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Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

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Brown kiwi: pp 8-10.

BROWN KIWI



Family Apterygidae

Species *Apteryx mantelli*

Common name North Island
Brown Kiwi

Status Endemic

Abundance Uncommon

Size 500 mm (cf sparrow 145
mm, domestic hen 500 mm)

Discussion The kiwi is New
Zealand's most unique
bird and most ancient.

The fact that it is flightless,
having only rudimentary

wings and no tail, suggests arrival here prior to the separation of the ancient landmass of Gondwana. It is a member of the ratite family of birds which include the extinct New Zealand Moa, Ostrich, Emu, Cassowary and Rhea. It varies from these birds by way of its much smaller size, its long extended bill with nostrils at the end, and by having four toes rather than either two or three as in the other species. Further, it is a nocturnal species.

Species There are three formally recognised species of brown kiwi. They are the North Island Brown Kiwi (*A. mantelli*), found in the North Island only, the Okarito Brown Kiwi or Rowi (*A. rowi*) found in the Okarito district of Westland in the South Island, and Tokoeka (*A. australis*) the Brown Kiwi of Haast, Fiordland and Stewart Island. There are also two other distinct species of kiwi, the Little Spotted Kiwi (*A. owenii*) and the Great Spotted Kiwi (*A. haastii*).

The name "kiwi" Many, in the past, have considered the Maori named the kiwi after its call. Its call, though, does not closely resemble the word kiwi. This has caused people to look for other explanations and some believe its name arose from its similarity to night calling birds with which the early Maori had become accustomed to in their original Polynesian homelands.

One such night-calling bird from the Pacific islands is the Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*), known as kivi to the islanders of Tahiti and Rarotonga. This bird calls loudly in the night – a long drawn out "krreep" sound.

The early Maori, upon arrival in New Zealand, could have likened this call to the night calling kiwi. The night calling Bush Thick-knee (*Burhinus grallarius*) of Australia, also calls “kivi” but it is not known from the islands of the Pacific.

Habitat Birds are found in forests both native and exotic, secondary forests and scrublands.

Range North Island and also on Moturoa Island, Kawau Island, Little Barrier Island, Ponui Island and Kapiti Island.

Description

Upperparts Brown streaked with dark brown. Feathers are unique with hair-like qualities, being basically shaftless and barbless. **Underparts** Similar colouring to upperparts. **Bill** Grey.

Conspicuous characteristics

- A nocturnal bird.
- When feeding it often sit on its haunches. In this position it can look like a mound of brown dirt or even a hedgehog.
- When running away, it has a waddling, side to side, swaying gait.
- At night, when startled by a torch, it tends to extend its head and hold its beaks in a horizontal position before running off.
- Feeding Brown Kiwi regularly make heavy breathing-like, snuffle sounds.

Calls Brown Kiwi start calling about 40 minutes after sundown and continue to call intermittently throughout the night with a noisy period before dawn. The call of the male bird is a shrill “*ah-el, ah-el*”, uttered several times. The female has a quieter and hoarser call “*aarh, aarh aarh*” or “*ah-eh, ah-eh*”. (Description; Colbourne 1981.)

Nest and breeding season Female kiwi are unique in the size of the egg they lay which can be equivalent to a quarter of the female’s body weight. Usually two white eggs are laid in burrows, cavities, or under vegetation and trees. These can be incubated by both sexes but more often, especially with North Island birds, by the male bird, which will also care for the young within the burrow in the early stages. Prior to nesting, male birds are territorial about their nesting area. Birds are thought to breed throughout the year with the July to February months being the most common. Male birds are vocal during late winter which indicates mating and the start of breeding.

Best calling months Birds are noisiest from June to December but can be heard during any month of the year.

Best viewing hours Just after sundown but also at any time during the night. Should a kiwi be missed in early evening, try again in the early morning hours. Remember that a calling bird in bush is almost impossible to locate. The only real chance of seeing one is on an open track, beach or pastureland.

Evidence of Brown Kiwi

Calls These indicate their presence. They also make snuffle sounds and sometimes are noisy as they push through the undergrowth.

Footprints These show up in mud, on tracks or on sand and often indicate their presence. Kiwi footprints are bold and bigger than those of a domestic hen. Usually only three toes are showing, unless the bird has been walking through deep and soft sand. Then the hind toe might be seen.

Dung White pungent smelling dung on a trail or around a forest burrow can suggest its presence. Note that there will be no cobwebs across the entrance of a recently used burrow.

Probe marks Feeding kiwi leave probe marks or small holes in the ground, usually with a circular whirl at the entrance. These are good indicators of their presence. In the pine forests the pine needles become whirled in this manner.

Equipment needed Binoculars, other than night vision ones, are of little use when looking for Brown Kiwi in the dark. Take a good torch or spotlight. There is regular debate on whether a red light is less frightening to a kiwi than a yellow light. Most say a yellow light is no different from a red one.

Where to find – North Island only

Northland – Purerua Peninsula and the Marsden Cross area is one of Northland's large populations. Try Detlef Davies - Ph + 64 9 407 3874. P. 282.

Northland – Bay of Islands Aroha Island, Kerikeri. P. 282.

Northland – Bay of Islands The Waitangi Forest. P. 283.

Northland – Trounson Park. P. 284.

North Auckland – Tawharanui Regional Park east of Warkworth now has Brown Kiwi. Got to www.arc.govt.nz. P. 288.

Waikato – Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust runs guided walks at night. Go to www.maungatrtrust.org.nz. P. 311.