

ENDEMIC SPECIES FEATURE KĀKĀRIKI KARAKA

Orange-fronted parakeet

Cyanoramphus malherbi

Kākāriki karaka, also known as orange-fronted parakeet, were once abundant throughout New Zealand, especially the beech forests of the South Island. Following the arrival of Europeans, predation pressure and habitat loss drastically reduced their numbers. They were declared extinct twice during the 20th century. In 1980 a small population was rediscovered in Lake Sumner National Park. Further searches found them in nearby Hawdon, Andrews and Poulter valleys of Arthur's Pass National Park. In an effort to save the species, captive rearing of birds began at Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust's Peacock Springs facility in 2003. Since 2005 over 300 captive reared birds have been translocated to 4 pest-free islands. Results have been mixed. Numbers boomed and bust. Today, of these islands, only Blumine Island has an established population. With a total number of approximately 360 birds, kākāriki karaka are the rarest of New Zealand's parakeets and one of the rarest of New Zealand's forest birds. They are classified as threatened – nationally critical.

Orange-fronted, yellow-crowned and red-crowned parakeets once co-existed. While they have similar habits, diets and breeding biology, they inhabit different niches within the forest. Yellow-crowned parakeets tend to forage in the upper canopy, orange-fronted in the mid-canopy and red-crowned low or on the ground. Red-crowned parakeets are now rare on the Mainland, but continue to do well on Stewart Island and on offshore islands.

Fortunately, kākāriki are prolific breeders. Kākāriki karaka are capable of laying several clutches each year with up to 10 eggs per clutch. They can also start breeding 3-4 months after fledging. They typically nest in tree cavities, which contributes to their vulnerability to mammalian predation. Nest preparation, incubation and brooding are done by the female. The male brings food to the female during incubation and later to the nestlings. Kākāriki karaka are monogamous. They also form loose flocks. Their diet consists of seeds, buds, flowers, honeydew, and invertebrates. During beech masts, beech seeds comprise a significant part of their diet..

The Department of Conservation first approached the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary (BWS) regarding translocating kākāriki karaka into the Sanctuary in late 2017. The current translocations are being led and driven by the Department of Conservation (DOC) with assistance from BWS staff and volunteers. The BWS

Kākāriki karaka in the Sanctuary



Photo credit: both photos by Deb Corbett



provides ideal kākāriki karaka habitat, old growth beech forest, and critically, a pest free environment. This unique combination has been recognised by DOC as an ideal opportunity to create a new sub-population aiding their kākāriki karaka recovery programme. We and DOC are optimistic these translocations will result in the establishment of a new population and help secure the future survival of this nationally critical species.

Written by:
Katherine Chamberlain, Bird Count Coordinator