

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird

Newsletter - January 2022

Chair's opinion. Big Nature

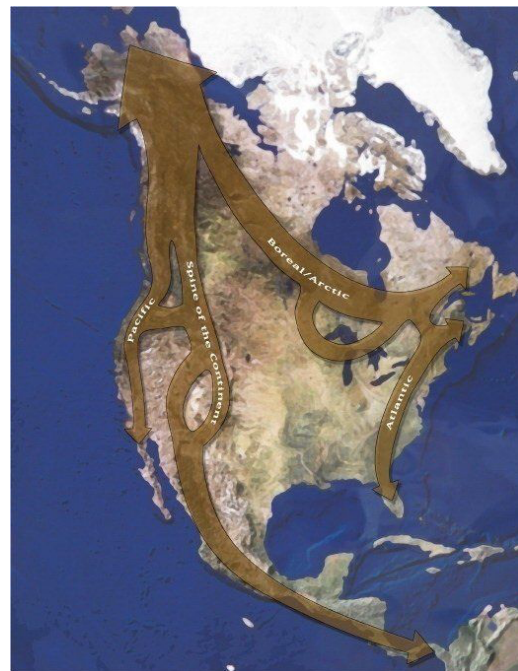
For many years I have been interested in eco corridors. Isolated ecological areas are greatly enhanced if they can be connected. I worked on linking the ecologically valuable parts of Lower Hutt. The work was valuable because Hutt City had large, unconnected, areas of protected land. Hutt City took on the plan. It provided a framework, a logic, to fit conservation and development into. But I was thinking small. Some scientists think that we need to think big.

In North America, the Yukon to Yosemite (Y2Y) initiative caught the imagination of people and produced projects to build wildlife overpasses across expressways and to add essential areas of land to the corridor between Yukon to Yosemite.



But there is an even larger continent wide initiative that is believed to be possible (see image on right). Corridors have to follow land features that are difficult for people to exploit except for recreation and tourism. The same is true for New Zealand.

DOC protected areas in the South Island are practically continuous so we have a huge continuous protected native land area from the south coast near Tuatapere to Farewell Spit and to the Marlborough Sounds. What would happen if we considered that as one entity, one landscape through which our wildlife and flora moved. What if we looked at what could make it better? Are there any standout actions that would improve it?



The North Island is harder to link up. Big gaps appear on both sides of the Manawatu Gorge. Kāpiti is not very well connected but that is because I cannot see land protected by DOC along with regional and local authorities' on the same map. If I could, Whareroa and QEP would join the southern area to the Kāpiti Coast through Akatarawa Regional Park (recently renamed).

North of Manawatu Gorge, practically continuous natural land could connect north to East Cape, west via the volcanic plateau close to Hawera, with two branches going further north, one up the Wanganui River and the other to north Pureora Forest. Another connected area runs from Rotorua to Coromandel.

DOC worries about its areas and so do regional and local authorities. I don't think anyone puts it all together and considers NZ's protected natural land in a similar way to the Y2Y and North America initiative. We need a mapper to put it all together.

Falcons

Faster than a V8 supercar and rarer than a kiwi

By Pene Burton Bell

We were delighted to receive a photo of a special new resident on the Kāpiti Coast - a Kārearea/New Zealand Falcon chick. High in a rata tree on private property, landowners near Raumati noted more activity than usual, and it turned out a pair of Kārearea had chosen this as a nest site, and there's a chick to show they've been successful. These are probably the same birds that I have seen occasionally on bird counts in Queen Elizabeth Park as this is well within their estimated range.



Photo Credit: P Kiernan

Many kārearea nest sites are on the ground on rocky scrapes or ledges, but they are known to also nest in epiphytes in old trees. Amazingly, kārearea eggs are only incubated for a month, and a little over a month later the chicks (usually 2-4 in a clutch), which are born blind grey fluffballs, have achieved full adult size and plumage and are able to fend for themselves.

The parents share breeding duties but normally the female spends more time brooding, and the male more time hunting. When she is hungry she [whines](#) for food. The falcon also cries kek-kek-kek as a sign of territorial defence, and they are very territorial - as those who have ventured too close to their nest sites have found - they defend by divebombing viciously at high speed.

New Zealand Falcons are endemic to New Zealand and are found south of Auckland as far as the Auckland Islands. Mostly they are found in forest habitats, but in the South Island a lighter form is sometimes seen on rough pasture or in the high country (we saw one on the Dunstan Trail). Our falcon is one of only four forest focused falcons in the

world (38 species in total). It was voted NZ Bird of the Year in 2012. There are thought to be over 4000 and less than 8000. They are our most threatened bird of prey and are considered vulnerable but as DOC only has funds to actively protect 250 species of the 3000 endangered species here, there is no specific conservation program for them.

Major threats include the usual suspects (cats, mustelids, hedgehogs, habitat loss) as well as electrocution and illegal shooting.

Because sightings are uncommon it is helpful to record your sighting. I record mine on the [eBird](#) app, as I do with all my bird sightings and bird counts as I then have a record of what I saw, and my records are available for research.



Photo Credit: J Glasson

Falcon vs Hawk

Many people confuse the New Zealand Falcon (*Falco Noveaseelandiae*) with the Australasian Marsh Harrier/Swamp-Hawk/ kāhu (*Circus approximans*) which is seen gliding over open country. Falcons are rare so if in doubt, you probably saw a Harrier. A few key differences include:

their size - harriers are similar in size to a black backed gull with a 1m wingspan, whereas a falcon is similar in size to an Australian magpie or a large pigeon and weighs up to 500g.

their diet - harriers prefer mammals (e.g. rabbits), where falcons prefer birds, especially exotic ones - finches and blackbirds are favoured but they've even been known to take a pheasant!

their style - harriers glide the thermals constantly looking for prey as they fly, whereas falcons sit at an appropriate vantage point and then dive (stoop) at speed (over 200km!) to surprise their prey.

their look - the falcon is so little that for a moment you won't be sure you're looking at a bird of prey. They're compact with short wings and come in different colourations depending on their habitat and to where you

are in the country. Our local birds are generally the darker brown 'bush falcon' colouring, whereas the birds we saw in Otago are a more sandy colour.

Want to learn more about Falcons?

A good starting point is the [DOC website](#) and [NZ Birds Online](#).

If you are visiting Rotorua you can be sure to see a falcon at [Wingspan](#).

Fun in the Summer with GWRC

There's still time to create new memories and have some fun with Greater Wellington's Summer Events. Every year GW put on a range of events for the public - some of which are family focussed (e.g. child vs wild), and some provide infrastructure that makes the trips (e.g. Remutaka Incline) possible, or provide the opportunity to access areas otherwise difficult or impossible to reach (e.g. the old forest in Wainuiomata Water Catchment, or Baring Head lighthouse). Some provide an opportunity for a new experience e.g. 4 wheel drive adventures or snorkelling off Whitirea. It is worth checking out, and booking in. [Click](#) to find out more.

Wallaby's in the Hutt - Akatarawa?

Whadda-ya-mean you saw a wallaby?

Greater Wellington's biosecurity team is hunting Dama Wallabies (also known as Tammar Wallabies) after several were seen around Upper Hutt and Featherston in September. They are very difficult to spot without a torch, at night, though you may spot their scat. [Read GW's useful article](#).

Wallabies pose a threat to our flora and fauna. They may look cute, but wallabies can cause significant damage to our native ecosystems and environment as they consume many native seedlings and shrubs, which not only affects the structure of native forests, but also impacts the animals who live in them, especially our native birds.

There's an anonymous [MPI website](#) where you can report wallaby sightings.

Consultation over Stewardship Land

State Forest and Crown land that had conservation value became stewardship land in 1987. It was considered at the time that it would be quickly assessed and allocated appropriately but most has stayed as Stewardship land. Allocation involves surveying, scientific analysis, consultation and is expensive and time consuming hence little has happened in the decades since.

[DoC is consulting on a simplified process](#)

where this land is assessed and classification recommendations are made to the Minister.

We don't know what F&B thinks about this process at the moment but it is one of the most important processes that will happen in the next few years because of the sheer

amount of conservation land involved. We will report further (if central office does not) next month. Submissions close 18 March 2022, so we have some time. I decided not to delay letting you know about this until next month because some of you may have very strong views.

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Your feedback on this newsletter would be most welcome as would contributions to future newsletters.