

KERERU NEWS No. 54 (26 June 2006)

Some more information about kereru, monitoring a population to see what effect pest control has, and the imminent launch of a website about kereru and the species conservation in urban habitats.

1. Kereru observations from the Coromandel - Tina Morgan

Two snippets about kereru up here at the top of the Coromandel. We observe that they *love* hibiscus. Garden shrubs are ripped to pieces by the birds, who spend ages feeding on, especially, the new shoots, but also leaves. They don't eat flowers. They are quite hard on the shrub, breaking twigs and branches, but it recovers well once spring comes.

The second snippet concerns kereru snoring!! The first time I heard this, during my early morning walk, I plainly saw the bird above my head with its head tucked under its wing and snoring loudly! Since then I have seen and heard this many times, including two birds sleeping side by side, both snoring, out of sync! Is it common for kereru, or any bird for that matter, to snore?

2. Kereru at the Baldhill Landcare Group - Andrew Sinclair (theteam@crazycatch.com)

Our group has been established for 18 months. The landcare area is located between Pukekohe and Waiuku in a steeper volcanic area joining the surrounding easier contoured, cropping land. The area currently covers 2,500 ha, of which 10% is bush and scrub with the remainder in farmland. The priority for the group is to create a better environment for native birds and in particular kereru. It is a key nesting area for kereru due to the dominance of taraire with their large and prolific berries. Our main focus to date has been possum and rat control. Along with Timms traps and shooting to provide the initial knockdown there are now over 200 bait stations in place and already a noticeable improvement in birdlife. For instance a flock of over 30 kereru was sighted last month as well as a flock of 12 last week.

It is widely publicised that kereru nest from September – January. In our area, and I expect further north in taraire dominant bush, the nesting pattern is quite different. The kereru coincide their nesting time with when taraire berries are most plentiful. This is usually from May – September and this is the time of peak nesting activity that we have observed. It may well continue on beyond September, however it is very noticeable that the nesting pattern matches the time of year when the food supply is most abundant. This is quite the opposite from most other areas when it is through these winter months where the food supply is most restricted for kereru.

It raises many interesting questions and opportunities. For instance:

a) It is highly likely that where there is a dominance of taraire that more nestings can take place in one year than in southern areas and therefore the potential to build and sustain higher kereru population densities.

b) Perhaps we should be promoting the planting of a lot more taraire in the northern regions. Perhaps they could be promoted as the kereru tree. In our area they are providing the best food supply of the year at a time in most areas where readily available and nutritious food is often at a premium. Taraire can be established in reasonably open sites and in full sunlight. They are excellent to grow in revegetation areas. As specimen trees they can potentially add a lot of value as with light all around they will ultimately crop very heavily as an excellent kereru food source.

c) The kereru appear to be very responsive to food supply with their nesting decisions. For instance this year the berries are a month later and the kereru as a result have been a month later with starting their nesting.

KERERU NEWS 54

d) The taraire is perhaps a most undervalued tree in the kereru diet if we are serious about increasing kereru numbers. In our area there is an excellent year round food supply with the kereru seldom having to revert to fresh foliage for food. May to September is taraire, September to January is fresh foliage and the first burst of puriri berries in November, late January the karaka start fruiting, February is totara berries and a second flush of puriri, and March and April is kahikatea. There is also nikau, coprosma, mahoe, kohekohe etc at various times of the year but little is on the menu from May – September in the way of berry food apart from taraire.

We have begun monitoring bird populations and will shortly have over 50 sites surveyed using the 5-minute bird method. It will be interesting to see the progress with the kereru population. We suspect the rat and possum control should have a major positive influence. Firstly there is the decrease in predating of kereru nests from the possums and rats. Secondly there will be less competition for the berries. It was very noticeable in some of the high rat and possum density areas that taraire berries were being eaten especially by rats, before they were even ripe.

3. Announcing the new Kererū Discovery Project - Eric Dorfman, Senior Manager Natural Environment Science Programmes

On the 12th of August, Te Papa will be hosting the launch of the **Kererū Discovery Project**, a new national initiative aiming to improve urban habitats for kererū. The project is a partnership between Te Papa, Wellington Zoo, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, Victoria University of Wellington, and Pukaha Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre, with more partners coming on board as the project is rolled out nationally.

The Kererū Discovery Project works by enthusing and educating people to improve the quality of their neighbourhoods for wildlife, especially for kererū. The programme is very diverse, including education programmes at each institution, science projects, a wonderful computer game (sent out free to the programme's registrants) and a documentary produced in collaboration with the New Zealand Film and Television School.

People can get involved with the programme in a number of ways, but the first – and most important – is through our website www.kererudiscovery.org.nz. It currently consists of a simple introductory page, but by mid August this year it will allow people to register for the programme, describe their gardens to us, learn about the kererū and wildlife-friendly gardening, and play some very engaging interactives. Most importantly, however, it will provide the facility for people to fill out on-line data sheets on where and when they see kererū. These data will be used to look at how kererū track resources in urban habitats, which will facilitate forward planning, as well as providing valuable ecological data.

The original project has been possible through the generous support of the Royal Society of New Zealand, who provided a Science and Technology Promotion Fund Grant. This enabled us to develop the graphic identity of the Kererū Discovery Project, as well as the game. A further grant from the Lotteries Commission to the Zoo and VUW has enabled behavioural research on the birds. Recently our project got another major boost via a sponsorship from Eagle Technology who provide us with Global Information Systems technology making the distribution maps that will tell us – and the public – how we're doing.

The public launch will be at Te Papa, on Saturday the 12th of August, 2006. It will consist of a 'mini-expo' put on by the partners and will feature our new website, interactives, talks by experts, and a documentary in Soundings Theatre, as well as family-oriented activities. All are welcome.

If you have any questions about the programme or the launch, please contact Hokimate Harwood, Bicultural Science Programme Developer 04-3817381.