

## Kiwi (*Apteryx* spp.)

### Introduction:

The kiwi is New Zealand's most well known bird and as a result has been adopted as the national icon. The Latin name for the genus, *Apteryx*, literally means wingless. This is, however, misleading as kiwis do in fact have small, reduced stumps in place of functional wings. Attached to these stumps is a claw, which they use to defend themselves with. Contrary to popular belief kiwis are extremely resilient creatures and are not particularly fussy about where they live.



### Vital Statistics:

New Zealand is home to six different kinds of kiwi that fall into two general groups– the spots and the browns. Great spotted kiwis occur from North West Nelson down to Arthur's Pass while little spotted kiwis are now only found, in the wild, on offshore islands. North Island browns are restricted to the North Island while the rowi (or Okarito brown) consists of a small population of 130 individuals on the South Island's West Coast. The southernmost brown kiwis are known commonly by their Ngai Tahu name – tokoeka - and consist of Haast tokoekas - 200 birds restricted to forest near the West Coast township - and southern tokoekas that are not uncommon throughout Fiordland and Stewart Island.

### What makes it unique?

Kiwis form an early branch from the evolutionary line of the primitive, flightless ratites (moa, cassowary, ostrich etc.). As a result they are one of the oldest members of the avifauna. Kiwis are naturally nocturnal and are unique in the bird world as having their nostrils at the tip of their bill. The females have a pair of functioning ovaries (rather than just one) and the body temperature and metabolic rate are much lower than most other birds.

### Conservation:

Kiwis, in particular the North Island brown kiwi, are disappearing from forests at a phenomenal rate and it is thought that at the current rate they may in fact disappear completely from the mainland in the next twenty years. Reasons for their decline are: 1) only 50% of kiwi eggs hatch in the wild due to a combination of breakage, predation or adults leaving the nest for some reason; 2) 95% of all kiwi chicks die before they reach the age of 6 months due to predation; 3) kiwi are particularly susceptible to dog attack because they lack a keeled sternum to protect their chest area; 4) Loss of habitat. In order to save the remaining kiwi population, DoC has undertaken the Kiwi Recovery Programme. A vital part of this strategy includes Operation Nest Egg whereby eggs are 'stolen' from the nest. The young chicks are kept safely in captivity until they reach an age whereby they can be released back into the wild.