

SPECIES FEATURE

KŌTARE Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sanctus vagans*

Compiled by Katherine Chamberlain

There are five recognised subspecies of ***Todiramphus sanctus*** distributed across Australia, New Guinea, New Caledonia, the Solomon, Kermadec, Lord Howe, Norfolk and Loyalty Islands. The subspecies ***Todiramphus sanctus vagans*** is native to and widespread across New Zealand including on Raoul Island the largest of the Kermadec Islands, as well as on Lord Howe Island. While frequently found near water, both coastal and fresh, kōtare also inhabit open country and forests. They are often seen sitting on treetops, posts and power lines from which they have a good vantage point to spot and dive on prey. The name kōtare is descriptive of this behaviour, 'kō' meaning 'to descend from tree' and 'tare' being a stage or platform in the fence of a pā. Kōtare predate on aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates such as insects, spiders, freshwater crayfish and crabs as well as vertebrates such as fish, tadpoles, lizards, mice and small birds. In winter, inland birds may move nearer the coast in search of more plentiful food.

Kōtare are monogamous. Breeding begins in September. Pairs nest in holes on the sides of clay banks or rotting tree trunks. Excavation of the nesting hole begins with the prospective parents flying, necks outstretched, directly at a bank or tree and spearing it with their bills. They repeat these strikes until there is a hole large enough to provide purchase, then they continue to chisel out the hole to create a tunnel leading to a spherical nesting chamber. Once formed, the nesting hole may be reused year after year. It is seldom lined. Each clutch consists of 4-7 eggs. Incubation and brooding are shared, but mostly conducted by the female. Both parents feed the young. Seven to ten days after leaving the nest, chicks are able to feed themselves. Typically two clutches are produced per year.

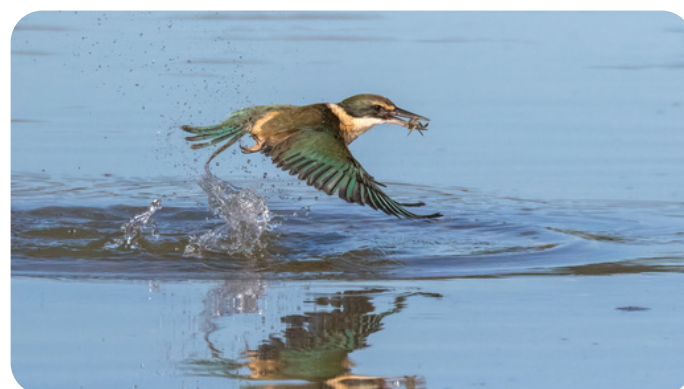
With its abundant waterways and ample prey, the beautiful kōtare are at home within the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary. Listen out for their loud staccato 'kee-kee-kee'.



Kōtare feeding chicks in mud bank nest. Image © Toya Heatley, Digitalpix



Kōtare working on tree trunk nest. Image © Toya Heatley, Digitalpix



Kōtare | Sacred kingfisher. Image © Toya Heatley, Digitalpix



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