

# KUAKA



*It was a huge mistake to take the woodpecker with us...*

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

Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa

Issue 70 – **AUGUST 2025**

### CONTENTS

- 🚩 Programme for next few months
- 🚩 Guest contributor
- 🚩 Local sightings
- 🚩 Koekoea/long tailed cuckoo
- 🚩 The Indonesiaian songbird trade
- 🚩 Great matuku-hurepo/bittern muster
- 🚩 Avian malaria in Hawaii
- 🚩 Underestimation of bio-diversity

Greetings *Kuaka* readers, welcome to the 70<sup>th</sup> issue.

We commenced publication in April 2020 with a 12-page newsletter. As it was during covid, the issue mainly consisted of photos and articles off the internet. I have included a couple of the photos in this issue, including the joke above.

The photo on the L above is a new photo. It is an eastern curlew in amongst SIPO and was photo'd by our member Bevan Walker whilst near Kaiaua. Great photo, thank you Bevan

**Our next meeting will be on Tuesday  
September 9 at 7.30pm**

If you have any suggestions for future topics for this newsletter, do let us know. Photos are very welcome.

**Editor:** Wendy Goad  
**Regional Representative:** Sue Frostick.  
09 2672495 [suefro@xtra.co.nz](mailto:suefro@xtra.co.nz)

## PROGRAMME FOR 2025

**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

<b>Sep 9</b>	Monthly meeting	Sue Frostick will talk about the birds seen on her trip to Darwin and Broome
<b>Oct</b>	Monthly meeting	Ellen Webb 'Nest Protection of tara iti/NZ fairy tern'
<b>Nov</b>	Monthly meeting	Jacinda Woolly 'An overview of Auckland Councils bird monitoring and survey work'

---

## ***SPEAKER FOR AUGUST***

---

There was no speaker this month, instead we shared birding tales, photos and videos.

---

## ***BY INVITATION***

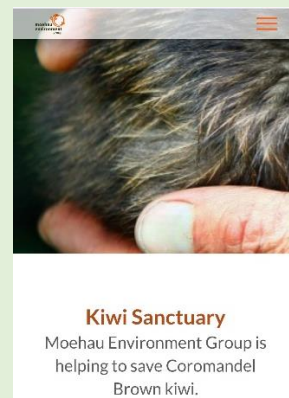
---

Whilst we have no speaker to report on this month we do have an article from an invited contributor, Steph from the Moehau Environment Group.

Thanks very much for the opportunity to tell you a little about our conservation efforts on the Coromandel Peninsula.

When Moehau Environment Group (MEG) first started in 2000, kiwi were in trouble on the peninsula. Only isolated populations remained, largely because of predation and habitat loss, and only 5% survival of chicks. The early transmitter studies of kiwi populations revealed they can roam great distances when looking for new territory. One, nicknamed Baggins, walked all the way from Moehau at the northern end of the Peninsula to Kennedy Bay in the east and back across to Papa Aroha on the west. From this, we learned if we were going to help our kiwi recover, we needed to work over a landscape scale.

Our MEG Kiwi sanctuary currently covers 16,000 hectares of northern Coromandel from around Kapanga/Coromandel Town and up to Sandy Bay, where a network of stoat traps is checked and serviced



monthly. The sanctuary was started to support the kiwi protection on Moehau run by DOC, in total over 30,000 ha of land has predator control, aimed at stoats in particular: they are the number one threat to our Coromandel kiwi. Ferrets are a threat too, but so far, we seem to have fewer ferrets than stoats in our northern region of Coromandel.

Thanks to the dedication of many trappers, we have some good news. Kiwi listening surveys carried out each winter at nine sites have shown generally increasing numbers of kiwi in the region of our trapping since our records began in 2004. This year we are repeating a much larger survey of over 50 sites and are looking forward to seeing the results. Many listeners have heard kiwi, and some even got to see the birds come right up to them!

When the small group of locals first met with the idea of “doing a bit of volunteer work to look after the environment” they never guessed that their idea would grow into Moehau Environment Group as it is today. We employ a small field team for track maintenance and to do the harder trapping work. We intensively trap a “MEGa Pest Attack Sanctuary” of 450 hectares of regenerating forest (it is an unfenced sanctuary like a marine reserve) targeting multiple pests and keeping rats and possums below 5% in monitoring. This benefits birds like miromiro/tomtit, helps kiwi find enough food to grow larger quicker, and helps seedling success, and survival of insects, frogs, lizards, and rare Coromandel striped gecko in the ngahere.



Photo: Dianne Prince

We also protect the Waikawau wetland, which is home to critically endangered matukuhurepo/bittern and a vibrant koroatito/fernbird population. The predators are rats, cats, stoats, weasels, possums and ferrets.

Coastal pohutukawa are being protected from possum browsing with a network of self-resetting traps. By partnering with local schools in planting days and running a Summer Holiday Programme, MEG helps foster the next generation's love and passion for their environment.

We'd love you to keep in touch on Facebook or Instagram to show you what we get up to, and hopefully you might make it to one of our winter lectures or a summer holiday programme event!

Contact us [info@meg.org.nz](mailto:info@meg.org.nz) to go on our mailing list or become a member [www.meg.org.nz](http://www.meg.org.nz)

<https://www.facebook.com/moehauenvironmentgroup/>

[https://www.instagram.com/moehau\\_environment\\_group/](https://www.instagram.com/moehau_environment_group/)



---

## RR REPORT

---

There is no RR report for this month. Sue is away enjoying warmer weather, and birding, in the Northern Territory

---

## SIGHTINGS

---

- Starlings are starting to bring new nest material to their nest boxes
- The editor has a thrush sitting on a nest
- Skylarks/kairaka and kahu/harriers are calling
- No kuruwhengi/shoveller were seen on the Tuakau oxidation ponds during a recent visit to count them
- Goldfinch/kourarini flocks are still being observed, and yellowhammers/hurukowhai are also present
- Mallard/rakiraki chicks have been sighted
- Sightings from a recent visit to Kidds included semi-palmated plover, stint, tuturuatu/shore plover, 66 taranui/Caspian terns and 37 kotuku ngutu papa/spoonies
- Four pateke/brown teal were spotted during a visit to the Puhinui Reserve
- 45 cattle egret are currently in the paddocks around Maioro
- 130 SIPO in the paddocks at Hoods Landing, along with two taranui/Caspian terns

Several months ago, a flock of 333 sparrows/tiu was counted at Aka Aka. Now, with maize silage being fed to the cows, the count of sparrows is in the thousands, along with large numbers of starlings and mynas. Also present are large numbers of kereru feeding in the paddocks behind the cows.



Sculpture located near the Woodville end of the Te Ahu a Turanga – Manawatu Tararua Highway (formally SH3).

From the top we have: huia, moa, and koekoeko/long tailed cuckoo (which could also be extinct in the not-too-distant future -see article below).

(the editor's photo)



---

## KOEKOEĀ/LONG TAILED CUCKOO

---



Koekoeā/long tailed cuckoo are declining and Manaaki Whenua/Landcare Research are working with DOC to better understand the threats to hopefully reverse their decline. While they breed in NZ, in the winter they migrate north for up to 6000km to scattered islands in the Pacific. Currently, 13 koekoea have been fitted with trackers.

A part of this study is using genomics tools to estimate the current population size and gene flow

For more details go to:

<https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/discover-our-research/restoring-ecosystems/koekoea-quest-uncovering-secrets-of-the-long-tailed-cuckoo/>

between remaining populations across the country. A total of eight dead specimens of koekoeā have been collected. An extra point from this project was the finding of a dead pallid cuckoo.

### WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

Koekoeā have an unfortunate habit of flying into windows, especially when they are on migration in spring and autumn, meaning they can be found dead or injured near buildings almost anywhere in NZ. Samples from these birds are a valuable contribution to research – only a small amount of tissue is needed, and the rest of the specimen is made available to iwi or museums.

If you find an injured koekoeā, please phone **0800 DOC HOT (0800 362 468)**, or contact your nearest DOC office or native bird rescue. Then, please let Manaaki Whenua know too so they can liaise with DOC.

If you find a freshly-dead koekoeā, please put it in a plastic bag, freeze it, and contact Neil Fitzgerald [fitzgeraldn@landcareresearch.co.nz](mailto:fitzgeraldn@landcareresearch.co.nz) as soon as possible.



In a haybarn on the Parry farm at Aka Aka a mallard has set up her nest (with ten eggs) in a nice warm, dry, sheltered spot, safe from kahu.

You can't see her in the photo, but below is a hint as to where her nest is located. Mum stays put when the tractor comes in to remove bales, but is making feeding out a bit more difficult.



## HAWAIIAN HONEYEATERS & AVIAN MALARIA



Hawaiian honeycreepers are vanishing due to avian malaria; a deadly disease spread by invasive mosquitoes. To try and stop it, scientists are releasing male mosquitos infected with bacteria that ensure any eggs laid by a female who mates with one of those males, will not hatch.

The mosquitoes are dropped inside small, cylindrical, biodegradable containers. Since the project started in 2023 more than 40 million males have been released. It will take several years for any benefit to be seen.

This is the first known use of the Incompatible Insect Technique (IIT) for conservation and it may be the only way to save birds like the kiwikiu. The goal isn't just to buy time. Its to give honeycreepers a real chance to rebuild - and maybe, eventually evolve resistance to the disease.

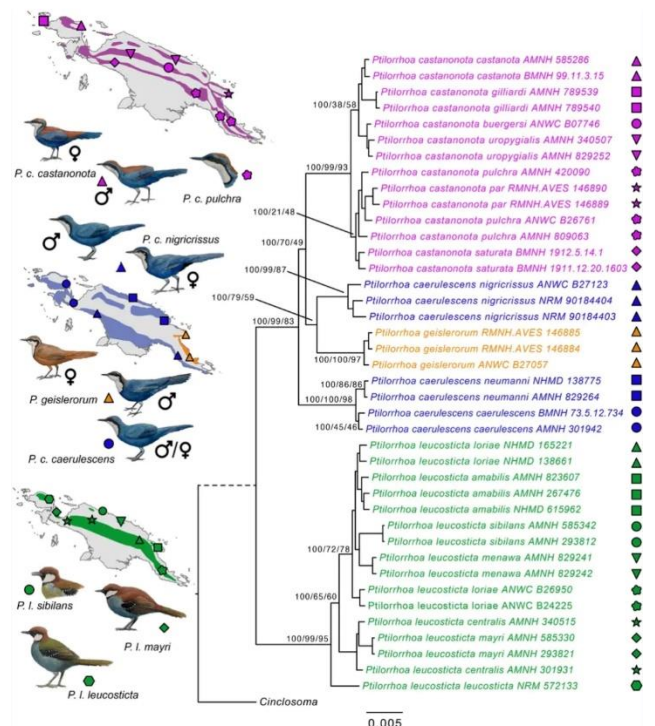
Source: Smithsonian *magazine*, June 16, 2025  
[www.smithsonianmag.com](http://www.smithsonianmag.com)

## UNDERESTIMATION OF BIODIVERSITY

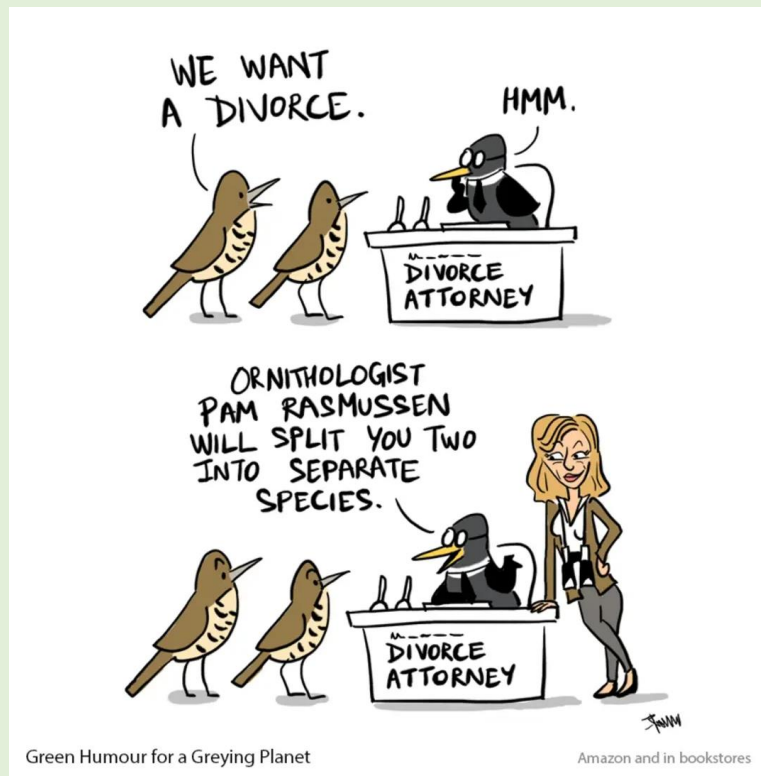
Birds have fascinated people for centuries and are among the best studied organisms to date. However, even among birds, there are still groups where we may have a poor understanding of true diversity. This Biology Letters paper combines advanced genetic methods and museum collections to study the species diversity of jewel-babblers from New Guinea. Sub-species, that were considered to be closely related, are in fact distinct species and plumage similarity is a poor proxy for species relatedness. These insights emphasise that biodiversity remains underestimated, even in well-known groups such as birds, and that this is particularly relevant for Tropical flora and fauna.

Read the full Biology Letters paper here: <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsbl.2024.0611>

(See cartoon on next page)







---

## THE GREAT MATUKU-HUREPO/BITTERN MUSTER

---



It's time to join the Muster - we're counting on you to help record male Bittern booming at a wetland near you in our second nationwide synchronised count. This year's Muster dates are on or near 5,6,7 Sep | 3,4,5 Oct, | 7,8,9 Nov 2025. Groups can join us for 1, 2, or 3 nights for 1,2 or 3 months.

We are asking groups to get settled at their listening sites before sunset and to listen for 60-90minutes after sunset. Individuals are encouraged to join a group and each group will have a coordinator looking after their team and project area.

Last year was the first ever nationwide synchronised count! It was a huge success; we had 512 people listen at 462 stations and count 223 individual male bittern booming! We think we need to double our efforts in wetlands across Aotearoa and need more boots on the ground to help!

Please register your group on our website or by email to [lovebittern@gmail.com](mailto:lovebittern@gmail.com) - let us know if you need any help!

Website: [www.lovebittern.com](http://www.lovebittern.com)



**Birds New Zealand**

8h • 🌐

Congratulations to Wellington Birds New Zealand member Vandy Pollard who recently won first prize in the 2025 New Zealand Garden Bird Survey photographic competition for this photo of a pair of Tauhou Silvereyes which she took in her garden.



---

## *INSIDE THE INDONESIAN SONGBIRD TRADE*

---



Orange headed thrush

This is an abridged version of an article from the Cornell Lab's All About Birds, issue Sept 24. It discusses the booming caged songbird trade in Indonesia, particularly on the island of Java, highlighting its cultural significance, economic impact, and conservation challenges.

Demand for caged songbirds is surging in Indonesia, particularly in Java, where bird-singing contests have become a cultural phenomenon. These events attract large crowds and significant financial rewards for winners, highlighting the deep-rooted tradition

of bird-keeping in the region. It's not just a hobby, the tradition has cultural significance, with an estimated 70 million birds kept in 12 million homes in Java. It is a cultural expression that fosters community and family ties.

Many bird-keepers view their birds as family members investing significant time and resources into their care. Birds like children, taken on trips and celebrating their achievements. The tradition has been passed down through generations, creating specialized communities around specific bird species.

The booming demand for songbirds has led to significant environmental concerns, including the risk of extinction for many species. The trade primarily relies on wild birds, exacerbating the decline of native populations.

- At least 43 songbird species are at increased risk of extinction due to trade pressures in SE Asia.
- Many forests in Java are now depleted of wild birds, prompting a rise in captive-breeding operations.
- Poaching has increased on other Indonesian islands to meet the demand for wild birds, despite the environmental consequences. The Bali myna is a victim of this trade.

Bird-keeping has evolved into a lucrative industry in Indonesia, contributing significantly to the local economy. The sector encompasses various businesses, from breeding to selling bird-related products and is estimated to



be worth trillions of rupiah and provides jobs in various areas, including selling food, medicine, and cages. During the Covid-19 pandemic, demand for birds surged as people sought new hobbies, benefiting sellers like Yanti, who successfully put her children through college from her bird sales.

The rise of bird-keeping poses challenges for conservation efforts, as many prioritize economic benefits over sustainability. There is a growing need to balance tradition with environmental protection.

- Experts express concern that many bird-keepers focus solely on profit, neglecting the sustainability of bird populations.
- Conservation strategies are complicated by the commercial interests of breeders, who may not prioritize the reintroduction of birds to the wild.
- The government faces pressure to reconcile economic growth with environmental conservation, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach.

The future of bird-keeping in Indonesia remains uncertain, with ongoing debates about its impact on wildlife and the environment. The country must navigate the complexities of tradition, economic growth, and conservation. There are more species of songbirds in global trade than any other bird group, with fewer protections from international trade authorities. Ecotourism is emerging as a potential alternative to bird-keeping, offering a way to appreciate wildlife without exploitation. The challenge lies in changing public perception and practices to prioritize environmental sustainability alongside cultural traditions.

(Source: Cornell Lab. All About Birds, Sept 24)



Cages holding Chinese Hwamei (smuggled for the bird trade)



## Thanks for reading Kuaka issue #70, AUGUST 2025

If you would like to contribute to our newsletter - whether you just want to supply a drawing or photo, or maybe even an article or two – just drop an email to the editor.

© Copyright Birds New Zealand South Auckland 2025

## Don't forget our Facebook page

