

## Kiwi decline

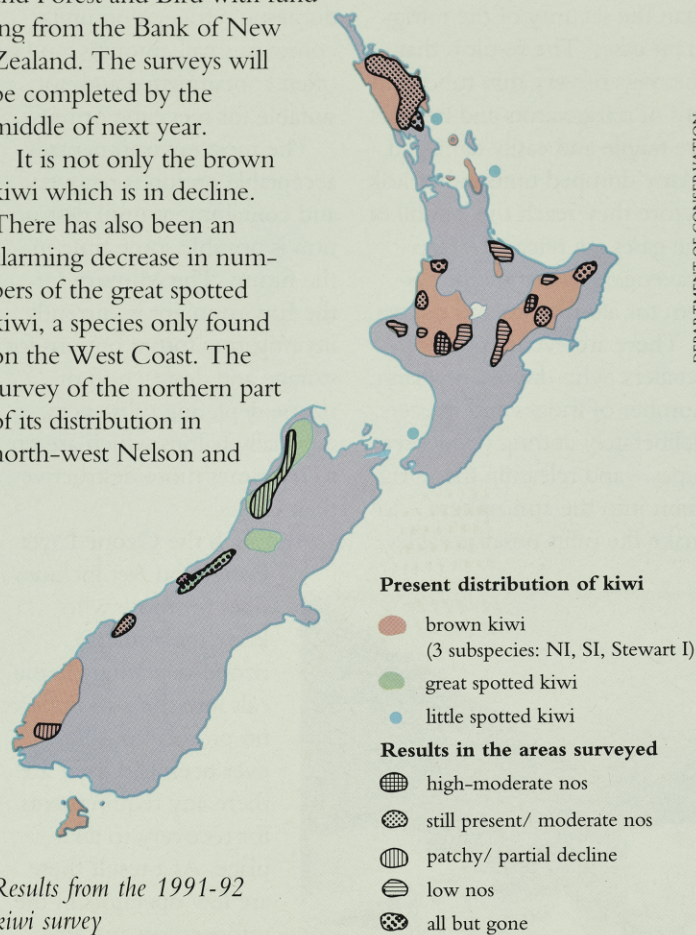
SURVEYS OF KIWI populations around the country over the past year have shown alarming declines in numbers and distribution, particularly those of the brown kiwi.

In Northland, long thought to be the stronghold of the North Island brown kiwi, there has been a clear contraction of the range in areas in the south-east where the birds were known 10-20 years ago. A similar story is emerging in Egmont National Park, Raukumara Range on the East Coast, Mamaku Plateau and Pirongia Forest.

The surveys were conducted by the Department of Conservation as the first stage of the five-year kiwi recovery programme launched last year (see *Forest & Bird* November 1991). The programme aims to maintain and boost kiwi populations throughout New Zealand and is a partnership between DoC

and Forest and Bird with funding from the Bank of New Zealand. The surveys will be completed by the middle of next year.

It is not only the brown kiwi which is in decline. There has also been an alarming decrease in numbers of the great spotted kiwi, a species only found on the West Coast. The survey of the northern part of its distribution in north-west Nelson and



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the Paparoas showed patchy results, but in its southern distribution, in South Westland, only one bird was found.

Only the little spotted kiwi, extinct on the mainland and now restricted to island sanctuaries, showed consistent well established breeding populations.

"There's now no doubt that kiwi are very severely at risk in the wild," said DoC's director of protected species Janet Owen.

The main threat to the kiwi comes from dogs. And possums, which compete for food, take over burrows and eat the eggs. Kiwi were also vulnerable to possum baits and poorly set gin traps.

DoC has advocated the shooting of dogs that kill kiwis. At present it is unable to do so. Forest and Bird, however, feels that this approach is too late and too limited, and has consistently argued that all kiwi habitat should be zoned as dog-free areas.

## Why shoot the shoveler?

SHOVELERS are very unusual dabbling ducks. Unlike other dabbling ducks, they do not graze on grass or grain and are therefore entirely dependent on shallow swamps. Shovelers seem to be in decline and this can be largely attributed to the loss of these fertile wetlands to farming.

In the late 1970s, the population of this duck (an endemic subspecies of the Australasian shoveler) was estimated at 130,000 birds out of a total waterfowl population of more than five million. Since then much wetland habitat has been drained or degraded and many observers suspect that the shoveler population has dropped considerably.

This decline is certainly suggested in the official records of the waterfowl shooting season which are sourced from hunters' diaries. In practically every part of the country in 1990 and 1991, hunters' records and opinions suggest shoveler numbers to be down.



*Shovelers are dependent on shallow wetlands. Their bills are disproportionately large and spade-like, and edged with fine fringes to sieve tiny aquatic animals and seeds from amongst the raupo and rushes.*

Murupara Forest and Bird member and keen shooter Andre Terpstra fears shovelers are continuing to decline drastically. On his farm where he and his wife Louise have sanctuary ponds and ponds for hunting, Andre has watched waterfowl for many years. He observes that shovelers are less wary than the introduced mallard, and respond readily to the decoys and calls of hunters.

These techniques are much more widely used than they were ten years ago, so bagged shovelers might have been expected to increase, rather than decline as they have done.

It is not clear whether shooting is a factor in the decline of shoveler, but it obviously doesn't help. If shoveler were removed from the shooting list, a spin-off would be the enhanced protection of other

small ducks. Shoveler are small and with their rapid flight can be confused with grey teal, a fully protected species. Many grey teal are shot by mistake for shoveler. If the latter were not targeted, this confusion should not arise, as hunting would focus on the much larger ducks – mallard, grey duck and paradise shelduck.

The loss of shoveler to most hunters would be slight. Over much of New Zealand shoveler contribute less than two percent to the hunter's bag (although in the Hawke's Bay and Wellington districts the figures are between five and six percent, and in North Canterbury and Otago, nine percent).

Already some hunters are choosing not to shoot shovelers. Perhaps it is time to consider greater protection for this endemic bird, and concentrate hunting pressure on the flourishing waterfowl species which have been introduced for this purpose.

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