

SHORT NOTE

Feeding association of tui (*Prosthemadera n. novaeseelandiae*) with North Island kaka (*Nestor meridionalis septentrionalis*)

DAVID G. MEDWAY
25A Norman Street, New Plymouth, New Zealand.
dmedway@xtra.co.nz

Up to three North Island kaka (*Nestor meridionalis septentrionalis*) were present in Pukekura Park, New Plymouth from April to October 2003. On 8 August 2003 I watched two kaka as they searched the lower branches of a large holm oak (*Quercus ilex*). For 30 mins the kaka searched the trunks and branches of holm oaks, and of puriri (*Vitex lucens*), kauri (*Agathis australis*), five-finger (*Pseudopanax arboreus*) and lemonwood (*Pittosporum eugenioides*) trees, occasionally screeching softly as they did so. Throughout this period, they were accompanied by a tui (*Prosthemadera n. novaeseelandiae*) that was often only about a metre from them. On one occasion, a kaka split the end of a broken dead twig and then moved on. As soon as it had gone, the tui went to the twig and searched carefully around the end that the kaka had split.

On 20 August 2003 I saw a kaka silently searching the trunk and lower branches of an Australian blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*). It was accompanied closely by a tui. Five days later, I watched two kaka in the top of a tall totara (*Podocarpus totara*) making frequent soft whistles while they sat there, and also when they searched the branch on which they were standing and the leaves at its tip. Five tui associated closely with the kaka during this time, moving around within two or three metres of them, or sitting close by. After a few minutes, the kaka flew away through surrounding trees and all the tui followed them.

Kaka sometimes feed on sap, and often spend a lot of time foraging for insects and other invertebrates that they find by systematically searching the trunks and branches of trees, and by stripping bark and splitting dead twigs (Higgins 1999). The activity of the kaka I observed in Pukekura Park indicates they were searching for insects and other invertebrates rather than for sap which they would search for and obtain by the two distinct techniques described by O'Donnell & Dilks (1989). Therefore, my observations suggest that the tui associating with the kaka were doing so in the hope of obtaining any insects or other invertebrates that were uncovered or disturbed by the kaka but which had been missed by them.

I am not aware of any published records of tui associating with North Island kaka in this manner. The behaviour I observed is similar to the feeding association between fantails (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) and saddlebacks (*Philesturnus carunculatus*) where fantails follow saddlebacks to capture invertebrates disturbed but missed by them. McLean (1984) suggested that this feeding association may occur because the noisy feeding habits and loud vocalisations of saddlebacks make them easy for fantails to find.

Noise generated by the host bird may not always be an important factor in the tui - kaka association I have described. Kaka are often noisy in flight and when in feeding congregations, but otherwise are generally silent, particularly outside their breeding season. Solitary kaka, or a small group of them, are usually quiet while feeding.

LITERATURE CITED

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