



KERERŪ, MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE

FROM SEED SPREADERS TO BUSY PARENTS, KERERŪ PLAY A VITAL ROLE

Some trees tell a story - and trees that have hosted a kererū nest can tell us quite a bit about what's happening in our bush.

Where kererū have nested, you may find taraire seedlings popping up beneath the tree. This is a clue that the nest was likely active sometime between April and September, when taraire is producing ripe fruit. Kererū are fantastic seed spreaders, helping regenerate our native forests as they travel from tree to tree, carrying and dropping seeds along the way.

But, kererū aren't exactly fussy eaters!

Unfortunately, we haven't managed to train them to stick exclusively to native plants. During late spring and summer, if woolly nightshade is growing nearby, kererū will happily tuck in. Woolly nightshade belongs to the Solanum family, the same family as tomatoes, and they produce little berry-like fruits that are particularly appealing to kererū.



Patches of Taraire seedlings (above) and Woolly Nightshade (below) observed growing under previous Kererū nesting sites. Photos supplied by Andrew Sinclair

A BUSY LIFE FOR OUR KERERŪ

While kererū in our area generally lay just one egg per nest, they have an impressive ability to breed throughout the year when food is plentiful. In fact, a pair can sometimes have two nests on the go at once. Feeding a rapidly growing chick in one while incubating an egg in another.

The egg is incubated for around a month, followed by about 10 days where the parents remain with their young chick. After that, the adults become more like Uber-eats drivers than babysitters, flying in to deliver food before heading off again. Remarkably, the young kererū can be fully fledged in just 35-40 days!

For much of the year, kererū are busy dining on fruit. But come September and October, when the supply of berries begins to dwindle, they change their menu. Young leaves, buds



Kererū on watch. Photo: Amber Sims

and flowers all become popular choices for the day, with plants such as kōwhai, poplar and willow all making the menu.

THE PAYOFF FROM PEST CONTROL

One of the most encouraging signs in recent years has been the increase in kererū numbers. This is something that everyone involved in pest control can be proud of.

Kererū face plenty of threats. Their eggs, chicks and adults can all fall victim to rats, possums, stoats and cats. And then there are the native predators, kāhu (hawks), which are always on the lookout for an opportunity to raid a nest.

At times, kāhu can even be seen hunting in pairs. One bird stays high above the canopy, acting as a spotter, while the other swoops low over the trees, shrieking in an attempt to disturb a chick and trigger movement. This may be a key reason for flimsy nest building and excellent camo of chick from above via evolution with kāhu, so that they are not easily spotted from above.

So, when you see more kererū around our neighbourhood, remember that it's not just luck. It's a sign that the hard work being done on the ground is making a difference.

