

Celebrities flock to secure New Zealand's Bird of the Year

Title Singer Hollie Smith, actress Lisa Chappell and former All Black and seabird advocate Anton Oliver are throwing their celebrity weight behind some of our native birds in Forest & Bird's (BirdLife in New Zealand) annual avian popularity contest, which opens today. Forest & Bird's seventh Bird of the Year poll will kick off at the Songbirds concert this evening at The Cloud on Auckland's Queen Wharf. The concert features several other New Zealand songbirds including Kirsten Morrell (NZ robin), Maisey Rika (ruru), Seth Haapu (kakariki) and Steve Abel (wandering albatross). These celebrities and others, such as musician Riki Gooch and TV3's Rachel Smalley, will be posting blogs and videos on Forest & Bird's website urging people to vote for their favourite bird. Forest & Bird staff are promoting some of the birds worst affected by the Tauranga oil spill such as the dotterel and common diving petrel. "Our seabirds and shorebirds are taking a battering at the moment with this oil spill, so Forest & Bird will be going into bat for these little strugglers," says Forest & Bird Seabird Advocate and diving petrel campaign manager Karen Baird. Karen last week worked on identifying dead birds at the oiled wildlife response centre in Tauranga. "Our incredible diving petrel has been one of the biggest casualties in the Rena disaster. It seamlessly moves through air and water. I've seen these birds fly through a wave and just burst out the other side. It's been terrible to see so many diving petrels killed by oil." Conservationist, campaigner and musician, Steve Abel, will also be campaigning for another bird affected by the spill - the wandering albatross. **Some Bird of the Year campaign managers and their chosen birds:**

- Actress Lisa Chappell ? NZ robin
- Musician Riki Gooch ? takahe
- Ex-All Black and seabird advocate Anton Oliver ? yellow-eyed penguin
- TV3 presenter Rachel Smalley ? kea
- Musician Seth Haapu ? kakariki
- Singer-songwriter Hollie Smith ? kokako
- Singer-songwriter Steve Abel ? wandering albatross
- Broadcaster Graeme Hill ? grey warbler
- Green Party co-leader Russel Norman ? tui
- Musician Hinewehi Mohi ? kereru
- Singer-songwriter Maisey Rika and Labour Party leader Phil Goff ? ruru/morepork
- Maori Party co-leader Dr Pita Sharples ? karearea/NZ falcon
- Conservation Minister Kate Wilkinson ? fantail

Fast facts:

- The poll opens on October 20 and will close at 9am on November 25.
- This year, Forest & Bird has launched a micro-site which allows the avian contenders to treat voters to a sample of their birdsong (www.birdoftheyear.org.nz).
- Bird of the Year has been running since 2005 as a way to raise awareness of our native birds and the threats they face.
- Past winners are 2005 tui, 2006 fantail, 2007 grey warbler, 2008 kakapo, 2009 kiwi, 2010 kakariki.
- Endangered birds, garden birds, and birds with a sweet song and a flamboyant dress-sense typically poll well.
- Our national bird ? the kiwi - has fared very poorly in most polls. It very rarely reaches the top ten. It was described by one campaigner as a ?flightless national bore? in one vitriolic blog. However, it was crowned Bird of the Year in 2009 ? after some serious campaigning by BNZ Save the Kiwi.
- Last year the poll got a record amount of votes ? 21,000 . The kakariki won by 1,500 votes, however, it is suspected that there was some fowl ? sorry foul ? play going on. Security has been ramped up this year to prevent cyber-bots skewing the votes.
- Last year, our newest native bird ? the barn owl ? polled 6th.
- The pukeko almost won last year?s race (it scored 5228 votes) and has a devoted following, so we are expecting it will streak ahead in this year?s poll. Our feathered bogan ? the kea - is also tipped to win.
- Those birds that are bad tempered, hold multiple citizenships and are dull or drab fare poorly. Underbirds include the skua and the spur-winged plover. They?re typically placed in the bottom ten.

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