly between feeding and roosting sites.



Sharing our spaces

Kākā are highly intelligent, curious and playful birds. This behaviour helps them find and use food sources. They love investigating new objects and testing their surroundings. While this makes them fascinating neighbours, it can result in damage to orchards or residential property.

Kākā happy places

Kākā thrive in native scrublands, forests and alpine areas, where they feed on sap, nectar, fruit, seeds and insects. Their powerful beaks are designed for stripping bark and breaking into decaying wood to find food.

Kākā are nomadic and move between places in search of seasonal food, they are strong flyers and can travel hundreds of kilometres. In winter, they may head to warmer urban or coastal areas and feed on exotic trees that are more abundant in these areas.



Photo: Pseudopanax – Wikipedia Commons

Kākā-proofing your land or residential property

Kākā are wild birds that come and go freely. Here are things you can do to make your property less interesting to kaka.

Enjoy kākā from a distance

If kākā start visiting your property, enjoy watching them from a distance. Avoid interaction of any kind. They enjoy contact with people, but this encourages them to visit human areas.

Keep kākā wild

Feeding attracts larger numbers of birds. Human food is harmful to kākā, birds that remain wild are healthier and have less impact on properties.



Plant native species

A variety of native trees and shrubs provides natural food sources and supports healthy ecosystems.



Photo: Pseudopanax - Wikipedia Commons

Remove tempting 'chew toys'

Because kākā are intelligent, inquisitive parrots, they will investigate almost anything. You can protect kākā and your property by:

- removing lead flashings and nail heads from roofs or nearby areas
- covering exposed timber with metal capping or lead-free flashing
- shielding garden lights, irrigation lines and cables
- repairing loose fences and boards on sheds and pergolas
- using durable outdoor building materials
- storing machinery, bikes, tools, toys and other items indoors.

Protect vulnerable trees

In home gardens, use wildlife-safe, fine-tensioned nets to cover fruit trees before fruit ripens. Make sure nets are tied down so birds don't become entangled

Some exotic trees are particularly susceptible to bark stripping. Monitor valuable trees and ask arborists for advice if damage becomes severe.

Large-scale protection for horticulture

Kākā may feed on soft fruit during ripening seasons or use trees as a food source for sap or nectar. While no research has been done on effective deterrents for kākā, you could try tools used for other birds:

- bird-proof netting
- reflective tape
- streamers
- predator decoys
- sound scare devices
- bird distress call systems
- predator call systems
- visual deterrents.

Along with the above, planting native trees and shrubs in shelter belts and riparian strips may also help deter them by providing alternative food sources.

Combined bird-management approaches are often the most effective for deterring kākā. Using several methods to minimise damage reduces the likelihood of birds becoming accustomed to any single deterrent.



Report your sightings

Many kākā are banded. This means they have coloured bands on one or both legs.



If you see a banded kākā, please report it. Note the colour combination of the bands, or if you can get a photo, even better.

Your sighting helps us understand where kākā travel and how well they survive.

Please report your sightings via email to: bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz

or via the website at doc.govt.nz/our-work/bird-banding/reporting-a-bird-band



Photo: Nina Mercer

Please don't feed kākā



Human food doesn't provide the nutrition kākā need and can lead to serious health issues, including metabolic bone disease and death in chicks.

Feeding also:

- encourages large gatherings of birds
- increases disease transmission
- makes birds more vulnerable to predators
- increases behaviour that can cause property damage
- reduces natural foraging behaviour
- increases mortality, particularly through poisoning and crop obstructions.

The best way to care for kākā is to let them find their own food and provide natural habitat through native planting.

Living alongside kākā

The recovery of kākā is a conservation success story. By giving them space, not feeding them and protecting our properties, we can help make sure these remarkable parrots become an everyday part of our communities and thrive for generations to come.



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