



# Kokako Fact Sheet



## Why are kokako special?

Kokako are only found in New Zealand. They belong to an ancient family of birds which includes the tieke (saddleback) and the extinct huia.

Kokako were once common in lowland forests throughout New Zealand, but there are now fewer than 1400 surviving in the North Island. The South Island sub-species of kokako is believed to be extinct.

Kokako are arguably the most beautiful songster in New Zealand's bush. To hear their beautiful, haunting song is an experience you will not forget.

## Kokako at a glance

- Known for its distinctive, haunting song.
- Highly territorial (defended by song).
- Male and female look alike (sexed by DNA).
- Medium-large sized "perching" bird.
- Flies in short bursts, glides up to 100m.
- Runs and jumps from tree to tree on powerful legs.
- Omnivorous – eats leaves, fruit, nectar and insects.



**Kokako only breed successfully when protected from possums and ship rats.**

## Breeding

- Known to live up to 25 years.
- Generally have stable pairings.
- Female builds nest and incubates (55 days).
- Male feeds female while on nest and both feed chicks.
- Lays 1-3 eggs late October to March, fledge 30-35 days.



## Kokako numbers

- Classed as an endangered species.
- Sub-species extinct in the South Island.
- Numbers in decline except for protected areas.
- About 650 known pairs live in North Island protected areas and the overall population is growing.
- Kaharoa contains the 4<sup>th</sup> largest of 18 protected populations in New Zealand.

**Kaharoa contributes to the national recovery of kokako nationwide by providing birds for translocation to other protected areas. To help save kokako at Kaharoa, contact the Kaharoa Kokako Trust.**



## About kokako

Kokako are similar in size to a small domestic pigeon and their feathers are a uniform steely grey. They are an elegant bird with a distinctive black beak and mask around their eyes. Their most striking feature is their cobalt blue wattles, which extend from either side of their beak to meet under their chin.

Although kokako are not particularly good at flying, their short rounded wings and powerful legs are well adapted for life within the forest canopy. Their diet of insects, fruits and leaves, combined with their ability to leap, run and glide through the trees has led them to being described an “avian squirrels”.

Kokako evolved to defend themselves from avian predators (e.g. falcons) so they build nests with good overhead cover. Sadly this age-old strategy does nothing to protect them from mammalian predators.

Since European colonisation, kokako numbers have decreased dramatically, mainly due to the effects of introduced predators such as possums and ship rats.



These animals affect kokako directly by preying on their eggs and chicks, and indirectly by competing for food.

The only way to ensure the survival of kokako is to protect them from these predators during the nesting season so chicks can fledge.

### What makes suitable habitat?

Kokako are forest birds who require large standing trees for nesting. At Kaharoa, kokako have shown a remarkable ability to survive in cutover native forest and are also known to nest in pine trees on the edges of the native bush.

### Why are kokako endangered?

From 1988 to 1997, Kaharoa Forest was part of an important national study by Landcare Research and DOC. The purpose of this research experiment was to determine the cause of kokako decline. Results showed that predation by possums and ship rats were the main cause for the widespread decline of kokako in New Zealand forests (Innes, J. et al 1999).

The study concluded that pest control during nesting period would enable successful breeding. This information has enabled DOC and community groups, like the Kaharoa Kokako Trust, to restore kokako numbers through effective pest management.

**To help save kokako at Kaharoa, contact the Kaharoa Kokako Trust by phoning Anne Managh on (07) 345 9952**