

Part two:
birds

Translocated birds

(in order of arrival)



Red crowned parakeet

Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae

Kakariki



An endemic bird, first released on Tiritiri Matangi in 1974.

These were the first birds introduced onto the island. About 30 were released in 1974. More were released later in the 1970's. This was before restoration of the island commenced.

What do they look like?

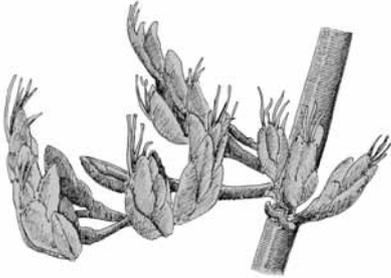
These long-tailed, bright green parrots, have a red crown, forehead and stripy band from the bill to behind the eye, as well as a crimson rump and blue hidden on their wings. Kakariki means green in Maori.

What do they sound like?

Red-crowned parakeets often give out a rapid loud chatter, particularly when they fly. The sound is very pleasant and not at all harsh.

What do they eat?

They particularly enjoy flax, beech, grass and tussock seeds. They also eat fruits, leaves, flower buds, young shoots and nectar, as well as invertebrates and carrion. Kakariki can often be seen feeding on the ground, along the edges of the tracks on Tiritiri Matangi, where there are common weed seeds and where flax and wattle seeds fall. On the mainland, this tendency to feed on the ground makes them particularly vulnerable to mammalian predators.



Parakeets on Tiritiri Matangi have been known to destroy almost all the flax flowers on the island before they are ripe. A scientist working on the island suggests that this may help other less vigorous plants by forcing the birds to feed from them and so more effectively spread their seed. Otherwise flax might overpower some of the other plants on the island.

Breeding

On Tiritiri Matangi, kakariki breed well, due to the absence of introduced predators and the availability of suitable nesting sites and food.

These birds nest in holes in tree trunks, rock crevices and even on the ground hidden in clumps of wirevine (pohuehue) and in the base of flaxes.

While the female is sitting on the eggs, the male feeds her by calling her off the nest and regurgitating the food. When the chicks hatch, the male continues to feed the female, who passes the food on to the chicks. As the chicks get older, both parents collect food and regurgitate for the chicks.

Where else can they be found?

Red-crowned parakeets are now very rare on the New Zealand mainland but common on many offshore islands and on Stewart Island.



Did you know?

In the 1870's and 1880's red-crowned parakeets were considered pests as they damaged crops, orchards and gardens.

There is a slightly smaller, yellow-crowned parakeet, found in small numbers throughout New Zealand, and a very rare orange-fronted parakeet, found only in three small areas on the Canterbury side of the Southern Alps.

References:

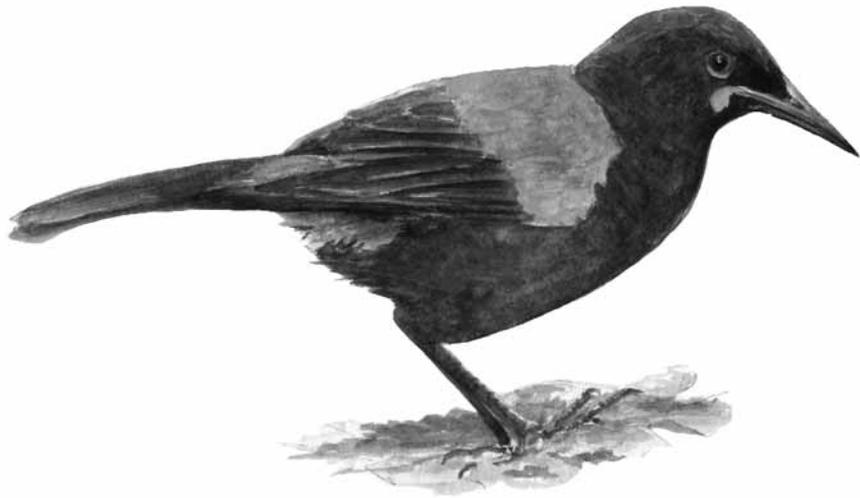
1. Cathedral, Luis Ortiz. 'Where are all the Kakariki?' 'Dawn Chorus' Bulletin 64 February 2006, pp3-4.

SEE ALSO: 'Dawn Chorus' Bulletin 61, May 2005. P3.

North Island saddleback

Philesturnus rufusater

Tieke



A threatened, endemic bird.

The first 24 saddleback were brought to Tiritiri Matangi Island from Cuvier Island in 1984.

Saddleback belong to an ancient group of birds – the wattlebirds. They are poor fliers and prefer to jump along branches and the forest floor, with occasional short noisy flights. Because they are poor fliers and are relatively trusting, they nest close to the ground and are mainly ground feeders. Saddleback have suffered greatly from the introduction of cats, rats and mustelids. By the twentieth century they were extinct on the mainland and by 1910 the North Island population comprised fewer than 500 birds on Hen Island off the Northland coast.

What do they look like?

Saddleback are a similar size to a blackbird and have a glossy black head and body, with a bright chestnut coloured saddle and rump. They also have slim, pendulous orange-red wattles at the base of their slender black bill. Both sexes have the same plumage, but the wattles of males are usually larger than those of females. North Island saddleback have a thin buff gold-coloured line at the upper edge of the saddle.

What do they sound like?

Saddleback are very inquisitive and will often watch for some time before making loud, piercing calls, which carry well through the forest. They are very vocal birds. One of their many calls sounds like ‘tieke!’ They also have a wide variety of other calls, including quiet and conversational ‘mews’. Ornithologist Dr Walter Oliver (1883-1957) described saddleback as:

‘... a noisy, active bird progressing by what may be described as long hops or short flights. It appears on the scene to the accompaniment of its shrill notes, moves restlessly about for a few moments and disappears as quickly as it came.’

What do they eat?

Saddleback eat a wide variety of nectar, berries, fruits and leaves, but their main diet is insects such as weta and grubs. They can be heard tearing at bark and rotting wood with their sharp bills, and searching vigorously and noisily amongst deep leaf litter or in cabbage trees.

Their jaw structure allows forceful gaping – using the opening action of the beak to prise open pieces of bark and gain entry to crevices where prey can be found.



Breeding

Saddleback build nests in such places as tree holes, the base of flax plants and the crowns of tree fern, usually close to the ground. The females incubate, but both adults feed the young, and territories are held all year. On Tiritiri Matangi nest boxes were built when saddleback were first released as there were insufficient natural nesting places in the young forest.

Where else can they be found?

They are now largely limited to predator-free islands.

In 1964, 36 saddleback were transferred from Hen Island to Whatapuke Island. Other translocations followed, including to Mokoia Island (Lake Rotorua), Hauturu/Little Barrier Island and Kapiti Island.

Tiritiri Matangi Island birds have been translocated to Mokoia Island, Moturoa Island, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary (Wellington) and Motuihe Island. Populations continue to be established as more predator-free or predator-controlled areas become available.

Did you know?



The cries of the tieke were often taken by ancient Maori to be good or bad omens.

‘Ka tangi te tieke I te taha katau o te huarahi he marie’

‘If you should hear a saddleback on the right hand side, you will have good luck.’

Also, tieke were believed to act as guardians, protecting ancient buried treasure, and guiding waka on their journeys.

One female saddleback on Tiritiri Matangi was known to have lived for 21 years!

References:

SOTM Bulletin 30, Winter 1997.