



Leonardo Da Vinci once said ...The secret of all knowledge is to know how to see ...

Hundreds of years ago Leonardo da Vinci bought birds in the market and released them in his studio so he could study their flight. We also can learn a lot by studying the birds around us and their daily actions.

Early Māori watched the birds they hunted and understood their behaviour. They then used this in comments about human strengths and failings in sayings known as *whakatauki*.

You can study birds at home in your garden. You don't need to buy them in cages and release them!

Common garden birds can have very strong personalities.

Pecking order is the seniority of birds and can be seen in your chicken run or in the sparrows waiting for crumbs as you eat morning tea.

Try watching seagulls on a beach and work out which are the young ones ... waiting to be fed.

Be a happy 'twitcher'!

Where to look for birds.

Place names in New Zealand are the same as anywhere else in the world – reflecting well-known people, their actions, landmarks with distinctive features, or the creatures that live there.

Many of the names in Aotearoa relate to the birds that lived in that area. As an important food source, it was valuable to know where and what type of bird could be found. The names were a way of remembering this information. It is a real help to know how to count in Māori, as many of these names indicate the numbers of birds or special colouration of those in the area.



The longest place name in the world is ...

‘The brow of the hill where Tamatea, the explorer, who slid, climbed and swallowed mountains, known as land-eater, played on his flute to his loved one.’



However, some place names can have several different meanings, as many Māori words can be used in several ways. The meaning can be worked out by the context it is used in. Titiokura (a peak in Hawkes Bay) is sometimes referred to as Okura’s lookout. Okura was a local chief; titi can be a lookout, or it is also a name for a mutton bird.

The second meaning refers to the local practice of lighting smoky fires in front of huge nets on poles, to catch mutton birds returning from the sea to their nests near the summit.

The remains of those fire ashes and grass growth around long rotted poles can still be seen beneath the rocks at the summit, known these days as Te Waka. This name is because of its shape, like a great canoe prow on the skyline.

Will the South Island kōkako ever be found in some remote valley?

In modern times the place name Rongokōkako (in the Tararua district in the Manawatu), makes us wonder what we have lost. It means to listen to, or experience the song of the kōkako, a once rare New Zealand crow. It was famed for its wonderful song. (Rongo means to listen.) This place may also have been named centuries ago by Tamatea, the explorer, after his father, on his many and wide-ranging travels around Aotearoa.

How long is it since someone here, thrilled to the beautiful song of this rare and endangered songbird? Many are hunting for its cousin, the South Island bird, and there is a big reward offered for the lucky bird-spotter who photographs one.

Another famed songbird was the huia. Its tail feathers were worn by a chief as a sign of mana. They were once widely hunted and are now considered extinct.

Huia became sparse after European settlement in the eastern North Island from Huiarau south. There with other brief records from the Ruahine, Tararua and Rimutaka ranges, Northern Wairarapa, and also the hills around Wellington.

Because sightings have never been reported in the South Island, it is a puzzle as to why an early surveyor named a major tributary of the Karamea River, the Huia River. Did he mistake a Kokako for a Huia? They are both Wattle birds and their flight is similar. There are also the Huia Caves near Nelson.

The name Huiarau in the North Island means many huia.



Ka whakaronogomai aki au te tangi o te huia

This whakatauki means ...

'Listen while I sing the sad song of the huia.'

Will it ever be heard again?

A brief guide to some other bird placenames in New Zealand

Awa-kāeaea	awa: valley or stream; kāeaea: the sparrow-hawk	Sparrow-hawk stream
Kaitangiweka	kāi: food; tangi: to cry; weka: wood hen	Crying of the weka for food
Kaitieke	kāi: to eat; tieke: the saddleback bird	Eat the saddleback bird
Kiwinui	kiwi: bird; nui: many	Many kiwi birds
Kōputaroa	kōputa: snare for catching parakeets; roa: long	Long snare for catching parakeets
Korakonui	korako: albino; nui: big	Large albino (bird)
Kōtuku-moana	kōtuku: white heron; moana: lake	Lake of white herons
Kuranui	kura: red; nui: large red birds	Big red (birds)
Mākōtuku	mā: stream; kōtuku: white heron	White heron stream
Mangaweka:	manga: stream; weka: wood-hen	Weka stream
Motutara	motu: island; tara: gull	Gull island
Ngākawau	ngā: the; kawau: shags	The shags
Motueka	Motu :island Weka bird	This could be a shortened name for a bird island. This could also be an ancient name of a Pacific Island

Ōhoukākā	ō: place of; hou: feather; kākā: parrot	Place of the parrot feather
Ōkiwi	ō: place of; Kiwi	Place of kiwi
Ōkōtuku	ō: place of; kōtuku: white heron	Place of the white heron
Ōrurutūmārō	ō: place of; ruru: morepork; tū: stand; mārō: firm	Place of the unmoving morepork
Ōtoroa	ō: place of; toroa: albatross	Place of the albatross
Paekākāriki	pae: perch or snare; kākāriki: parakeet	Parakeet perch
Pakuratahi	Pakura : swam-hen or pukeko. Tahī ,one	Place of a single swamp hen
Pukekāhu	puke: hill; kāhu: hawk	Hill of the hawk
Rotokawau	roto: lake; kawau: shag	Shag lake
Waikākā	wai: water; kākā: parrot	Parrot stream
Waikererū	wai: water; kererū: wood pigeon	Water of the wood pigeon
Waimatuku	wai: water; matuku: bittern	Bittern water
Waitangiruru	wai: water or stream; tangi: to sound; ruru: morepork	Stream that sounds like a morepork
Whangaruru	whanga: harbour; ruru: morepork	Morepork harbour

Make a list of the basic words, have a look at signposts in your area, you may understand

Whakataauaki ... wise sayings

Early Māori in New Zealand relied heavily on birds for their food, and wise sayings evolved as part of these observations. For Māori the kūaka were birds of mystery. They featured prominently in tribal mythology. It was believed that they came from, or at least passed through, the ancestral home, Hawaiki. Where were they going? Where did they breed?

Kua kite te kohanga kūaka?

‘Who has seen the nest of the kūaka?’

Ko wai ka kite I te hua o te kūaka?

‘Who has ever held the egg of the kūaka?’



Can you see one nesting in the top image?

Did you know they have the longest migration flight of any bird in the world?

Further observation of their habits led to other whakatauki:

Rarangi noa ra te rangai kūaka kia tauhikohiko he pare tu waho.

‘Flocks of godwits are gathering, moving restlessly on the seaward cliffs.’

When a flock of kūaka continually rose in the air and then settled down again, this was regarded as an *aitua* or evil omen, by any war party that observed this behaviour. Then the cry was, *Ka hoki te taua, ka hoki te taua!*

Can you find out what that means?



Bird habits and human behaviour were blended together in many sayings. Some are as true today as they were in early history.

He kūkū ki te kāinga, he kākā ki te haere.
 ‘Quiet like a pigeon on the marae, loud and noisy like a kākā when he is elsewhere.’

This describes people who nod and murmur agreement in big meetings, too scared to voice their opinion in public, then go away and do a lot of big talking in other places.

Over stormy ocean
 toroa skimming waves,
 breathing wild salt wind.

In the south, birds like the albatross and penguin were part of the sayings taught to children as way of instilling concepts and wisdom.

Ka rere te toroa ... ka rere ke te korora.
 ‘The albatross flies ... the penguin flies too ...but differently’, explains that we can all do the same things, but in different or individual ways.

Another favourite says:
... ka heke te toroa...ka hokimai a te ukaipo.
 ‘You can make the long trip of the albatross, but you will always be welcome home.’



Could you write a Haiku poem?

*They are Japanese poems and have a five-seven-five syllable pattern
... and show something of the character with as few words as possible.*

Piwakawaka,
flitting with a flick of tail,
riding a huge snail.

Slow paryphanta,
shiny carnivore hunting
worms on forest floor.



Single great white bird,
reflected in still water,
catching inanga.

This distinctive bird was noted for its rarity e
ven in early days.

Te kōtuku rerenga tahi.
'The bird of a single flight.'

If you saw one in your lifetime you were considered lucky.



A fantail in a house was considered bad luck
and to some, a sign of coming death. Perhaps
because, in a traditional legend, the laughter
of piwakawaka caused the death of Maui.

