Title Our Critically Endangered parrot, the Kakapo, and our blue-suited swamp hen, the Pukeko, are well in front of the flock in Forest & Bird?s (BirdLife in New Zealand) annual Bird of the Year poll. The Pukeko has a handy lead in the month-long bird popularity competition, which closes on Friday, November 25. By late Thursday morning, with 6947 votes counted, the Pukeko had 1270 votes and its arch rival, the Kakapo 999 votes. Commentators believe Kakapo Sirocco, the randy show-off and international luminary, has helped to raise the profile of our endemic flightless parrot in the past year. ?The Kakapo has around 130 individuals to its name after introduced predators almost made it extinct. The birds live on two remote islands at the bottom of the South Island, so raising the profile of this bird is tricky,? says Forest & Bird Advocate Nicola Vallance. ?But this year Sirocco has been vigorously touring, so New Zealanders have had a chance to get up close and personal with this huge nocturnal parrot.? Meanwhile, team pukeko will be promoting their underbird. Its plucky nature, showy dress sense and its status as a prodigious lover have seen it fly in the polls in recent years. ?Pukeko love a good swamp, so they?re perfect ambassadors for the wetlands that are so important in purifying freshwater and stopping flooding,? says Nicola Vallance. ?More than 90 per cent of New Zealand?s original wetlands have been drained for farms and other development, which is the sad reason why Pukeko are forced to hang out in ditches alongside roads.? A newcomer to the poll is the Emperor Penguin ? which is riding on the publicity wave generated by Happy Feet. It is currently polling in 11th position. Past winners include the Tui (2005), Fantail (2006), Grey Warbler (2007), Kakapo (2008), Kiwi (2009), and Kakariki (2010). **Snapshot: The ten top polling birds**

1. Pukeko
2. Kakapo
3. Hihi
4. Kaka
5. Tui
6. Ruru
7. Saddleback
8. Kea
9. Kokako
10. Fantail

To find out more about Forest & Bird?s Bird of the Year poll see www.birdoftheyear.org.nz **Subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific Quarterly E-Newsletter**