

**KERERU NEWS No. 64 ( 9 May 2008 )**

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Information about and observations of kereru / kuku / kukupa / kokopa / New Zealand pigeon / parea / Chatham Islands pigeon

**1. Eletrocuted kereru – Ralph Powlesland**

Kereru often perch on power wires, power poles, and the wooden cross-arms attached to power poles in urban areas. Unfortunately, the odd kereru has been found dead under power poles with burnt feathers being the only sign of injury, and it seems certain that they have been electrocuted. In order for this to happen the kereru would have to touch a wire plus a cross-arm or pole at the same time. Even though it rarely occurs, this seems quite feasible given the size of kereru (wingspan and length of tail) relative to the distance from a wire to a cross-arm. Possibilities include a kereru perched on a wire and touching the cross-arm with its tail, or doing similarly during landing or take-off. Any other explanations?

**2. Kereru flocks in Wellington**

**A. Kereru flock in Ngaio. – Hugh Robertson**

Kereru do indeed seem to be doing well (see Kereru News 63) - at the weekend (mid March) we had a flock of 16 fly over our garden near Trelissick Park, Wellington, and later I saw 14 hooning around while one sat on a nearby treetop, so there may have been more than 16 in the area if not all were flying each time. Karaka berries seem to be the main attraction, as well as some ngaio berries.

**B. Kereru flock in Korokoro – Lynette Clelland**

I counted 11 kereru in one ngaio tree in my backyard on Sunday (late March), with others flying around. By comparison, over the past 2-3 years just 2 or 3 kereru have been seen at once in my backyard.

**C. Other reports of kereru flocks in Wellington – Kereru Discovery Project news**

The newsletter includes details of seven reported kereru flocks seen in the greater Wellington area during 2007/08. See: [www.kererudiscovery.org.nz/Newsletter/Autumn2008KDPnewsletter.pdf](http://www.kererudiscovery.org.nz/Newsletter/Autumn2008KDPnewsletter.pdf)

**3. Bird deflector – Ralph Powlesland**

By chance I came across a web site (USA I think) that provides information about the construction and attachment of 'bird deflectors' to the outside of windows that can help reduce the incidence of birds flying into windows. The web site is: [http://wildliferescue.ws/volunteer/how\\_kids\\_can\\_help/](http://wildliferescue.ws/volunteer/how_kids_can_help/)

All you need are:

- A piece of string (long enough to hang from just above the window to about 1/3 from the bottom)
- A small pine cone (a large one might hit the window too hard in windy weather) or something of similar weight
- Strips of shiny silver paper or tin foil

Attach the pine cone, or alternative end weight, to one end of the string. Tie silver foil at c. 20 cm intervals along the string. Attach the string outside the window under the eaves above the window with tape, hook or whatever.

If you or a neighbour has a problem with kereru and/or other species flying into a window, and you put up one or more bird deflectors, it would be of interest to learn after a few months whether the devices have been effective or not in reducing or stopping birds flying into the window.

**4. Tui & kereru pamphlet – Ralph Powlesland**

Southland Conservancy, Department of Conservation, have produced a pamphlet for distribution to people in Southland making enquiries about a number of factors related to the conservation of tui and kereru in urban and rural areas entitled, Tui and Kereru: helping New Zealand icons in your backyard. While the information on the pamphlet has a Southland focus, much of it is relevant nationally. Information includes suggestions of ways to assist the conservation of these species, such as the preferred native food species to plant, removal of pest plants, how to control predators in urban areas, and contacts for further information on these topics and others. The pamphlet text is not available on the DOC website as yet so if you would like a copy of the information please send me your postal address.

**5. Kereru collision with the Maungatautari pest-proof fence surveillance wire – Chris Smuts-Kennedy**

On Easter Sunday (23 March) I came across a kereru at Maungatautari which had just flown into the single surveillance wire which is strung 150-200 mm above the pest-proof fence, thereby killing itself. It was still warm, and it wasn't there when I passed the site an hour or 2 beforehand (late morning). The wire had caught it under the neck and across the shoulder, causing a deep cut into the body cavity and much haemorrhaging in the chest. In the past a few other kereru (probably between 1 and 5) have also been found dead close to the pest-proof fence, and it had been assumed that they flew into the fence itself, but I wonder if at least some of them also got caught by the surveillance wire? One was seen to actually hit the fence mesh, bounce off with a cloud of feathers, and then fly away! The surveillance wire is simply an electric fence wire above the pest-proof fence which shorts out if something falls on it (e.g. a tree), and alerts us to the potential problem. It would be interesting if staff at other fenced sanctuaries had encountered kereru mortality caused by surveillance wires if they have a similar set up?

Once on Little Barrier Island when fencing, I left a single wire strung between strainers while I went to the house briefly and on my return a kereru had flown into that wire and killed itself. The wire had caught it at the base of the neck and opened the crop up, from which its last meal of foliage was spilling out (probably the coastal *Calystegia* which kereru were seen feeding on). So perhaps kereru have trouble seeing and avoiding single wires close to the ground, or close to the top of the fence in Maungatautari's case.

The Maungatautari bird seemed to be exceptionally heavy so I retrieved it for examination. In the table below I've compared its measurements with those recorded in Oliver 1955, HANZAB 1996, and DOC Technical Series No. 15 (Mander, Hay & Powlesland 1989) - males & females combined. The bill/wing/tail/tarsus measurements suggest it is a normal sized kereru (although the tarsus and tail are at the higher end of the range), but the weight is heavier than any recorded in the first 2 sources, and at the top end of the range in the last. The weight given in the description of kereru in the Field Guide (Heather & Robertson 1996) is 650 gms.

	<b>This M'tautari bird</b>	<b>Oliver</b>	<b>HANZAB</b>	<b>Mander, Hay &amp; Powlesland 1989</b>
<b>Bill</b>	16.9 mm	16.0-19.0	14.6-19.0	
<b>Wing</b>	260 mm	250-267 mm	247-273	
<b>Tail</b>	205 mm	190-205 mm	172-209	
<b>Tarsus</b>	38.8 mm	-	30.0-39.9 mm	
<b>Weight</b>	840g		567-795g	550-850g

Dissection of this bird revealed considerable visceral fat with a fresh tawa berry in the gullet, another half-processed in the gizzard, and several seeds in the alimentary tract. No gonads were obvious, so I can't tell you the sex. It seemed to be in the latter stages of full moult, with a few half-emerged pin feathers on the body, the upper tail coverts and the under wing coverts.

One might indeed expect kereru to be fat at this time of year, but this could be further evidence (following recent sightings of flocks around the mountain) that kereru might at present be doing rather well on Maungatautari, at this early stage of freedom from competition and predation by mammals. Even if the fence surveillance wire is taking out the odd kereru, one would think the overall benefit of the fence would far outweigh that mortality but it could be interesting to monitor the latter. Kereru were certainly noticeable doing display flights at Maungatautari around September 2007.

## **6. A couple of publications on kereru**

A. Wotton, D.M.; Clout, M.N.; Kelly, D. 2008. Seed retention times in the New Zealand pigeon, *Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*. NZ J. Ecol. 32 (1): in press (accessible via the NZ Ecological Society website, [www.nzes.org.nz/nzje](http://www.nzes.org.nz/nzje)).

Some of the abstract: We offered ripe fruits of tawa, taraire, and puriri to captive NZ pigeons and recorded seed retention times. We also recorded seed retention times while radio-tracking wild pigeons in Taranaki and Canterbury; tawa, puriri, miro, fivefinger and kahikatea seeds. Where data were available for the same plant species from wild and captive pigeons, retention times were similar. Seed retention time differed significantly among fruit species, and was positively related to seed weight. Mean retention times ranged from 37-45 min for the two smallest-seeded species (fivefinger and kahikatea) up to 109-181 min for the three largest species (puriri, taraire and tawa).

B. Lyver, P.O'B.; Taputu, Te M.; Kutia, S.T.; Tahi, B. 2008. Tuhoe Tuawhenua matauranga of kereru (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae novaeseelandiae*) in Te Urewera. NZ J. Ecol. 32 (1): in press (accessible via the NZ Ecological Society website, [www.nzes.org.nz/nzje](http://www.nzes.org.nz/nzje)).

Some of the abstract: Indigenous peoples' knowledge on changes in wildlife populations and explanations for these changes can inform current conservation and wildlife management systems. In this study, Tuhoe Tuawhenua interviewees provided matauranga (traditional knowledge) about a repertoire of visual, audible, and harvest-related indicators used to assess kereru abundance and condition in Te Urewera, New Zealand over the last 100 years. Metaphorical explanations for the decline in kereru included the loss of mana (authority and prestige) by the iwi over the kereru and forest, and the retraction of the kereru's mauri (life force) by Tane Mahuta. Interviewees reported that predation and interspecific competition with introduced species, variability in food supply, and loss of habitat were the principal biophysical mechanisms to have caused declines in kereru abundance. Long-term qualitative monitoring by Tuhoe Tuawhenua has the potential to guide the restoration of kereru and wider environmental management in Te Urewera. Allowing iwi the self-determination to make management decisions according to their matauranga (or science, if desired) is likely to lead to greater application of results and altered practices where required for sustainability.

## **7. A stay-at-home kereru – Kerry-Jayne Wilson**

An adult kereru (probably a male) that was colour banded (band No. K13859) at my place in Church Bay, Banks Peninsula on 22 January 2004 has been seen from time to time since, the most recent sighting being 23 December 2007. When banded it was eating cherry-plums in my garden, when last seen it was again eating cherry plums in a tree about 30 metres from the tree at which it was captured. When banded it was also fitted with a radio transmitter and for the 15 months the transmitter was active the bird was seldom more than a kilometre, and usually much less from the banding site. During those 15 months I had a receiver and whip antenna fitted up at home and each morning after breakfast I checked to see which of the five birds tagged in the bay were currently in Church Bay. This bird was seldom absent. Church Bay is a steep, deeply incised bay less than 1 km long and about 700m wide. The topography ensured that only birds within the confines of Church Bay could be received by the radio installed at home.