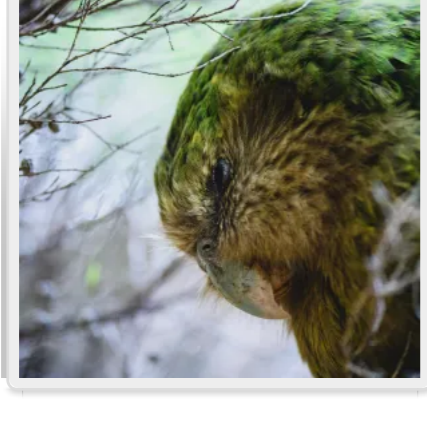


Home / Kākāpō / Celebrating 40 years with Nora the kākāpō

Search

Search... [input field]



Celebrating 40 years with Nora the kākāpō

Department of Conservation — 08/07/2020

By Bronnie Jeynes, Ranger

At first glance Nora the kākāpō doesn't appear particularly different from the other 209 birds in the population.



Nora the kākāpō. Photo by Jake Osborne

Her green feathers are a little sun faded and she has a few distinctive pale feathers around her face but nothing gives away that she's the longest monitored kākāpō in the world, first discovered on this day 40 years ago. She's often perched several meters up a manuka, sleeping in the sun. There's a pile of poop at the bottom of the tree to signify she's been here a while. This must be her favourite.

The first kākāpō nest of the 20th century

Nora was found in the wilds of Rakiura in July 1980 by renowned kākāpō finder Gary 'Arab' Aburn and his black lab Mandy. She was discovered just three months after the first female kākāpō was found on the island. There was worry that the species was functionally extinct so every female found in that first year was hugely exciting, a promise that the species might actually be able to survive.

Nora was named by American biologist Margaret Shepard who was on the team studying the remnant population of kākāpō and collecting data. In 1981 Nora became the first kākāpō to be seen nesting in likely over 100 years. Her nest was closely monitored, and Nora provided many insights into how kākāpō rear their young. She successfully fledged two chicks from this nest: Adler and Zephyr. Sadly, Adler disappeared shortly after fledging (likely eaten by a feral cat) but Zephyr has gone on to become a successful mother in her own right.



Nora in a tree. Photo by Jake Osborne

An irregular breeder, but an important one

Nora is the matriarch of the "Wind Dynasty" of kākāpō (a large family group all descended from Nora), and boasts chicks, grandchicks and great grandchicks, many of whom also have wind themed names.

Genetics work tells us that Zephyr was fathered by Rangī who Nora also mated with in 1985, but she hasn't visited him again since being moved off Rakiura. Nora only nests during years of big rimu masts but unfortunately her chosen beau for many years was Lionel who had the worst sperm deformities ever seen in a kākāpō. This is likely the cause of her infertile eggs in 1992 and 2002. Nora did however prove to be a good foster mum in these years

Nora successfully bred for the first time in 36 years in 2016, producing two chicks: Kōtiū and Matangi who were both fathered by Blades. In 2019 she nested twice, mating with Tūtoko both times. She was also successfully artificially inseminated with sperm from Sinbad; one of only three kākāpō fathered by Richard Henry, the only bird to survive from Fiordland. Safe to say he carries precious rare genetics. The successful artificial insemination work in 2019, funded by Meridian Energy, that fathered Rahotu was one of the highlights of the 2019 breeding season! Nora reared Rahotu herself, while the three chicks from her first nest were all fostered out to other mothers to rear.



Whenua Hou, where Nora lives today. Photo by Jake Osborne

Forty years of change

Over the 40 years that we've known Nora, she's seen a lot; from the vast scrub of Rakiura with cats decimating the population to the carefully monitored and supported life on predator-free Whenua Hou where she lives today. Nora's witnessed huge changes in technology too, as we move closer towards the prospect of remotely monitoring the actions of each individual bird. Nora has eaten various diets of supplementary food and provided essential data to hundreds of studies as we've worked to learn as much as possible about these birds. From just having found breeding females in 1980 to coming out of a massively successful breeding season in 2019, 40 years has seen a huge change in the outlook of the species.

And hopefully in another 40 years the Wind Dynasty, and maybe even Nora herself, will still be here to see a species back from the brink.

Thank you Nora!

Kākāpō population since 1976

Find out more about the work of the Kākāpō Recovery Programme on our website: www.doc.govt.nz/kakapo-recovery

Share this:

Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Print buttons

In Kākāpō, Native animals, kākāpō, Nora, Rakiura, Stewart Island

10 responses to Celebrating 40 years with Nora the kākāpō

- Comments from Christian Masser, Patrick, Shirley Newman, ro25anjanc, Kakapo213, fregata1, LALA, Department of Conservation, Mark Ferns

Trackbacks and Pingbacks:

- Trackback from ニュージーランド ダーニデン便り - July 13, 2020