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

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Kokako: pp 267-269.



KOKAKO

Family Callaeidae

Species *Callaeas cinerea*

Common names Kokako, North Island bird – Blue-wattled Crow, South Island bird – Orange-wattled Crow.

Status Endemic

Abundance Rare

Size 380 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Saddleback 250 mm)

Habitat A bird of podocarp and tawa-type forests. The isolated populations of this bird seem to prefer forested areas of easy contour.

New Zealand range Found in the forests of the Bay of Islands, the Hunua Ranges just south of Auckland, Coromandel Ranges and those of the central North Island. The South Island Kokako may still survive although there have been no records for many years.

Discussion The Kokako is considered to have diverged further from the original

wattle-bird ancestor than the Saddleback and the Huia, with a difference being its predominant diet of vegetation and fruits associated with old forests rather than fruits, insects, insect larvae, spiders and even nectar as adopted by the Saddleback and Huia. Those who have seen the Australian Apostlebird. (*Struthidea cinerea*) will see a likeness in it to the Kokako although no relationship between the two species has been established.

Conservation status The Kokako has suffered significantly since the arrival of European people to New Zealand. On-going predator control is helping it to survive in some isolated localities such as Hunua Ranges and Mapara. Birds liberated on predator-free Little Barrier, Tiri Tiri Matangi and Kapiti Islands are showing a general increase in numbers.

Description

Forehead and face Covered with a black mask to behind the eye. **Wattles** Found just below gape are blue on the North Island bird and orange on the South Island bird. **Upperparts** Grey. **Wings** Grey with a touch of black on edges of primaries. **Underparts** Grey. **Bill and feet** Glossy black.

Conspicuous features

- Heavy almost parrot-like, black bill.
- Black mask and blue wattles.
- Long black legs.
- Wings are rounded and short in comparison to size of bird.
- Tail appears long when the bird is in flight.

Conspicuous characteristics

- In flight the bird makes rapid wing beats.
- Has a habit of running along branches.
- Will often arrive without notice.

Call The song, delivered by both birds often in duet, is known as the “organ music” of the forest. It is a rich melody of notes interspersed with periods of pure silence, some notes being distinctly like that of the Tui and Bellbird. When singing, birds clap their wings in time with the notes. Birds also have a variety of “took took took” notes issued in sparse phrases and sometimes barely audible. Birds commence song with first-light and continue singing for up to two hours after daybreak.

Nest A platform of twigs and leaves the cup lined with tree-fern hairs or fine grasses at about four metres. Up to 4 grey, brown-blotched, eggs are laid.

Where to find – North Island

Northland – Bay of Islands at Puketi Forest near Kerikeri (small numbers only here). P. 281.

Northland – Little Barrier Island but permit required. P. 289.

North Auckland – Tiri Tiri Matangi Island (this is the best place to find them).

P. 292.

South Auckland – Hunua Ranges (quite a long walk to find them). P. 302.

King Country – Otorohanga Kiwi House (in captivity). P. 312.

King Country – Mapara (a good locality but tracks are rough). P. 314.

King Country – Pureora (only small numbers here. Guidance needed). P. 314.

King Country – Rangitoto Station (4 wheel drive vehicle needed here). P. 312.

Wairarapa – Mt Bruce (in captivity). P. 333.

Wellington – Kapiti Island but permit required. P. 337.