



Bird Watch

August
2013

Kaka

Nestor meridionalis

At present the kaka is a bird you are unlikely to encounter in your garden, but watch this space. We hope they will one day populate the Brook Waimarama Sanctuary and being strong fliers, you may be lucky enough to enjoy the company of these smart, gregarious, beautiful birds in your garden. Kaka are olive-brown, with light grey caps, red bellies and orange-red on the undersides of their wings. Kaka and kea are closely related and similar in size. Kaka live mainly in native forests, while the olive-green kea tend more towards alpine environments. However, it isn't unusual to find the two species hanging out together in the same habitat. Kaka and kea are endemic to New Zealand and fully protected.



Photo: Rick Field

Kaka enjoy a varied diet. They have brush-tipped tongues which they use to feed on the nectar of flowers and lick the honeydew from scale insects on beech trees. They also eat fruit; seeds; shoots; tree-dwelling invertebrates, especially wood boring insects; and tree sap, which they access by ring-barking trees. While this can be detrimental to trees, it should be noted that kaka also play an important role in forest regeneration by dispersing seeds and assisting with pollination.

Kaka nest in deep cavities in trees, which they line with soft wood chips. A clutch may consist of 1-8 eggs, 4 being the mean. Incubation lasts approximately 20 days. While the female remains with the nest, the male brings food to both her and the nestlings. Nestlings fledge at approximately 10 weeks of age, sometimes before they can fly. Both parents care for the fledglings until they become independent, which may not be until they are 5 months old. While breeding usually takes place in the spring and summer, in a good year, a second clutch may be produced extending breeding into winter.

The main threats to kaka, past and present, are habitat loss and predation. Because they nest within tree cavities, eggs, chicks and females are vulnerable to predation, especially by stoats and possums. Higher mortality among females can skew the sex ratio of a population, further reducing its reproductive capacity. In the absence of predation, kaka populations can do very well. Thanks to pest control in the Nelson Lakes and beyond, Nelson is fortunate to have kaka living in the vicinity.

Backyard Bird Monitoring Data

Many thanks to everyone who conducted a garden survey in June or July. The graph below compares the averages of each bird species recorded during the June/July garden surveys from 2011, 2012 and 2013. The average number of house sparrows recorded increased while that of silvereyes decreased. One surprise was the sharp increase in the average of black-backed gulls recorded this year. I checked to see if this was down to one or two surveys with high numbers, but black-backed gulls were recorded in 52.6% of garden surveys and, where recorded, the mean number was 3.5. The average number of chaffinches counted was also up this year. It was nice to see a few redpolls in the mix too. For the results of Landcare's Annual Surveys, go to:

<http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/science/plants-animals-fungi/animals/birds/garden-bird-surveys/preliminary-results>.

