

Published by
Science and Research Unit
Department of Conservation
PO Box 10-420
Wellington
February 2003

Kereru and tui study in Southland

Kereru (New Zealand woodpigeon) and tui are two distinctive native birds that are a special part of the New Zealand scene. They are relatively widespread throughout Southland and can be seen in gardens, parks, planted road verges, streamsides and native bush.

Habitat requirements

The small patches of bush scattered around Southland may be part of a web that allows tui and kereru to persist locally. In addition to important native plant foods (such as miro, kowhai and flax), tui and kereru seek out many introduced food plants. These introduced plants (such as broom, willow and winter-flowering gums), may be very important to the long-term survival of these birds. People keen to attract kereru and tui to their gardens or bush patches may plant nectar- and fruit-bearing trees, and also provide sugar water for tui.

The presence of seasonally abundant food for tui and kereru is important to the long-term survival of these birds. Individuals of both species will fly long distances, 20 km or more, to feed on preferred foods. By their feeding and movements about the countryside, tui may be responsible for the pollination of some flowering species as well. Similarly, both tui

and kereru transfer native plant seeds between widely separated bush patches and so help to maintain these plants in these patches. Unfortunately, the fruit eaten may also be from introduced weeds, so the birds may be responsible for transferring weedy plants into native forest patches, too.



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Study objectives

An objective of our study is to determine the seasonal habitats, foods and nesting requirements of tui and kereru in the urban and rural landscape of Southland. The study is

expected to take about three years, with two staff being employed full-time to carry out the field work. The first phase, taking about a year, will involve seasonal visits to sites such as small and large native forest patches, forestry plantations, farmland and residential areas, to see whether tui and kereru are present. Various characteristics of each site will be recorded, such as habitat type, presence of food plants, distance to closest forest patch, and proximity to dwellings. This will be followed by a two-year study of selected radio-tagged birds to determine individual movements, their foods, when and where they nest, and how successful they are at rearing their young. We hope that the information obtained will help various organisations and groups, such as the Department of Conservation, councils, iwi, landcare groups and private individuals, to ensure the long-term presence of these two important native birds in rural and urban Southland, and in other regions of New Zealand.

How you can help

We would welcome any observations from people if they see kereru and tui feeding on exotic plants in gardens and farmland around Southland. If you are unsure of the species of food plant then it would be helpful if a sprig of foliage, flower or fruit is collected and made available to us.

If people come across a tui or kereru nest at any time we would be glad to hear about it, because we would like to determine whether chicks are reared or not.

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Tui on drinking trough. Photograph by J.L. Kendrick.