

KERERU NEWS No. 73 (7 October 2009)

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An email newsletter of views and information about and observations of kereru / kuku / kukupa / kokopa / New Zealand pigeon / parea / Chatham Islands pigeon

1. A publication that may be of interest

Worthy, T.H.; Hand, S.J.; Worthy, J.P.; Tennyson, A.J.D.; Scofield, R.P. 2009. A large fruit pigeon (Columbidae) from the early Miocene of New Zealand. *Auk*: 126: 649-656.

Abstract: We describe a new genus and species of pigeon (Columbiformes) from a single coracoid from the St Bathans fauna of New Zealand (16-19 mya). It is the first columbid species described from pre-Pliocene deposits in Australasia. Two apomorphies identify the fossil as belonging to the ptilinopine group of fruit pigeons, among which it is most similar to *Hemiphaga*, the large fruit pigeon currently endemic to the New Zealand biogeographic area. This reveals that the *Hemiphaga* lineage has been in New Zealand since the Early Miocene, which supports recent divergence-date estimates for *Hemiphaga* and its modern sister taxon (*Lopholaimus*) based on molecular data.

2. Parea population of southern Chatham Island continues to increase – Ralph Powlesland

The threat status of parea or Chatham Islands pigeon is presently listed as Nationally Critical (less than 250 mature individuals). Lynn Adams, Peter Dilks, Ian Flux & Ralph Powlesland, with assistance from Chatham Island Area Office staff members Abby Biltcliff & Nick Cameron, spent 27 July to 7 August 2009 involved in a re-survey of the parea population of some areas of southern Chatham Island. Since 1994, when intensive research on the species was completed, surveys have been carried at 4-5 year intervals. Surveys are carried out in years when the species is breeding, and at the start of the nesting season (July-August usually) because the pigeons are much more visible (sit on exposed perches, undertake display flights) compared with when not breeding. The forested areas chosen for surveying are mainly those readily accessible on foot or quad, and situated in valleys so that good views are available from hill- and ridge-tops. Also most areas are those that have been managed in some way for parea conservation, such as fenced to exclude farmed and/or feral stock, and/or subjected to cat and possum control.

In 1994 the number of parea counted in the Tuku, Awatotara, Kiringe and Waterfall areas was 76, which increased by 9% to 83 in 1999, then by 70% to 141 in 2005, and lastly by 66% to 234 this year. These figures are not the total numbers present because some pairs will have been nesting (incubating an egg or brooding a small chick); some changeovers at nests will have gone undetected and so such territories will have been considered to have been occupied by single birds when in fact pairs were present. However, the results show that there has been a good increase in the population over the past four years. Our thanks to the landowners, Liz and Bruce Tuanui, for access about their property to carry out the latest survey.

3. Kereru starving in Northland – from an article in the Dargaville & Districts News, 12 August 2009

“Native wood pigeons are starving to death in Northland and a record number have been taken to the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre. Manager Robert Webb says on average the centre receives up to 60 pigeons – kereru – a year but so far this year more than 80 have been taken in or picked up.”

“He says the number of pigeons has slowed down in the past week after 30 came in during one week about a fortnight ago. Tests were sent to Massey University to determine what was causing the influx of dying pigeons. Mr Webb says the reason why so many are ill is because there isn't enough food. They are starving to death he says. He says this would be because of a bumper

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breeding season last year that saw some pigeons having a second chick – usually pigeons only lay one egg. When the pigeon has a second chick, the first is left to fend for itself before it is ready. When there are twice as many chicks there isn't enough food to go around.”

4. Kereru Discovery Project newsletter – Hokimate Harwood

Have you seen the latest newsletter from the Kereru Discovery Project? If not use the link to access it:

http://www.kererudiscovery.org.nz/Newsletter/KDP_Newsletter_2009.pdf

5. Kereru flock at Moonshine Road, Wellington – Ian Flux

30 September we had over 50 kereru at the bottom of the drive. It was quite dramatic when they all got spooked by something and flew off; both the noise of wings and the sight of them all in the air. They're in feeding on broom and tree-lucerne flowers, as they do each year at this time. However this was the most I've ever seen here!

6. Growth and lice on a captive kereru – Nik Hurring & Ricardo Palmer

The bird had been held at the Kereru Rehab Facility in Dunedin since 2004. She was found fluffed up on the floor of the aviary on 25/09/2009 and was euthanased due to a large growth over the keel. Several lice were found on her and so some were collected and sent to Ricardo at Te Papa for identification. The bird was wild reared and was diagnosed with a fractured left coracoid on 21/10/2003. The fracture healed with a large callus, and she was deemed unfit for release. She flew around the aviary well and ate well, and showed no signs of disease until 25/09/2009.

Provisional diagnosis from Institute of Veterinary, Animal & Biomedical Sciences, Massey, Palmerston North:

There is a large mass within the pectoral muscles of the left sternum incorporating and partially destroying both the left coracoid and clavicle. It is likely that the mass was a fungal granuloma or a foreign body granuloma. Further tests are being performed to determine a diagnosis.

Ricardo identified the 2 lice from the bird as belonging to the genus *Hohorstiella*. Although he has plenty of this same species of louse from other kereru, he has not been able to identify the species with certainty. At first he thought it was a new species but now he believes it may be the same species that has been found on a species of the genus *Ducula* in Timor. He says this would make sense because that genus has been postulated as one of the closest relatives of *Hemiphaga* (see McEwen, W.M. 1978. The food of the New Zealand pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae novaeseelandiae*). New Zealand Journal of Ecology 1:99-108).