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Little spotted kiwi: pp 11 - 12.



LITTLE SPOTTED KIWI

Family Apterygidae

Species *Apteryx owenii*

Common name Little Spotted Kiwi

Status Endemic

Abundance Uncommon

Size 400 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Brown Kiwi 500 mm)

Discussion This kiwi is smaller than the Brown Kiwi and has different colouration, being brownish grey, finely mottled and banded with white. Other features, such as bill and body proportions, are similar.

Range The largest population of about 1000 birds is on Kapiti Island. These birds were released there in the 1920s probably from the diminishing population found at that time in the Paparoa Ranges on the west coast of the South Island. In 1980 several pairs were liberated on Red Mercury Island off the Coromandel coast and in 1988 several pairs were liberated by the Department of Conservation on Hen Island off the Northland coast. Since then birds have been placed on Tiri Tiri Island and Motuara (Long) Island in Queen Charlotte Sound where they are breeding. It has also been released at the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary in Wellington.

Where to find – North Island

North Auckland – Tiri Tiri Matangi Island. P. 292.

Wellington – Kapiti Island. P. 337.

Wellington – Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. P. 340.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough – Motuara Island. P. 341.

From P9 - 10 - Similar characteristics to Brown Kiwi.

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.
- When feeding regularly makes heavy breathing-like, snuffle sounds.

Calls Starts calling about 40 minutes after sundown and continues to call intermittently throughout the night with a noisy period before dawn. The call is similar to Brown Kiwi — 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 birds – similar to 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.