

The Ancestry of Birds

A new book, *New Zealand's Unique Birds* by BRIAN GILL includes a popular account of new discoveries about the origins of our birds. These extracts discuss their evolution, and relationships with birds of other regions of the world.

The endemic birds of an area — those originating there and found in the wild nowhere else — are always of special interest. Among New Zealand's unique birds we find, for example, such species as the world's largest living rail and largest living parrot. Among the extinct species were the world's tallest bird, biggest penguin, biggest eagle and biggest owl-nightjar.

New Zealand is a 'centre of endemism' — a region where the relative proportion of

