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SHORT NOTE

Seasonal song development of a North Island Kokako

The song of a male North Island Kokako (*Callaeas cinerea wilsoni*) was periodically listened to 10 times between April 1981 and June 1982 at Puketū State Forest, Northland. This bird, affectionately referred to as the 'pet bird', is known by Forest Service staff to have inhabited a ridge with large kauri (*Agathis australis*), pate (*Schefflera digitata*), makamaka (*Ackuma rosaefolia*) and heketara (*Olearia ranii*) for at least the last seven years. His song was recorded in October 1979 by John Kendrick, Wildlife Service. When we played this recording back to the 'pet bird' during each visit, he responded instantly and excitedly. He either ran or hopped quickly through the undergrowth or flew, with laboured flapping, a distance of up to 100 metres to the nearest perch, 10 metres or so above the tape recorder. He puffed himself up and broke into a chorus of chattering and song accompanied by wing beating. It soon became obvious that his wide repertoire was 'programmed': he was able to join his own song exactly, along with the wing-flapping sequences, in complete synchronisation with the tape. Often he was a fraction of a second ahead of the taped version.

The only variable part of the song was the number of *ko* syllables at the end of the song sequence. This part varied through the seasons as follows:

April 1981	<i>kawl kawl ka ko . . . ko . . . ko</i>
May, June, July	<i>kawl kawl ka ko . . . ko</i>
October, November	<i>kawl kawl ka ko . . .</i>
December, January	<i>kawl kawl ka</i>
May, June 1982	<i>kawl kawl ka . . . ko . . . ko . . . ko</i>

Song is primarily under the control of sex hormones and is in general concerned with the reproductive cycle (Thorpe 1984, *Singing in Thomson, A.L., A new dictionary of birds*, Nelson). The variable aspect of this bird's song is therefore probably related to differing levels of testosterone in the blood as the breeding season progresses. Oliver (1955, *New Zealand birds*, Reed) noted that the main laying period for Kokako is November-December.

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