



Forbes' parakeet *Cyanoramphus forbesi*

28 cm

CHATHAM ISLANDS ENDEMIC, NATIONALLY ENDANGERED



Forbes' parakeet, Mangere.
Photo: Dave Crouchley
(DOC).



Identification

Forbes' parakeet is a medium-sized, bright-green parakeet with a long tail and orange-red eyes. It has a yellow crown to just behind the eye, and a narrow red frontal band above the bill. The wing coverts and outer primaries are violet-blue. Sexes are alike, although the female is slightly smaller. The taxonomic status of Forbes' parakeet has been contentious. Originally described as a distinct species, for many years it was regarded as a subspecies of the yellow-crowned parakeet (*C. auriceps*), and was sometimes referred to as the Chatham Island yellow-crowned parakeet. Recent genetic work has found that Forbes' parakeet is highly differentiated from all other New Zealand parakeets, and should be considered a full species.

Distribution and ecology

Forbes' parakeet is endemic to the Chatham Islands and is one of the rarest of New Zealand's parakeets. Historically, Forbes' parakeets were found on Mangere and Tapuaenuku, and also visited Pitt Island seasonally to feed. However, by 1930 the entire population was confined to Tapuaenuku. Mangere was recolonised following the disappearance of feral cats and the regeneration of native vegetation after the removal of grazing animals in 1968. Forbes' parakeets are now confined to Mangere and Tapuaenuku, with vagrants reported from southern Chatham Island, Rangatira, and Pitt Island.

On Mangere, Forbes' parakeets occur at highest densities in the small patch of remnant forest. However, forest habitat is extremely scarce on Mangere, and parakeets also use open habitats such as scrub and grassland. Nesting occurs in November-January; most nests are in cavities in Chatham Island akeake trees. The male feeds the female while she incubates the 2-9 eggs, and both parents feed the chicks.

Threats and conservation

Destruction of forest habitat and predation by feral cats and rats were probably the key causes of the decline of Forbes' parakeet. Another major threat to the Forbes' parakeet population was hybridisation with Chatham Island red-crowned parakeets. After cats and stock were removed from Mangere, the red-crowned parakeet population expanded rapidly at the same time as Forbes' parakeets were recolonising from Tapuaenuku. Loss of forest may have given the red-crowned parakeet a competitive advantage, as they make more use of open habitats. Hybridisation between the two species led to genetic swamping of Forbes' parakeet by the more numerous red-crowned parakeets. Forbes' parakeets continue to be limited by habitat availability, and hybridisation with red-crowned parakeets. Further habitat loss from accidental fire, and accidental introduction of mammalian predators such as rodents or cats to Mangere, are ongoing threats.

Forbes' parakeet, Mangere.
Photo: Dick Veitch (DOC).



Efforts to save Forbes' parakeets from complete hybridisation with red-crowned parakeets began in 1976 with the start of a revegetation project on Mangere. The removal of both hybrid and red-crowned

parakeets from Mangere was also undertaken, as this was considered essential to ensure the survival of a distinct Forbes' parakeet. Revegetation has continued to the present day at a rate of approximately 6000 trees per annum. Intermittent culls of red-crowned and hybrid parakeets continued until 1999, when a moratorium was put in place while ecological and genetic research on Mangere parakeet populations was undertaken. This research will be used to guide management to ensure the survival of Forbes' parakeet with minimal intervention. A population of around 900 parakeets was estimated to be present on Mangere in 2002, with more than 83 percent being "Forbes-like" in appearance. Options for re-introduction to other sites are limited, as red-crowned parakeets are common on Pitt Island and Rangatira, and are present in southern Chatham Island. Forest remnants lacking parakeets are present in northern Chatham Island, but would require predator fencing before Forbes' parakeets could be re-introduced.

Forbes' parakeet, Mangere.
Photo: Dave Crouchley (DOC).

