

The first five - Kiwis, Kakapos and all that

New Zealand's Bird of the Year Poll - the early winners

Part 3: The winners 2005-2009

Still rolling backwards, we finally reach the initial five years of New Zealand's Bird of the Year Poll - the early winners.

In the fifth year of the poll - 2009 - a Kiwi actually got a look in as a poll winner, although it was uncharitably dubbed by some as the, "flightless national bore." What is less clear is which Kiwi won. Whilst this flightless bird is unique to New Zealand, there are actually five different species. The largest is the Roroa or Great Spotted Kiwi (*Apteryx hasstii*), which has vulnerable status and is found in areas of the South Island; the Little Spotted kiwi (*Apteryx owenii*), the smallest species of all, weighing up to 1.9 kg and restricted to a few small offshore islands and protected mainland reserves; the Rowi or Okarito kiwi (*Apteryx rowi*) a recent addition that is scarce and found only in part of the Okarito forest on the West Coast of South Island; the Tokoeka or Southern Brown (*Apteryx australis*), also found only on South Island; and finally, the North Island Brown (*Apteryx mantelli*) is common across much of North Island. Oh, this one hold the world record for laying the largest eggs relative to its body size. Sounds painful.

As the national bird, Kiwis have naturally featured heavily in philatelic output - particularly the Southern Brown - as you can see from the following sample only:



1898 Definitive



1935 Definitive



1959 Jamboree



1988 Brown Kiwi bkt



1988 Native birds



1989 Native birds



2000 Threatened birds



2005 Greetings



2007 Classic Kiwi



2011 Kiwistamps



2011 Children's health



2018 Round Kiwis



Incidentally, the 2018 Round Kiwi issues illustrated above are just two examples from the only set where all five species are depicted.

For 2008 it was the turn of another well-known New Zealand bird to become the winner - the Kakapo or Night parrot (*Strigops habroptilus*). It is an endemic, large, flightless, ground dwelling parrot. It is critically endangered with a population of perhaps only a few hundred. Their numbers declined dramatically due to introduced predators and most are now kept on two islands, Codfish (off Stewart Island) and Anchor (off the southern fjords). Both predator free.

They have featured on a number of modern stamps as shown below:-



1986 Native birds



2000 Threatened birds



2005 WWF Strip

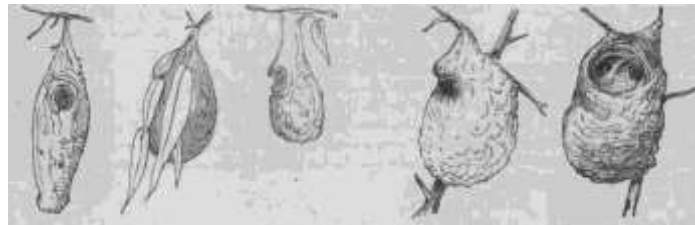


2009 Tiki Tour



2011 Children's health

The Bird of the Year for 2007 was a very different proposition - the Riroriro or Grey Warbler (*Gerygone igata*). It's a small grey-brown bird, one of the smallest in New Zealand, only about 11cms long with paler grey face and breast. It is found in forests or where there is tree cover and is common across both main islands. It's remarkable for the pear-shaped nests they build with an entrance near the top.



Riroriro nest designs

Sadly, the Riroriro has never been placed on a stamp - any stamp, let alone a New Zealand one - so we shall have to make do with a photograph instead.



I was quite pleased to discover that the 2006 winner was the New Zealand bird I have a particular soft spot for, the Piwakawaka or New Zealand Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*). It is another smallish bird with three sub-species, *R. f. fuliginosa* found in the South Island, *R. f. placabilis* in North Island and *R. f. penita* in the Chatham Islands. It was originally considered to be the same bird as the Grey Fantail found in Australia but is now regarded as a separate species.

Relatively common, it is one of the very few species that have adapted to environmental changes in the country. It is found in forests, scrubland, orchards and gardens. It is not classified as endangered.

There are just four examples of the Fantail appearing on New Zealand issues, but they include the fine classical 1935 definitive and the health stamp of 1965. I wish there were more.



1935 Definitive



1965 Health stamp



1995 Environmental protection



2008 Alphabet sheet

The first - but last for this blog - winner of the title in 2005, was the Tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*). It's one of the largest species of Honeyeaters and endemic to New Zealand. In fact, there are actually two Honeyeaters found on the islands, the other being the New Zealand Bellbird. It is widely distributed from North to South and normally inhabits low lying broadleaf forests at low altitudes, although can also be found in small wooded patches, plantations and even well-vegetated suburbs. Indeed, they are one of the most common birds found in urban Wellington, the capital. This may have been why it won the first poll. Whilst Tui populations have declined due to habitat destruction, it is not currently a threatened bird and numbers have even risen in some areas.



Adult and juvenile Tui

A handsome bird, with a blackish-brown iridescent sheen, it is distinguished by small, whitish feathers on the back and sides of the neck that produce a lace-like collar. However, more particularly, there are small tufts of pure white feathers on the front of its neck and it was these that gave it its original name as the Parson Bird.

It may have been the first winner, but its philatelic showing has been extremely meagre. There is just the one example on the classic one shilling green definitive of 1935. Whilst a

lovely bird on a lovely stamp, it is now clearly well overdue for another appearance. Come on New Zealand, let's see this one again!



The first ever winning bird and its only stamp
1935 One shilling definitive

And there we are. From 2019 and then backwards to the original poll topper of 2005. A full Cook's tour of all past winners. I wonder who is going to win this year's title. And more importantly, will it have a stamp to accompany it?