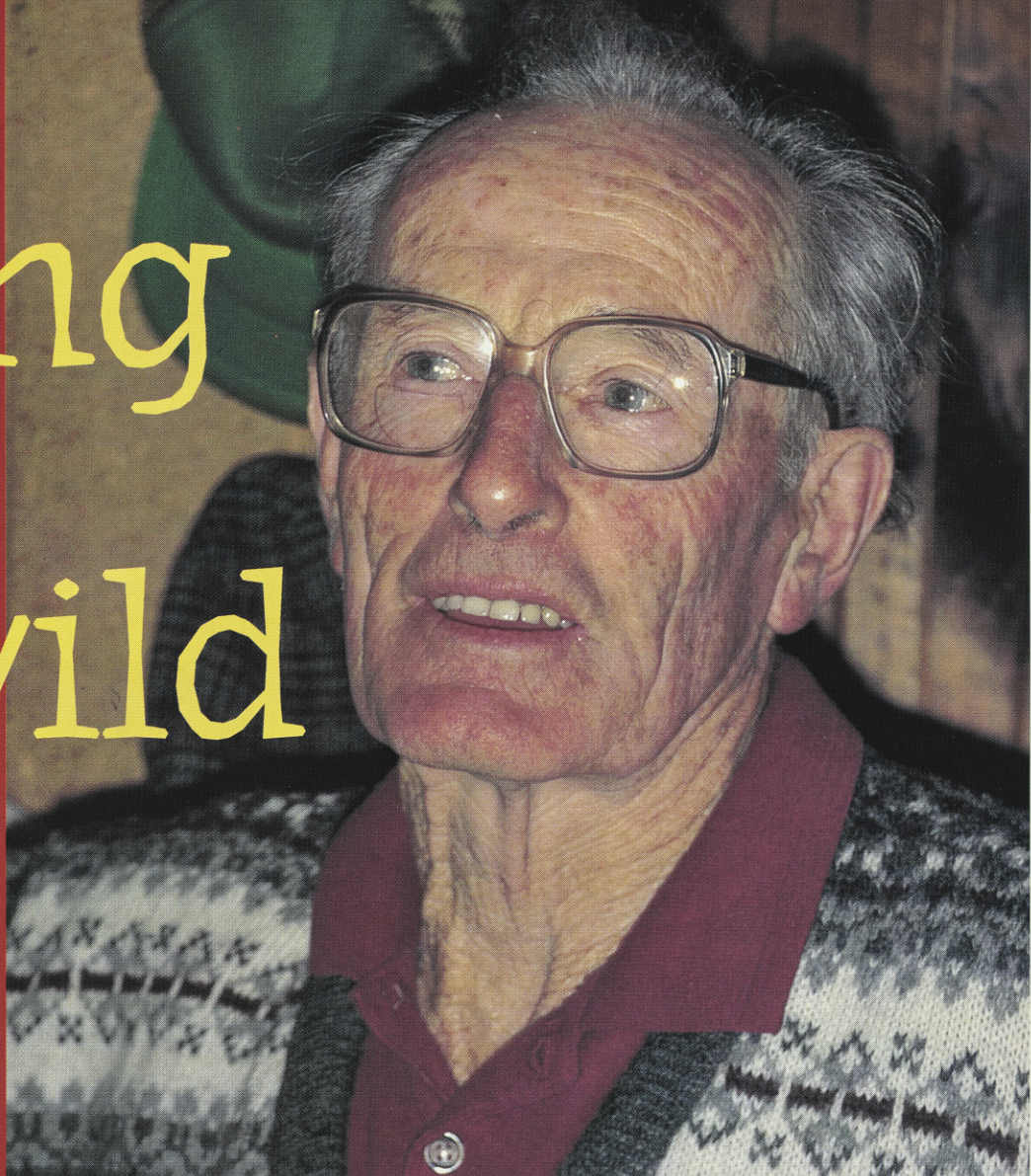


profile

Luring the wild

JACQUI BARRINGTON meets the man behind the bird calls that have beguiled generations of National Radio listeners – and finds him still hankering for one last quest for an elusive native bird.



JACQUI BARRINGTON

"QUICKSILVER" Kendrick he was to the former Wildlife Service; and at almost 74 John Kendrick displays the same mercurial mind – and body – that earned his nickname. He fairly sparkles recalling his ground-breaking recording of native birds (whose legacy survives in National Radio's morning bird call). Near his Whangaparaoa home, this coordinator of Hibiscus Coast's Kiwi Conservation Club, twinkles up steep hill-sides at breakneck speed, talking all the while.

His English father came out in 1899; after breaking in and farming 700 hectares near Kawhia for 17 years he moved to a small farm near Hamilton where John was born. Growing up in the relatively unspoiled Waikato in the 1920s and 30s, and encouraged by their father, John and his sister became nature enthusiasts.

Their "bibles" were Moncrieff's *New Zealand Birds and How to Identify Them* and later the first, 1930, edition of W. B. Oliver's *New Zealand Birds*.

These were pre-electricity days, when big oil lamps lit the evenings to the call of myriad moreporks or ruru and the days were filled with the song of tui

and bellbird. But he also remembers the first mynas arriving in the Waikato when he was just seven. They nested in a nearby farm building, and local boys wanted to kill them, but were prevented by John. In hindsight he wishes he hadn't interfered. Like his friend, wildlife photographer Geoff Moon, he now recognises them, and the magpie, as significant intruders into the New Zealand environment.

Secondary school saw natural history take a back seat to a growing interest in electronics and this led to his first job – assistant projectionist with a travelling cinema. Two tonnes of equipment were hauled in caravans around the outlying district to places like the Ngaroma mill, which at this time was working its way through the northern part of Pureora forest. Some venues, like Marakopa, required a whole day's gruelling travel over clay roads to set up the show.

When World War II broke out, John signed up with the Waikato Mounted Rifles. His morse and radio skills soon saw him attached to Signals Division but, following illness, he was discharged.

For the next five years he ran the family dairy farm while pursuing his qualifications in radio. In 1950 he became very active in the newly formed New

Zealand Speleological Society. For John, caving was a dream come true, "sporting science" where he could push his physical limits to the maximum, at the same time as extending scientific boundaries through the discovery of fossil and subfossil bird bones. These finds included one complete moa skeleton laid out on the sandy floor of a cave, and kakapo remains only 20 kilometres from the centre of Hamilton. His discoveries helped expand the number of known New Zealand bird species and redefine the historical distributions of others.

Meanwhile with the Waikato Tramping Club he explored the Raglan Hills and the Karakariki Bush, which at that time were still marvellously diverse. Today there's little left, he mourns, pointing the finger at the great push to break in marginal land for production following the War. Before then, despite the enormous changes wrought on the landscape, wild New Zealand was still alive and well, he asserts. The destruction with the most telling impact has all been in the last 50 years.

JOHAN MOVED into Hamilton where he ran an electronics business for eight years.

In 1960 he bought one of the first