

Title The Kiwi Conservation Club is asking all New Zealanders, young and old, to take part in a nationwide Kereru survey that begins on Sunday. Kereru is also known as New Zealand Pigeon *Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*. Forest & Bird's (BirdLife in New Zealand) junior division, the Kiwi Conservation Club ran its first Kereru Count last year, with over 1100 recorded sightings of kereru around the country. Kereru Count Co-ordinator Ann Graeme says the Kereru Count is a fun citizen-science project that gives a snapshot of kereru populations and distribution. 'The survey also alerts the community to the presence of this special native bird living near them. People may never have noticed kereru in their parks or, if they had, paid them scant attention. Awareness is the first step to conservation,' she says. From 9am Sunday 24 February to 3pm Monday 4 March, participants are asked to visit gardens, parks and reserves and count the number of kereru. Then go to the Kereru Count website and record the location, the number spotted, what the kereru were doing, and if possible what type of plants they were feeding on. Kereru, or New Zealand wood pigeons, are declining in numbers in many parts of the country. 'The biggest culprits are predators - rats, stoats and feral cats - that eat their eggs and chicks,' Ann Graeme says. 'Kereru are our only native pigeon and as well as being big, beautiful birds, they are important to the health of native forests. They distribute seeds in their droppings. Only kereru can swallow the really big seeds of tawa, taraire and karaka.' Data from the Kereru Count will be shared with bio-recording organisation NatureWatch NZ, councils, local conservation groups, councils and other interested groups such as the Kereru Discovery Project. Ann Graeme says data will identify where there is a need for more pest control and ensure future development of green spaces supports boosting numbers of resident kereru. Last year's survey identified Dunedin as a hotspot for kereru, while high numbers in Wellington and Auckland illustrated kereru could thrive in urban areas. KCC is hoping to make the survey an annual event and build up data on long-term population trends. For more information visit www.kererucount.org.nz and watch the Kereru Count introductory video clip here <http://www.kcc.org.nz/news/join-us-our-annual-kereru-count>