

Nga Mokopuna o Tāne – FAUNA

Fauna – Introduction

This section follows on from the last and looks more specifically at the animals and insects that inhabit the domain of Tānemahuta. The manu or birds are prolific in the history of Aotearoa. At one time, before the introduction of predators including man, our islands were home to many species of birds, reptiles and insects. Marine birds would number in the billions having few natural predators. The early Māori were responsible for the extinction of several species of bird-life including the well-known Mōa. The Māori quickly learnt the meaning ‘conservation’ when they realised that their survival depended on sustaining animal populations. Eventually the Māori became very familiar with the children of Tāne and adopted certain animals as their kaitiaki or guardians, weaving their stories into the tales and myths we know today.

Manu

Birds are the couriers of the forest. They feed on the ripe berries of one tree and then fly to another distributing fertile seeds as they move between trees. Through this self-serving act the bird assists in the rejuvenation of the tree species it has eaten from. In order to live a bird must follow an annual route from one seasonal area to another. The journey may require flights of several kilometres. The bird knows what berries will be ripe at a certain time of the year so that it may follow a course that takes in mountains, plains and hills.

The people of Ngāti Hāmua had studied the feeding patterns of birds such as the kereru and huia. Birds were a key part of their diet so they needed to have expert knowledge in the habits of the birds. The job of the tohunga and kaumātua was to determine how many birds should be killed in any one year without jeopardising the ongoing regeneration of those birds. The key consideration for tohunga was to sanction how many birds would be caught. He had to find a balance between the immediate needs of the people and sustainable management of the birds. Taking too many birds in the current year could mean a shortage in subsequent years. Other factors that figured into this sustainability equation were the health of the tree upon which the bird fed. If the tree was cut down or died the birds would not return. If other parts of a forest were destroyed would the tree remain healthy, producing enough berries, in an isolated state? If a food crop had failed to produce planned amounts could they afford to take extra birds for that year?

The feathers of certain birds were used to identify rank among groups of people. In other cases it was the colour of the feathers that announced a person’s standing to those he or she met. The chiefs of Ngāti Hāmua wore a single feather of the now extinct huia in their hair while their relations from Ngai Tumapuhia a rangi in the Kaihoata Valley, on the Wairarapa coast, wore the plume of the albatross (toroa).

Possibly the most prized feathers of all were those of the kotuku or white heron. The feathers were called Whitiri with the largest plumes being termed Whitiripapa. Feathers of the kotuku were prized items for trade. This bird was a rare visitor to New Zealand so its feathers were in short supply but demand for them was very high.

Korowai or cloaks worn around the shoulders served a dual purpose. The first was that korowai were practical in that they provided warmth. The second use was found in the patterns that were present within the materials used to make the cloak. Red was the sign of a chief so a korowai that had a line of red feathers going around the cloak near the top of the garment identified a person of high rank.

When walking from one place to another everyone in a group would look out for and pick up feathers. At other times small groups would be sent into the forests during the moulting season to gather feathers.

He Whakatauki (Māori Proverb)

“Ka tangi te Titi, ka tangi te Kaka, ka tangi hoki ahau”

“The Mutton bird sings, the Kaka sings, I too wish to speak”

He Whakatauki (Māori Proverb)

“E koekoe te tui, e ketekete te kaka e kutu te kereru”

“The tui sings, the kaka chatters, the pigeon coos”

(A proverb about diversity)

Hūia

Up until the mid-1800s hūia were found in prolific numbers in the forested areas of the Wairarapa. The clearing of forest to make way for agriculture and over-hunting by early settlers was the main contributing factor to the extinction of the hūia.

The hūia is the only bird to develop different sized and shaped beaks in the male and female. The male's beak was short, straight and strong to chisel rotten wood to locate grubs. The female's beak was long, slender and curved so that it could get to grubs in wood where the male could not reach.

Our old people used the prized feathers of the hūia and also ate the bird when necessary



Ruru

Morepork would be trained to act as lookouts to warn of approaching people especially those that were unfamiliar. The morepork would sit high in trees where they could see what was happening below them. They were taught to let out three different kinds of warning for those they were protecting.

If people well known to the bird were walking to the pa a soft coo would be emitted, if the people were unfamiliar or strangers who were not geared for war approached a louder noise was given. Finally if it were obvious that a war party was going to attack a high pitched continuous screech would warn of the impending threat.

Some local families believe the morepork to be a kaitiaki, something that looks out for their well being as above. Other families believe that morepork signal that a death is about to occur, even if the bird is not seen, a *hoot hoot* heard in the darkness is enough to cause worry.

Pet ruru were taken into battle but if the bird screeched while approaching the enemies position the taua or war party would turn around and return home. The screech of the ruru was a sign of certain defeat.

Moa

Our people contributed to the extinction of the giant flightless birds called moa. The extinction of the moa taught our ancestors a very valuable lesson. They realised that if you over exploit an animal to the point that it no longer exists you will put your own survival in danger. This and other valuable lessons provided great motivation for becoming better conservators.

Moa remains have been found in a number of places throughout the Wairarapa.

Tui pictured left

Kererū

The kererū or native wood pigeon (right) was a prized food caught by our tupuna in the summer when the berries were ripest and the birds plumpest. Kererū were caught by snares or speared in the trees that they visited every year. Sometimes the kererū were so full and plump after feasting on berries that all the hunter had to do was to poke it or push it off a branch and it would fall to the ground.

One way to cook kererū was to encase the whole bird in clay and then place it in an open fire. When the clay cracked open the bird was ready. The feathers stuck to the inside of the clay while the intestine shrunk away. Kererū fat was used to as a preservative to store other food in.



Kereru pictured right



Photo (above) Pīwaiwaka or NZ Fantail

Kahu

Kahu are native hawks, birds of prey that are often seen on roads in the countryside either hunting or eating other animals killed by motor vehicles.

The ancestor Haunuiānaia, he that named Wairarapa Moana and Rangitūmau Maunga, had a kaitiaki (guardian) called Rongomai that was a giant hawk.

At Glenburn Station on the mid coastal area of the Wairarapa there is a large rock off the coastline called Kahu Rock. It is so named because from the hills, the waves that pass the rock spread out and away like the wings of a bird and the image resembles a hawk with its wings spread out ready to fly.

Pīwaiwaka

The Pīwaiwaka or Fantail is common throughout New Zealand. When walking through the bush you'll notice them flitting around feeding on insects disturbed by your movement.

Different tribes have different superstitions about the fantail. Some believe that a fantail inside your house is a bad omen meaning that a death has occurred. Others believe that it is a sign of good fortune.

OTHER ANIMALS

Kiore

The Polynesian Bush Rat – kiore, was caught in the forested hill areas around Masterton. At Okurupatu, north of Te Oreore Marae there were particularly good spots for rat catching. There are several places down Caves Road that were Ngāti Hāmua rat catching areas.

There also used to be a track that ran along the northern side of Taumataraiia Hill near Taueru, east of Masterton. The old people would walk along this track on their way to and from the coast. On the other side of the hill was the Taueru River where the walking was easier due to the flat river terraces. Those using the track went along the more heavily forested northern side because this not only provided more cover but also held more food including kiore.

The kiore would stick to favourite paths or rat runs. Traps would be dug into the ground along the tops of hills or beside these runs to capture the rats. These runs were allocated to specific whanau or hapū.

Mokomoko

To see a lizard or a mokomoko is fine but to witness one cry like a new born baby is said to be a bad omen. As unusual as it sounds, lizards have been witnessed making a crying noise after which the person who saw this happening has died within days.

Pungāwerewere (spider)

Tangata whenua would protect spiders' webs that were spun across tracks. The purpose of the webs was to indicate whether strangers had been using the track. Periodically a scouting party would be sent out to check whether any of the webs had been broken. Only strangers or hostile parties would have secretly passed through land belonging to another hapū. If the signs of human movement were fresh the scouts would pursue the strangers to ascertain their intentions.

Kurī (Polynesian Dog)

The kurī has been a constant companion to people throughout the ages and our people were no exception. The humble kurī did serve other purposes though such as being made into cloaks. The Okurupatu Hills above Te Oreore were named after the neck portion of a dog's skin.

The name Kurīpuni, a suburb in Masterton, is translated to mean a 'greedy dog' or a 'constipated dog'.

The most famous dog in local history was the companion of the prophet Paora Potangaroa. This three-legged dog accompanied Paora as he canoed down the Ruamahanga River as the prophet travelled to each marae or whare giving blessings to all the people.

Quick quiz – Fauna

1. From which bird did the Ngāti Hāmua take a feather to wear in their hair?
2. According to a whakatauki (proverb), which bird sang which one chattered and which one cooed?
3. What was this proverb illustrating?
4. What are the common names for these birds – Kererū, Pīwaiwaka, Kahu and the Ruru?
5. What types of animals were caught for eating near Okurupatu?
6. What suburb of Masterton translates to mean 'a greedy dog'?

Answers at the back of booklet

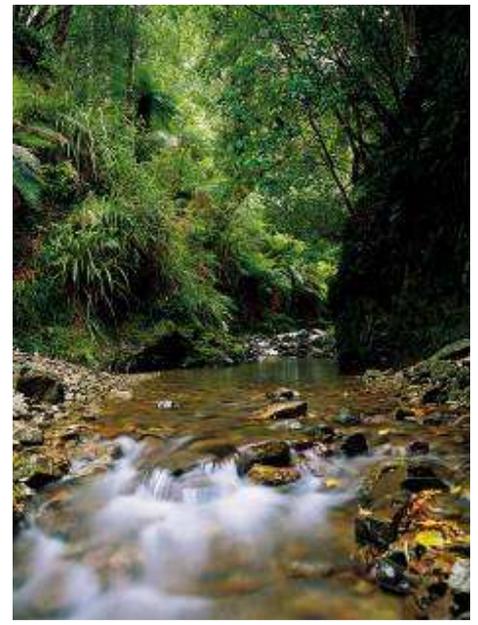
Key Points – Fauna

- Aotearoa was host to many species of birds before the arrival of predators and man;
- Through the extinction of the Moa and other species, the Māori learnt the concept of conservation; and
- Hapū and whanau adopted specific creatures as their kaitiaki.

WAI TAPU – WATERWAYS

Wai Tapu – Waterways – Introduction

Water was described as wai ora (water of health) that in general represented the lifeblood of Papatūānuku. A spring that was used for medicinal purposes could also be called wai ora. There were also wai tapu (sacred waters) where birth, death and cleansing rites such as cleaning after childbirth or washing a body after death took place. The same location was always used and only specific people were allowed there at the appropriate time. Wai kino (evil or dangerous water) could be a hazardous piece of water that for some reason had claimed lives or a place where someone had been slain or died through an accident. Sometimes burial caves were found under water and were declared tapu or kino to retain their sanctity.



Akatarawa Stream pictured right

Wai Tapu

The inland waterways included rivers, swamps, coastal wetlands, streams and lakes. Our tupuna knew that each piece of water held numerous species within its confines, each one was a part of a big jigsaw that had to be kept intact. On the banks of each watercourse were plants that assisted to maintain the health of the water. The roots of trees kept banks stable so that excessive sediment did not deoxygenate the water, over-hanging branches helped to maintain steady light, which in turn helped to maintain a constant temperature and also provided food debris for water-based life forms.

Rain falls down through the different levels of trees until reaching the ground among the forest floor. This process allowed the drops of water to be filtered before entering streams and rivers. The downward flow of water carries with it other material from the land such as rotting trees, leaves, soil and stones. These sediments enter the waterways and are transported in the water. In small amounts, sedimentation is a natural process that provides food to water based life and flushes unneeded particles into the sea. Problems start to occur if too much sediment enters a waterway in a short period.

Plants growing along the edges of waterways were important. Leaf matter, which dropped into the water, was used as food. Overhanging banks kept fish cool during the day. Logs on the riverbed and in the banks acted as homes for numerous fish and insects, with the insects also acting as food for fish. The variation of features along a river or stream supported life too. Deep pools gave way to rapids that then made way for slower flows that entered deep pools again. Fish species feed and hide above and below rapids where leaf materials, insects and larvae would be carried, while koura preferred slower moving water where they could catch the same kinds of foods that floated past the rocks they hid under.

Permanent altering of stream flows was not a common practice because of the resulting unbalance this would cause to the life of the stream. Those that believe this was beyond the technology of Māori only have to look at the tonnes of earth and stone moved to create a defensive pa to see what our tupuna could accomplish. The small-scale alterations they did make were only for the purposes of trapping fish or for irrigation of crops. A common practice around Lake Wairarapa was that Māori would dig blind channels off the lake around the migration season. The eels would swim into these large canals and once full they were blocked off. The eels were then caught and dried for preservation. Swamps were important because they provided homes for eels, kourara, fish, flax, raupō and so forth. Wetlands were also excellent filters of paru (dirt) coming from the land. In addition, in times of threat, taonga were placed in swamps for safekeeping. This could range from personal adornments right through to canoes and carvings.