

# From Fairy Terns to Parakeets

New Zealand's Bird of the Year Poll - the middle years

## Part 2: The winners 2010-2014

In the first of this small series of blogs about New Zealand's Bird of the Year poll (Te Manu Rongonui o Te Tau) which has been run annually since 2005, I introduced the most recent five winners and then sought to match them with stamps that New Zealand had issued. This next set presents more winning birds and stamps and follows the same pattern, rolling backwards with each year's winners. This time it's the batch of five between 2010 and 2014.

In 2014 the Tara iti or Fairy Tern was the successful bird chosen. There are three sub-species found in the south-western Pacific and the one that breeds in northern New Zealand - the New Zealand Fairy Tern (*Sternula nereis davisae*) - is listed as critically endangered. Indeed, it is New Zealand's rarest native breeding bird and it is believed that there are only about 40 birds remaining, nesting at very specific locations in North Island. Its status is highly precarious. In 2018/19 there were believed to be only five breeding pairs left with the sub-species threatened by introduced predators, weather, tidal conditions and coastal developments.

Regrettably, there is just a single stamp featuring the Tara iti, appropriately issued also in 2014 as part of a series of singles and a mini-sheet of endangered seabirds.



2014 Endangered Seabirds series

The Mohua or Yellowhead (*Mohoua ochrocephala*) won the title in 2013. It is a small passerine found only in South Island. It was originally a common forest dwelling bird and used to be called the Bush Canary due to its song making. However, the introduction of rodent predators have reduced numbers alarmingly and it now has endangered status. The number remaining has been estimated at about 5,000 individuals

The Mohua has only appear in one philatelic guise, initially on the 20c Native birds series in 1988, and then repeated, unchanged, as part of a sheet for this series at "Philakorea" in 1994.



The year 2012 saw a bird of prey emerge as a winner at last with the Karearea or New Zealand Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*). It is the country's only falcon and its most seriously threatened bird of prey with less than 5,000 breeding pairs. The main cause of decline are farmers despite its protected status. It is predominantly found in South Island and only very rarely in North Island. Its habitat is essentially bush and hill country where its main prey is other birds. It's an aggressive falcon and has been recorded attacking dogs or even people when defending its territory. Despite being a handsome bird there are only three examples of it on New Zealand stamps.



1961 Health Stamps



1986 Native Birds



1993/5 Native birds Booklet

The 2011 winner was the Pukeko or Purple Swamphen/Gallinule (*Porphyrio melanotus*), which I have seen described as, “the most recognisable bird in New Zealand.” I would have thought it was a Kiwi, but there you go! The Pukeko is a relatively common, widely spread bird normally found near sheltered fresh or brackish water, for example, vegetative marshland, streams or lagoons, especially when close to open grassy areas and pastures. It is a species that has actually benefited from the clearing of land for agriculture. The birds form permanent social groups and defend shared territories for feeding and breeding. The Pukeko groups can have multiple breeding males and females, however all eggs are laid in a single nest and chicks are raised by group members. There's community spirit for you!

Strangely, the Pukeko seems to have been depicted on national stamps only once, and then as an illustration for children's literature. It's an attractive stamp though!



2002 Children's Book Festival

In 2010 it was the turn of the Karariki, but I wonder if there were really more than just one winner. The generalised Maori name means small (green) parrot, but technically, there are several sub-species of Kakariki or New Zealand Parakeets and not just one bird. They are the Yellow-crowned Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus auriceps*), status rare; the Red-crowned or Red-fronted Parakeet (*C. novaeseelandiae*), status very rare; Malherbe's or Orange-fronted Parakeet (*C. malherbi*), which has the most endangered status; Forbes Parakeet (*C. forbesi*), which is only found on Mangere Island in the Chatham's; and lastly, the Antipodes Parakeet (*C. unicolor*) which is completely green. With the exception of Forbes Parakeet all

are found on both main islands, and all have experienced drastically declining numbers due to habitat destruction and the introduction of predators.

The Kakariki are well represented on New Zealand stamps beginning with the health stamp issues of 1962 and most recently, with all five sub-species being depicted in single and sheet form earlier this year.



1962 Health stamps



2000 Threatened birds



2009 Health stamps on stamps



2020 Kakariki - New Zealand Parakeets