

Counting Kereru in New Zealand

All Forest & Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand) members, bird enthusiasts and Kiwi kids are being encouraged to get behind the inaugural Kereru Count this month. From February 19-27, volunteers are being asked to keep a look out in their local areas for kereru – the native pigeon also known as kōkupa and kōkō in some areas - and record information on the purpose-built website for the nationwide survey. Participants will be asked to record basic information about any sightings, including the location, number of birds, their activity and what they were eating at the time. Information will be collated and shared with local and national conservation groups with an interest in kereru distribution. Since the extinction of Mōa, Kereru are the only birds with a mouth large enough to swallow the large seeds of our native tawa, miro, taraire and karaka trees. So information about their whereabouts is also valuable for forest restoration groups. Forest & Bird Kiwi Conservation Club (KCC) members and all schools around the country are invited to take part in the Kereru Count. It's an easy and fun way to get kids interested in conservation and the more people counting kereru, the more accurate the information. KCC Officer and project organiser, Jenny Lynch, says the Kereru Count also gives kids the chance to contribute to a genuine, science-based conservation project. "It's just a way of connecting them with wider research, because they don't get that opportunity very often." She hopes the project will become an annual event. And while Jenny expects there will be a few gaps in the data, the inaugural count will provide a baseline to track trends over time. The project will also help connect New Zealanders with their environment. Results will be relayed back to participants and this will help raise awareness and appreciation for New Zealand's only endemic pigeon. "It lets people know Kereru are in the area so they can grow kereru-friendly trees," she says. Kereru are most abundant in forests around Northland, the King Country, Nelson and the West Coast. However, they're also found in backyards, parks, reserves and city areas around the country – as long as there's a good number of food trees. They're a large bird and with a distinctive coo but keep an ear out too for the loud beat of their wings. Visit www.kererucount.org.nz to find out how to get involved. **Subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter**