



Title TV personality Te Radar, comedian Raybon Kan and actress Jennifer Ward-Lealand will be championing their favourite native bird in Forest & Bird's (BirdLife in New Zealand) annual Bird of the Year poll, which kicks off today. The poll, in its eighth year, aims to raise the profile of New Zealand's threatened and much loved bird species. In recent years, well-known New Zealanders have acted as 'campaign managers' for their favourite bird, and gone to great lengths to drum up votes. 'Competition between campaign managers has become fierce in recent years, with people finding all sorts of hard-case ways to promote their bird,' says Forest & Bird Conservation Advocate Nicola Toki. 'Some approaches have included sledging off other campaign managers on Twitter, producing videos to promote their campaign, and last year diehard saddleback campaigner, Jackson James Wood, actually donned a saddle and offered people rides on his back if they would vote saddleback - in the middle of downtown Wellington. 'And in 2007, broadcaster Graeme Hill brought a landslide victory for the grey warbler by blatantly using his radio airtime to promote his bird.' Nicola Toki says this hotly-contested poll is also a great way to learn about the conservation issues our native birds face in an engaging way. 'Our native birds face an incredible array of threats - including predation, fishing by-catch and habitat loss, so this poll gives the New Zealand public a snapshot of what's special about our birds, the threats they face and how people can be involved in giving them a chance to thrive.' Former Forest & Bird writer and poet Kate Camp will be highlighting the threats to her chosen bird, the albatross. New Zealand is a breeding ground for more than half of the world's albatross species and is known as the albatross capital of the world. Sadly, many albatross species are threatened by long-line fishing, as they get hooked on the lines and drown. 'They say it's bad luck to kill an albatross, which could explain a lot, considering how many of them get knocked off by us every year. Maybe we could solve a lot of the world's problems if we just stopped jinxing ourselves by killing albatrosses all the time,' she says. Previous winners include the tui (2005), fantail (2006), grey warbler (2007), kakapo (2008), kiwi (2009), kakariki (2010) and pukeko (2011). Voting runs until 5pm, October 10 at www.birdoftheyear.org.nz Follow the competition on Facebook: www.facebook.com/ForestandBird and Twitter #birdoftheyear