KUAKA

Welcome to the newsletter of the South Auckland Branch of Birds NZ

Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa

Issue 54 – **March 2024**

CONTENTS

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Greetings everyone, once again we are a little later than usual getting this month's Kuaka to you. Hopefully next month things will be back to normal.

On the left we have a kereru/NZ pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaseelandiae)*. On the right is a parea/Chatham Is pigeon (*Hemiphaga chathamensis). The* parea, at 800gm, is heavier than the kereru, it is also paler on the back and has a red bill with an orange tip.

Both are lovelyl but the parea has an extra 'umph' factor making it very handsome indeed.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday 9th April at 7.30pm

We have some interesting speakers coming up and note your diaries with the dates for the three censuses in June.

PROGRAMME FOR 2024

Monthly Meetings: held on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Papakura Croquet Club, 1 Chapel Street Papakura. Meetings start at 7:30. Visitors welcome. $3.00 donation to cover costs please

Apr 9	Monthly meeting	Adrian Riegan – will give us an update on the dotterels of Auckland's west coast and bring updated census maps for the Manukau
May 14	Monthly meeting	Sandra Anderson will talk on bird ecology and plant interactions
Jun 11	Monthly meeting	Alex Wilson will talk about the fairy tern captive breeding program
Jun 23	Manukau Harbour winter wader census and spoonbill survey – details TBA	
Jun 29	Coromandel winter wader census and spoonbill survey – details TBA	
Jun 30	Firth of Thames winter wader census and spoonbill survey – details TBA	

SPEAKER AT MARCH MEETING

Gaia Dell'Ariccia is a seabird scientist who works for Auckland Council. Her specialisation is monitoring and research work for the Council seabird regional restoration programme. The majority of seabirds in the region are considered 'at risk' or 'threatened' with extinction, so Council is stepping up with a seabird and shorebird monitoring and research programme – a first for local government.

The Council's programme began in late 2018 with funding through the Natural Environment Targeted Rate (NETR). The programme aims to improve the conservation status of Auckland's seabirds and shorebirds, and this will be accomplished by conducting much-needed monitoring to fill knowledge gaps around population health and breeding success and carrying out research relating to how the Council and its partners might go about restoring these bird populations.

The Council is collaborating with others to achieve these goals, having established partnerships with the University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland War Memorial Museum, Department of Conservation, the Northern New Zealand Seabird Trust, as well as various community groups keen to help out.

We had 15 people at our March meeting, when Gaia gave her talk: "A long term regional program to restore seabirds in Auckland". The Hauraki Gulf is an important area for seabirds - visited by 70 seabird species, 27 of which breed there. Of these, 16 species are endemic to NZ and 5 are locally endemic. Unfortunately, seabirds are the most threatened of all birds, due to habitat loss, predation, fisheries, climate change and pollution. However, they are rarely managed as they are difficulty to monitor – many breed on offshore islands, are nocturnal, nest underground, and have long, variable breeding. Years of data are needed.

Auckland Council's NETR covers pest management, disease management and marine ecology, and the Seabird Monitoring and Research programme falls under this. Its objectives are to

- Increase knowledge on the presence, health and trends of seabird populations
- Explore factors affecting population distributions and trends to advise management for protection
- Identify the most effective actions to restore ecosystems and seabird biodiversity

Species identified as 'at risk' or 'threatened' were prioritised according to whether there had been recent or ongoing monitoring, as well as other important interests, with the highest priority given to species with a major or partial knowledge gap, which included:

Black petrel/taiko have been monitored on Great Barrier Island for 28 years, but Little Barrier populations were less studied. Monitoring for the last three years has shown that while the number of burrows has increased, the breeding occupancy and success has declined. Deeper analysis of banding data is needed.

White-faced storm petrel/takahikare breed on Maria Island in The Noises, and on Burgess Island. They are very sensitive so can only be monitored using cameras, and are caught in mist nets for banding. Breeding success dropped for 2022/23 but showed an increase this year. The population is estimated at about 7000 birds.

Spotted shag/kawau tikitiki – a project has started to introduce these birds back to Otata in the Noises, using decoys, calls and fake guano. Some birds have returned but are not breeding there as yet.

80 study burrows have also been set up for monitoring of grey-faced petrel/oi and little penguin/korora.

Shag breeding colonies have been identified around the Auckland region and will be monitored, amidst increasing concern about the number of birds getting caught and killed in fishing gear. It is hoped that a survey can be done in October, when all species are likely to be breeding.

Shag sightings wanted, dead or alive.

In order to build a regional understanding of shag populations and their threats, the Auckland Council regional Seabird Programme is looking for observations of colonies and reports of dead birds for all the shag species that occur in our region.

If you see a colony of any shag species (or mixed), please record the coordinates (or take a screenshot of where you are on your phone), the date, the observer and, for each shag species present, the total number of nests, of empty nests, of adults and of chicks/juveniles present.

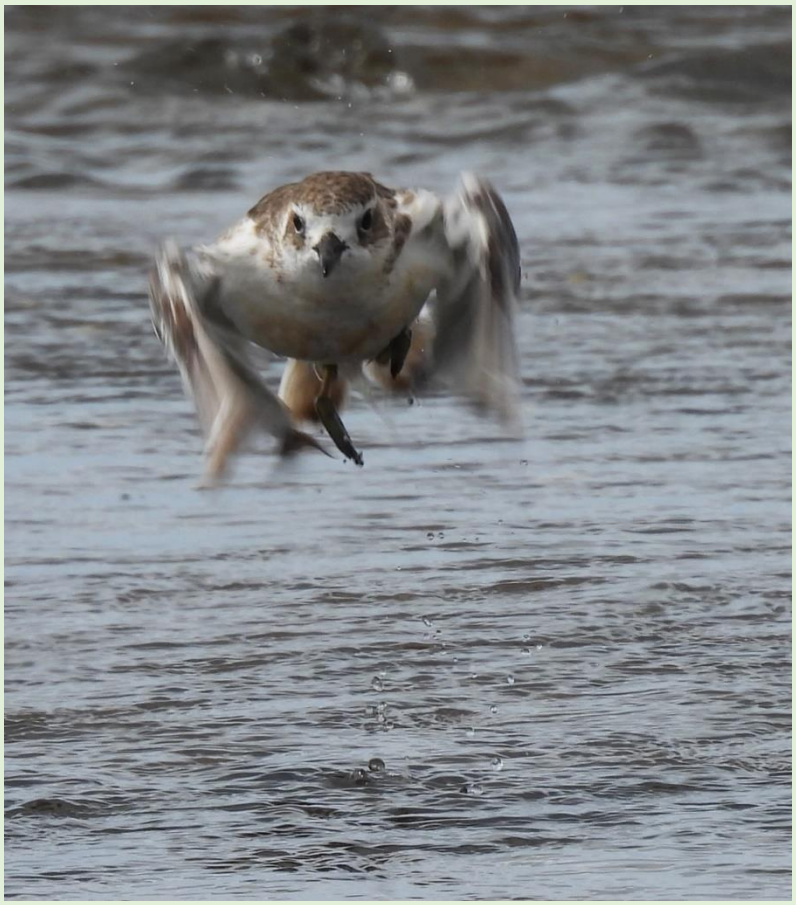
If you encounter a dead shag, please record the date, the location, the species (if recognisable) and if the bird was entangled in any fishing gear or any other apparent cause for the death. If possible, attach a photo, and add any other notes you think are relevant.

Send your sightings to: Gaia at gaia.dellariccia@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

SIGHTINGS

The following sightings were reported at the meeting:

- Shining cuckoos/pipiwharauroa were recently heard calling at Duders Beach and Ayrlies Wetland, and cuckoo young were seen being fed by grey warbler/riroriro at Maratoto and on the Coromandel.
- A long-tailed cuckoo/koekoea was heard at Maratoto
- A gull-billed tern and two glossy ibis were recently seen at Piako
- A harrier/kahu was seen holding then carrying away a pied stilt/poaka near Otara Creek weir
- A minimum of 12 kereru were seen `floating' around the totara groves at Mauku in early March, and 14 seen near Pukekohe



A great tuturiwhatu shot from our Awhitu correspondent (Kate)

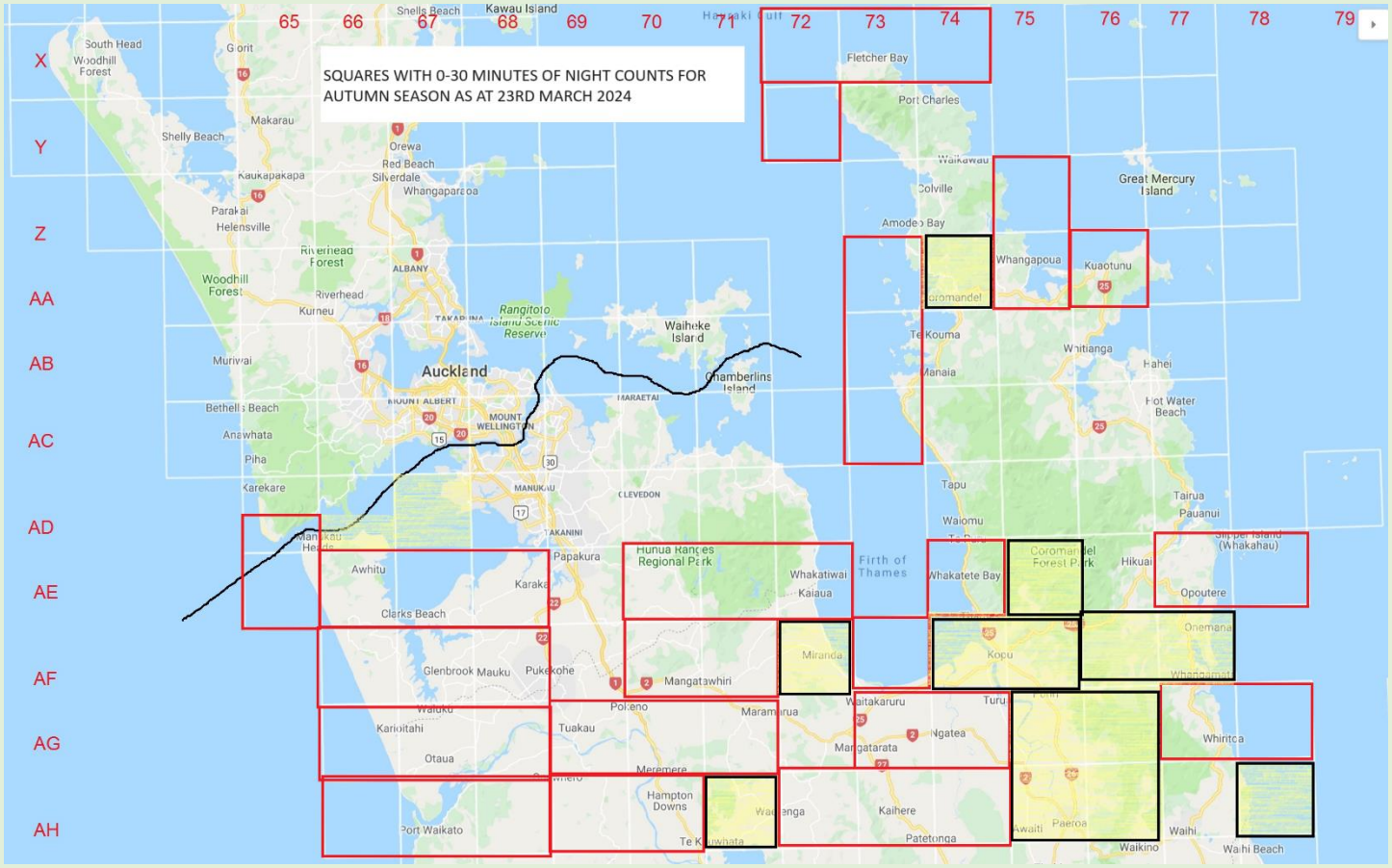
ATLAS REPORT

We have just over two months of the atlas project left to go, and a few of us plan to increase the daytime effort in some of the Coromandel and Hauraki squares. This month I have attached a map showing the nocturnal effort for autumn. Nocturnal checklists start earlier then 40 mins before sunrise, or later than 20 mins after sunset. With daylight saving finishing on Sunday 7th April, you will be able to count earlier in the evening.

The squares outlined in red on the map below have had no night counts done, and the yellow squares outlined in black have had 30 minutes effort or less. If you live in or visit one of these squares, it would be great if you could listen out for birds – hopefully morepork, but also other species such as spur-winged plover, pukeko or shorebirds flying over if you live near the coast.

Even if you see or hear nothing, let me know as that is also useful information. Make a note of the details below and send through to Sue:

- Exact location of sighting, Date, Start Time, duration of count, Species, Number of birds seen



THE ‘RELENTLESS’ NATIVE BIRD PREYING ON OTHER SPECIES

Stuff, 26 Jan 2024

Conservationists and biodiversity managers have suspected for some time the karoro (black-backed gull) was behaving as a predator to other native birds. Now bird counts in Hurunui and Kaikōura show the karoro is a predator to threatened ground nesting birds for a source of food, Environment Canterbury senior biodiversity advisor Heath Melville says.

The karoro are ‘‘a big, beautiful bird’’, but have been monitored attacking nesting colonies until complete failure by destroying eggs and taking young chicks for food. They are also known to attack newborn lambs and calves, and other vulnerable livestock. ‘‘We can certainly see the black backed gulls are relentless,’’ he said. ‘‘We have been doing some controls, but they are still returning to these sites to breed."

Environment Canterbury recently completed bird counts at the Waiau Uwha and Hurunui rivers in the Hurunui district, and the Clarence Waiau Toa and Charwell rivers and along the Kaikōura coastline. This was co-ordinated with bird counts conducted by DOC and other councils from across the South Island, to learn more about the karora and threatened native species nesting in colonies, primarily in braided riverbeds.

The Waiau Uwha braided river bird surveys have been completed eight times since 2008. The latest count produced a similar result to previous years, with native bird numbers trending down, while karoro and exotic species were trending upwards. In all, 45 bird species were identified in the Waiau Uwha survey, including native wrybill, white and black-fronted tern, and banded dotterel. The birds were also threatened by animals and humans, as well as climate change, habitat loss and weed infestations in riverbeds, leaving birds to nest in areas prone to high river flows.

The Kaikōura sites were added to the bird survey last year, after the Kaikōura Zone Committee agreed to fund control work of the karoro, provided staff engage with mana whenua. A Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura spokesperson said karoro eggs were traditionally collected as mahinga kai, but there was no need to manage the population prior to colonisation. The birds have expanded into areas where land use provides increased food sources, particularly braided rivers surrounded by farmland, and near landfills or refuse centres.

The Rūnanga was supportive of taking control measures, provided decisions were based on good data, the spokesperson said. ‘‘The biggest concern for Ngāti Kurī is having a clear understanding of what is going on. If the karoro is predating other native species in decline then we need to manage it. But what if we have a cull and then we have a disease go through the population, then we have contributed to wiping them out.’’

Kaikōura has the largest red billed gull colonies in NZ, while black-billed gulls, shags, terns, oystercatchers and dotterels were also surveyed breeding in the area. Bird counts were new in Kaikōura, aside from a 52 year study by local resident James Mills of red billed gulls on the Kaikōura Peninsula. This study has shown the red billed gull is in steady decline, despite predator control measures carried out by DOC.

The endangered red billed gulls were often considered a problem to outdoor diners, which has been exacerbated by declining food sources at sea, Melville said. ‘‘They get in people’s faces, take their eggs benny or their fish ’n chips because in many instances they are literally starving, whereas the karoro don’t tend to get so close, and are better adapted at foraging a more diverse diet in highly modified environments.’’

Melville said council staff will continue engaging with the Rūnanga, DOC, LINZ, Clarence River Rafting (which have been assisting in surveying nesting sites), researchers, and other councils and biodiversity managers to monitor the population and develop strategies to manage bird populations.

The karoro are proving to be a pest in other parts of the South Island. In Geraldine, DOC biodiversity senior ranger Ian Fraser said his office has been working to control karoro on local rivers over the last eight years. ‘‘We have been talking with [Te Rūnanga o] Arowhenua and they have been working with Environment Canterbury, identifying the potential of karoro eggs as mahinga kai and the Rūnanga has carried out some control work as well.’’

Fraser said land use changes over the last 1000 years had favoured karoro over other native birds. The clearing of forests have created open plains, while today’s farms offered plenty of food sources - ‘‘not to mention our waste facilities. We have altered the balance, so we need to try to meddle in good ways.’’

HUIA (A TAONGA)

Source: Aotearoa New Zealand History (Facebook)

The huia was the largest of the five Aotearoa New Zealand wattlebird species.

Maori named the bird after its loud distress call, described as "a smooth, unslurred whistle rendered as uia, uia, uia or where are you?" Of all Tane's children, the huia was the most sacred to Māori.

Other birds, such as the kōtuku (white heron) and amokura (red-tailed tropic bird) were also prized for their plumes, but huia was pre-eminent. In pre-European times only chiefs of high rank and their whānau wore the distinguished tail feathers in their hair.

Huia feathers signified more than rank. A marereko consisted of 12 tail feathers worn as a war plume. Feathers were also worn at tangi, and were used to decorate the heads of the deceased. The skins were dried and worn from the ears, and in some cases, a special flax headpiece was ornamented with huia heads, "the beaks of which, hanging down all around and coming into contact make a rattling sound as the wearer moves about. These are called 'pōtae huia' and no one but a woman of high rank would presume to wear one,"

It was a striking large songbird, mainly black with long white-tipped tail feathers. Female and male huia had dramatically different bill sizes and shapes; this was the most extreme sexual bill dimorphism of any bird species. A fleshy orange wattle hung at the base of each side of the bill, and was often held pressed under the chin.

Pre-human huia bone remains indicate it was common throughout the North Island but not from the South Island. Maori huia hunting was regulated to by traditional protocols. The main hunting season was from May to July, when the plumage was in peak condition. A rāhui, or ban, was enforced during the spring and summer breeding season, allowing numbers to build up.

Large areas of native forest containing huia were logged or burned in the 1800s to make way for farming, but this would have caused a modest range reduction rather than being a major contributor to their extinction. Huia was widespread but sparse after European settlement, in the eastern North Island from Huiarau south, with most records from the Ruahine, Tararua, and Rimutaka ranges and northern Wairarapa, also the hills around Wellington

No one could have realized the implications of presenting the elegant black-and-white feather to the Duke of York, then heir to the British throne, during his visit to NZ in 1901. Not the high-ranking Māori woman who took the quill from her own hair and placed it in the Duke's hatband; if she had, she would have chosen a different gift that day in Whakarewarewa. Nor the Duke, who, by wearing it, inadvertently set up a chain of events that sealed the extinction of NZ's most majestic forest bird, the huia.

Tail feathers became fashionable in Britain after the Duke of York was photographed wearing one during the 1901 visit to NZ. Overseas bird collectors and museums bought mounted specimens and tail feathers. Austrian naturalist Andreas Reischek took 212 pairs between 1877 and 1889. New Zealand naturalist Walter Buller recorded that 11 Maori hunters took 646 huia skins from the forest between Manawatu Gorge and Akitio during one month in 1863. Gilbert Mair recorded eating "a splendid stew of Huia, Kaka, Pigeons & Bacon" with Buller at a bush camp in Wairarapa, October 1883, after shooting 16 huia and capturing live birds. Thousands of huia were exported overseas. Two male manu kept at London Zoo in the 1880s died in captivity

Protection measures enacted in the 1890s were poorly enforced.

Plans to transfer huia to Kapiti and Little Barrier Island reserves never eventuated. A pair captured in 1893 for transfer to Little Barrier was acquired by Walter Buller and apparently sent to Baron Walter Rothschild in England.

A particularly tragic part in the huia's downfall was played by the European naturalists of the day. Having identified the bird as an avian wonder of the world, they set about harvesting them in large numbers for overseas museums and collectors. Where the men of science-led, unscrupulous traders followed. Pairs were stuffed and sold as drawing-room curios, and Pākehā men soon copied Māori customs by wearing huia feathers in their hatbands, even before the Duke of York's visit. Huia plumes were reduced from sacred treasures to fashion accessories. The price of tail feathers was soon pushed to £1, making each bird worth £12 (12 feathers per tail), and some feathers sold for as much as £5. Female huia beaks were also set in gold as jewellery.

Maori pre-1900s managed this taonga but the events of 1901 changed everything. The last accepted sighting was in 1907, but it is likely that a few huia persisted into the 1920s.

Call of the Huia:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsfuJgw-PvM
Please watch this video from Te Papa on Huia.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3ldOYF7dLs

Kororā Kōrero with NZ Penguin Initiative (NZPI) & Co.

Online Monthly Meeting- Next Meeting Wed 03 April

Thanks to all those that attended our first **Kororā Kōrero** during **Seaweek**, we had a great turn out and some good conversations! It was wonderful to put names to faces and hear about what's happening around the country. We showcased the NZPI dashboard and talked about what we have been up to with trying to tackle key threats. Groups shared information about how their latest breeding season went, ranging from poor or okay to pretty good and they also raised some questions about specific challenges within their colonies.

We asked everyone to describe our precious Kororā in one word- *Fascinating, Cute, Adorable, Puzzling, Smelly, Feisty, Angry, Noisy, Determined and No Rules!*

Join us for a casual chat over lunch to discuss all things penguin!

A great chance to network and get to know other penguin heroes, share updates/stories, compare angry penguins, nest box success rates, ask questions, give advice/tips to make achieving kororā conservation- a little easier on everyone!

Penguins certainly keep us guessing and perhaps you have an amazing idea that may could help improve field work practices, can problem solve threats or improve policy changes?! or maybe you just need to share your frustration- we promise, you are not alone!

We'll try our best to have a topic to discuss but we'd really like this to be an open platform for conversation.

Open to anyone involved with penguins (not just kororā) and/or wanting to learn more....

1st Wednesday of Every Month 12-1pm Via ZOOM

Send us any specific questions or topics you'd like discussed in detail to admin@nzpi.nz or fill out on the Registration Form Questionnaire

Please click the button below to register your attendance and we will send an email confirmation with the meeting details

Please Register Here

New Zealand Penguin Initiative, Epworth House, 75 Taranaki Street, Wellington, NZ

Spotted shag at 'shag point' on the Firth of Thames
(photo: Michael C)

NEED FOR SPEED: HOW HUMMINGBIRDS SWITCH MENTAL GEARS IN FLIGHT

Date: January 11, 2024 *Source:* University of British Columbia

Hummingbirds use two distinct sensory strategies to control their flight, depending on whether they're hovering or in forward motion, according to new research by University of British Columbia (UBC) zoologists.

"When in forward fight, hummingbirds rely on what we call an 'internal forward model' -- almost an ingrained, intuitive autopilot -- to gauge speed," says Dr. Vikram B. Baliga, lead author of a new study on hummingbird locomotion published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B.

"There's just too much information coming in to rely directly on every visual cue from your surroundings. But when hovering or dealing with cues that might require a change in altitude, we found they rely much more on real-time, direct visual feedback from their environment."

The findings not only provide insights on how the tiny, agile birds perceive the world during transitions in flight, but could inform the programming of onboard navigation for next generation autonomous flying and hovering vehicles.

Hummingbird flight recorder

The researchers had hummingbirds perform repeated flights from a perch to a feeder in a four-metre tunnel. To test how the birds reacted to a variety of visual stimuli, the team projected patterns on the chamber's front and side walls. Each flight was videoed.

In some scenarios, the researchers projected vertical stripes moving at various speeds on the side walls to mimic degrees of forward motion. Sometimes, horizontal stripes on the side mimicked changes in altitude. On the front wall, the researchers projected rotating swirls, designed to create the illusion of a change in position.

"If the birds were taking their cues directly from visual stimuli, we'd expect them to adjust their forward velocity to the speed of vertical stripes on the side walls," says Dr. Baliga. "But while the birds did change velocity or stop altogether depending on the patterns, there wasn't a neat correlation."

However, during flight, the hummingbirds did adjust more directly to stimuli indicating a change in altitude. And during hovering, the birds also worked to adjust their position much more closely to shifting spirals the research team projected on the front wall. "Our experiments were designed to investigate how hummingbirds control flight speed," says Dr. Doug Altshuler, senior author on the paper. "But because the hummingbirds took spontaneous breaks to hover during their flights, we uncovered these two distinct strategies to control different aspects of their trajectories."

University of British Columbia. "Need for speed: How hummingbirds switch mental gears in flight." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 11 January 2024. <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/01/240111113038.htm>. *Note: Content edited for style and length.*

Hope you enjoyed the read. Don't forget to check out our Facebook page