

ENDEMIC SPECIES FEATURE

KĀREAREA

New Zealand falcon

Falco novaeseelardiae

The kārearea or New Zealand Falcon is capable of flying at speeds of over 100km/hr. They use their speed, manoeuvrability and keen eyesight to catch birds on the wing. Their main prey are small to medium-sized birds, but they may also take larger prey such as ducks, pheasants, rabbits and hares. At the other end of the scale, they also feed on insects such as cicadas, dragonflies and huhu beetles.

Falcons differ from hawks and eagles in having a tomial tooth on both sides of their beak. A tomial tooth is a small notch on the upper bill, and corresponding divet on the lower. It assists with the bite-and-twist motion used by falcons to kill their prey. Hawks and eagles simply break bones with their more powerful beaks.

An adult kārearea is 40-50cm long. Weighing between 420-740g, females are about a third larger than males, that weigh 205-340g. Both males and females are highly territorial. They live apart through winter, but in spring the male comes courting. His initial advance takes the form of a mock attack on the female. He then encourages her to chase him. Ultimately, the courtship may take a more romantic turn with a manoeuvre called a 'pass'. During a pass the male and female fly straight towards each other, the male with a kill in his talons. Just before they are about to collide, both falcons roll outwards, their talons touch and the kill is transferred.

Kārearea do not build nests, but instead create a 'scrape' on the ground, a cliff ledge or on an epiphyte in a tree. Clutch sizes vary from 1-4 eggs. Incubation is shared. After about 33 days the eggs hatch. The female then does most of the brooding while the male hunts for food, passing it to the female mid-air, either foot-to-foot or dropping it for her to catch. Chicks fledge when 32-45 days old and become independent between 75-124 days. Juveniles can be distinguished from adults in having blue-grey instead of yellow legs.

Threats to kārearea include predation by introduced mammals; habitat loss and degradation; trapping, shooting and poisoning by people; collisions with cars and windows; and electrocution from un-insulated power lines. They are thought to number 5000-8000 and are a protected species. We are lucky to have resident pairs of kārearea within the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary. As native predators, they are an important part of the forest ecosystem.



Photo credit: Paul Barter, August 2019



Photo credit: Katherine Chamberlain

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