

BIRDS OF  
THE LANDING



# BIRDS OF THE LANDING

New Zealand is sometimes referred to colloquially as ‘Birdland’. Our isolated position on the globe and complete lack of native land mammals meant that for millions of years, birds (ngā manu in Te Reo Māori) ruled the landscape.

Over time, they filled every ecological niche, with several species becoming flightless as they took over roles usually played by land-based mammals (the giant moa, for example, was New Zealand’s equivalent of an elephant or giraffe).

Today, despite many species becoming extinct after the arrival of humans, New Zealand is still home to more than 460 species of birds.

The Landing’s rich native bird population is one of our most valued taonga (treasures) as well as one of our proudest achievements. More than two decades of work has gone into restoring forest and wetland habitat on this property, which along with a concentrated pest and predator control programme has allowed many species of birds to recover and flourish.

This guide aims to help you identify the native birds you are most likely to see at The Landing, differentiate them from introduced species, and give you a little insight into some of the features that make them special. Where population estimates are cited, they refer to the population within New Zealand. Some native species also have populations in Australia or other Pacific Islands.



# NATIVES



## Kererū/Kūkupa

Woodpigeon | *Columba palumbus*

Estimated 24,000

New Zealand's native woodpigeon can often be identified by sound first – not by its call, which is a soft and infrequent 'ooo', but by the distinctive noisy whooshing of its wings in flight. The large birds have beautiful colouring, with a rich green head, blue back and wings overlaid with purple, a blue-green tail and bright white underbelly. As frugivores, they feed on native and exotic berries and fruit, particularly karaka berries (which are poisonous to dogs), miro and kahikatea, but also leaves and herbs.

In the summer, the kūkupa's habit of sitting in the sun means its bellyful of fruit can ferment, becoming alcohol, and leading to drunken behaviour, including occasionally tumbling out of trees.



## Tūi

Tūi | *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*

Not threatened

The complex song of the tūi is New Zealand's most recognisable bird call. Capable mimics that imitate the songs of other forest birds, tūi were sometimes traditionally tamed and taught to speak by Māori, particularly mihi (greetings), which they could recite to visitors.

Tūi feathers are black with a blue-green and bronze iridescent sheen and a distinctive white puff of feathers (poi) at the front of the neck, giving them the nickname 'parson-bird'. They are energetic in flight, with their wings making a distinctive whirring noise. Their song is loud and complex: melodic and mournful trills contrasting with harsh grunts, coughs and bell-like chimes.



## Korimako

Bellbird | *Anthornis melanura*

Not threatened

Bellbirds are rare in Northland, though are found widely from the Waikato southwards, as well as at The Landing. Their song is sweet and a little melancholic, without the grunts and coughs that characterise the tūi's call.

Their plumage is green and purple, with blackish wings and tail, and red wine-coloured eyes. Females have a white-yellow cheek stripe. Like their fellow honeyeaters, the tūi, they cluster around flowering trees, bushes and small fruit-bearing plants.





## Pīwakawaka

Fantail | *Rhipidura fuliginosa*

Not threatened

Fantails are dark grey-brown in colour, with a yellow belly and white facial markings. Typically, they grow to about 16 centimetres, half of which is their long and often-fanned tail. These tiny birds are small and agile, weighing a mere eight grams.

If you walk through native New Zealand forest, it's more than likely a fantail will tag along with you. Although these likeable birds seem curious about humans, they're actually chasing the tiny insects you stir up as you walk. The fantail's fanned tail acts like a boat rudder for swift mid-flight turns. Occasionally, fantails may be seen without tails, which can be caused by predatory attacks from animals such as cats, rats and stoats.



## Tauhou

Silvereye | *Zosterops lateralis*

Not threatened

Often seen alongside fantails in flocks that flit quickly from tree to tree, tauhou are small green, grey, cream and yellow songbirds with a clear white ring around the black eye. Active and friendly, they have a feathery brush tongue that helps them sip nectar like the larger tūi and korimako (which resembles the tauhou, but is larger, greener and has no eye-ring), but also feed on small insects, fruit and berries.

Although small, they managed to introduce themselves to New Zealand in the 1830s, with larger numbers arriving in the 1950s, probably off the back of a large storm. Its Māori name, tauhou, means 'stranger', or 'new arrival'.



North Island  
Brown Kiwi

## Kiwi-Nui

North Island Brown Kiwi | *Apteryx mantelli*

Over 24,000 | Not threatened (conservation dependent)

One of the five species of New Zealand's iconic bird is found in abundance at The Landing, so your chances of sighting one are high, as long as you venture out at night. Flightless, with tiny, useless wing stubs (the Latin name, *Apteryx*, means 'wingless') and strong clawed feet, the kiwi makes its home in shallow burrows, with each bird having a number of different burrows within its territory.

Kiwi hide in their burrows or in dense undergrowth during the day before emerging after dusk to search for insects, worms, invertebrates and grubs. Although their eyesight is poor, their sense of smell is excellent, aided by the fact that their nostrils are at the end of their long beaks, instead of at the base, like most birds.

Kiwi are ratites, related to emus, cassowaries and the extinct giant moa bird, and don't have a breastbone/sternum, which makes them particularly vulnerable to predation by dogs. Their eggs are the largest in the world for their body size (although kiwi are about the same size as chickens, their eggs are six times as large), and chicks hatch fully feathered and ready to run.



## Kākā

Kaka | *Nestor meridionalis*

Fewer than 10,000 birds | Recovering

The kākā is a loud, forest-dwelling parrot found across all three of New Zealand's main islands and several offshore islands. Their feathers are olive-brown, but you may spot a flash of red-orange under their wings mid-flight. Kākā have strong, curved beaks that allow them to manoeuvre up trees and strip bark for grubs and sap. This behaviour can be harmful for trees, as the birds shred the wood while they forage for food. Flocks of kākā often gather to socialise in noisy clusters. Their name is comprised of the Maori word, kā, meaning screech – a nod to their chatter and gossiping.



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## Ruru

Morepork | *Ninox novaeseelandiae*

Not threatened

The nocturnal ruru or morepork is a bird you're likely to see or hear during a kiwi-spotting night walk. Small and compact, the ruru is one of only three owl species found in New Zealand (the others being the introduced little owl and barn owls).

The ruru's bright yellow-green eyes (which have been suggested to be the source of the large eyes of Māori carvings) stand out against its speckled feathers. Their distinctive double call gives it both its Māori name and English name. Dusk and dawn can be good times for spotting ruru: listen for clusters of angrily chattering smaller birds 'mobbing' a morepork, which reveals its position and forces it to move on.



## Pūtangitangi

Paradise Shelduck | *Tadorna variegata*  
Not threatened

You'll likely find the colourful pūtangitangi at the pond overlooked by The Landing winery. Several pairs of these large, striking, goose-like ducks live there and can often be spotted gliding across the pond as a group. The males are predominantly black with chestnut and green patches on the tail and white patches on the wings. Female paradise shelducks have a chestnut body and white head with similar patches to the male on the tail and wings. Pairs mate for life and produce broods of around 6-10 fluffy brown-and-white striped ducklings between spring and mid-summer.



GLENDAREES

## Matuku-Hūrepo

Australasian Bittern | *Botaurus Poiciloptilus*  
Rare | Estimated fewer than 1000 in New Zealand  
Nationally critical

The Australasian bittern is a large, stocky heron with a dagger-like beak, standing up to 75cm tall and weighing up to 1.4kg. Their streaky feathers give them excellent camouflage in their preferred habitat of raupō (bullrush) wetlands, where they feed on fish, eels, insects and small crustaceans. The bittern is a notoriously cryptic species, as the birds are stealthy, well-camouflaged and partly nocturnal. Males have a distinctive booming call that can be heard up to two kilometres away. Wetland loss is the largest contributor to their population decline, and when bitterns are found at a site, it is seen as an indicator that it's a high-quality habitat.



GLENDA REES

## Mātātā

Fernbird | *Poodytes punctatus*

At risk | Declining

The shy fernbird looks a little like a cross between a songthrush and a fantail, with speckled brown colouring and a long, raggy tail. They live in shrubby and tussocky habitats, weaving deep, snug, feather-lined nests close to the ground. They are particularly susceptible to attack by dogs as they are reluctant fliers.

Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand notes that “to some tribes, the mātātā is tapu (sacred). When a chief died and was buried, men would catch a mātātā from a swamp. The bird was used in a ceremony to help lead the dead man’s spirit to the legendary Polynesian homeland of Hawaiki.”



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## Pāteke

Brown Teal Duck | *Anas chlorotis*

Estimated 2000-5000 | At risk | Increasing

The pāteke is a dark brown dabbling duck, noticeably smaller than the common mallard. Both sexes have a conspicuous white eye ring around their dark brown eyes and blue-black bills, and in breeding season males have shiny green heads and reddish chests. They are reluctant fliers and prefer to walk, often feeding on the forest floor rather than in the water. They are semi-nocturnal, so may be spotted when you are out looking for kiwi.

Pāteke were once widespread, but predation, hunting and habitat loss has severely impacted their population. The Landing has been used as a release site for captive-bred birds on three occasions, so has a good local population.





## Pūkeko

Swamp Hen | *Porphyrio melanotus*

Not threatened

There's something vaguely Jurassic about the hefty, purple-blue bird known in New Zealand as the pūkeko (and elsewhere as the Australasian swamphen). With large red beaks and long prehensile claws, they are a capable predator of smaller birds and fish (despite being mostly vegetarian), and they have a bold, curious and territorial attitude that frequently puts them into close contact with humans. They live near wetlands and are reluctant fliers but strong swimmers despite their lack of webbed feet. Adults are noisy, with a shrill screech and a regular territorial crowing. They can be confused with their near-relative, the very rare takahē, which are much stockier.



## Pūweto

Spotless Crake | *Zapornia tabuensis*

Declining

Small (half the size of a blackbird) and shy, the dark blue and brown spotless crake can be heard and sometimes spotted in The Landing's wetlands. Listen out for their range of calls, which include a sharp 'pit-pit', an alarm clock-like 'purrrr' and single or repeated 'book' calls.

They have black beaks, red eyes that stand out against their dark heads, and orange-pink legs. Their secretive nature makes it very hard to estimate how many there are in New Zealand, but their numbers are thought to be declining.



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## Weweia

New Zealand dabchick | *Poliiocephalus rufopectus*  
Recovering | 1900-2000, North Island only

A dark-coloured grebe with striking yellow eyes, the weweia's name comes from its call. With spiky silver head-feathers, dark back and a red chest, it has a punkish air, and is known for conducting a complex mating dance that has been likened to a tango.

They build floating nests from raupō around the edges of freshwater lakes, and the striped black-and-white chicks are able to swim and dive as soon as they are hatched. They often ride on their mother's back, or dive underwater under her wings.



## Matuku Moana

White-Faced Heron | *Egretta novaehollandiae*  
Not threatened

Standing around 70cm tall, the white-faced heron can often be seen picking its way around the edge of wetlands or along calm seashores, or frozen mid-step as it waits for prey to approach. Pale blueish-grey in colour, with a splash of white across its face and upper neck, it has a sharp dark grey bill and bright yellow legs.

Matuku moana are unusual in flight in that they do not always fly with their necks folded back (as herons typically do) but sometimes fly with necks outstretched (more like cranes). Often they let out a harsh 'grawk' cry in flight.





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## Kāhu

Swamp Harrier | *Circus approximans*  
Not threatened

New Zealand's largest bird of prey can usually be seen gliding in wide circles above farmland or perched by the side of rural roads making a fast meal of roadkill. Kāhu take their meals as they come, diving onto unfortunate small mammals, birds or lizards or cleaning up after lambing season. Kāhu arrived in New Zealand from Australia within the last 700 years, out-competing the now-extinct native Eyle's Harrier, which was around twice their size.



## Kōtare

Sacred Kingfisher | *Halcyon Sancta Vagans*  
Not threatened

A glowing flash of blue-green-and-white is often the darting form of the New Zealand sacred kingfisher. Sitting around 20cm high, they are usually spotted perched patiently on tree branches or powerlines near rivers, streams and estuaries. You might also be alerted to their presence by their distinctive 'kek kek kek' or 'kreee kreeee' calls. As much hunters as fishers, they eat a wide variety of small species, including fish, lizards, insects, crabs, mice, and the odd unfortunate silvereye or other small bird. They nest in holes they dig into soft riverbanks using their sharp beaks, or hollows found in trees. Māori traditionally compared the watchful kingfisher to a good sentry.



## Tūturiwhatu

New Zealand Dotterel | *Charadrius obscurus*

Around 2500 | Recovering | Critically endangered

The New Zealand dotterel is a beach-dwelling plover with a brown back, cream underbelly and a distinctive red-orange chest during breeding season. Although the North Island species is growing in population, the South Island species is critically endangered.

Dotterels nest on beach dunes, with the 'nest' often being little more than a scrape in the sand. During breeding season, vehicles are banned on The Landing's beaches to protect the eggs and young birds. Please be careful when walking on beach dunes between August and February.



## Kororā

Little Blue Penguin | *Eudyptula minor*

Not threatened

Small but mighty, New Zealand's little blue penguins stand about 30cm in height and 1kg in weight. To compensate for their compact size, little blue penguins have adapted their behaviour to remain at sea until dusk, helping them to avoid some of their natural predators. Their short and distinctive slate-blue feathers act as a waterproof coat when swimming, with webbed feet and wings-turned-flippers allowing them to 'fly' underwater. Their moult season takes place during January to March, making them vulnerable to attacks as they are unable to swim when moulting. The New Zealand population is in decline, with approximately 50,000 to 100,000 birds estimated to reside across the country.

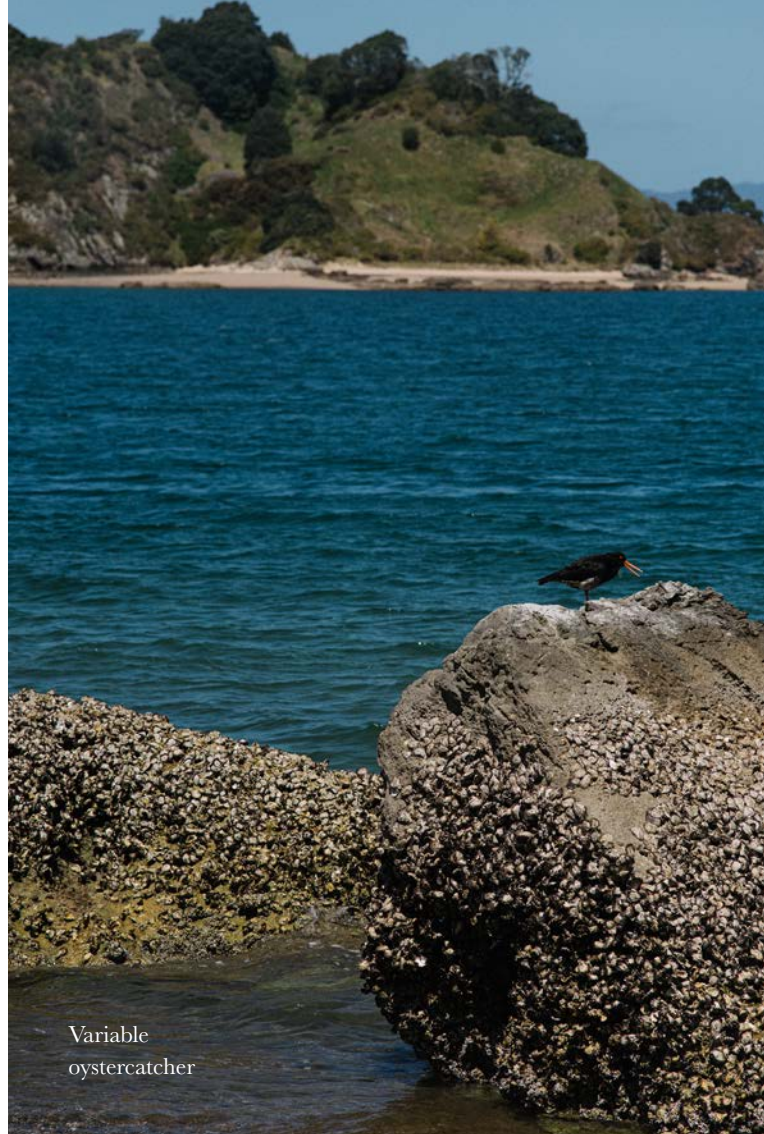


## Tōrea pango

Variable oystercatcher | *Haematopus*

Around 6000 | Increasing

Due to their wide range of colouring, you might wonder if the oystercatchers you spot at The Landing are from different species. But whether they're all-black, black-and-white or all-white, they're all the same 'variable' oystercatchers. They mainly dwell on the coast, where they feed on mussels, oysters, limpets and crabs, but after a good rain, they may head inland to pick up worms and other soft insects that have risen out of the wet ground. Like dotterels, their nests are usually only a scrape in the sand above the tideline, but breeding pairs may mark their own nest with a piece of driftwood, shell or dried seaweed.



Variable  
oystercatcher





GLENDAREES

## Ngutuparore

Wrybill  
*Anarhynchus frontalis*  
Around 5000  
Vulnerable | Increasing

The wrybill's sideways-curved bill is unique in the bird kingdom. These small white and grey plovers use their unusual beaks to prise insects and shellfish from underneath stones. They are usually only seen in Northland from January to July, as they migrate to the South Island riverlands to breed in the second half of the year.



## Tarāpunga

Red billed gull  
*Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae scopulinus*  
Not threatened

New Zealand's most commonly encountered gull is found on coastlines around the country, but rarely inland. White, with a silver-grey back and distinctive red beak and legs, they are fearless and aggressive scavengers and kleptoparasites (food-stealers), earning them the nickname 'chippy-pinchers'.



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## Tarāpuka

Black billed gull  
Around 60,000  
At risk | Declining

A slenderer and more elegant relative of the tarāpunga, the tarāpuka has a slim black beak and black feet. As New Zealand's only endemic gull, it has the unfortunate status of being the world's most endangered gull. It is mainly found in the South Island, where it often lives inland, but can occasionally be seen on Northland coasts.



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## Karoro

Black backed gull  
*Larus dominicanus dominicanus*  
Not threatened

A large white gull with an imposing yellow beak, the karoro is found throughout the country. Juveniles, which are a mottled brown and white, can be mistaken as being a different species. They are both scavengers and predators, and will catch and eat smaller birds. They are one of only two native birds in New Zealand not subject to Wildlife Act protection.

# VAGRANTS AND MIGRANTS



## Kuaka

Bar-tailed Godwit

*Imosa lapponica*

More than 80,000  
visiting annually

The world's greatest travellers, godwits make an incredible 12,000km flight from Alaska to New Zealand – the longest of any migrating bird. The Landing is only a stopover on their way to their summer feeding grounds in Auckland, the firth of Thames, the Tasman region and Christchurch. In contrast to the extraordinary journey they make, godwits are ordinary-looking birds; plump, medium-sized waders.



## Eurasian Whimbrel

*Numenius phaeopus*

Around 70 visiting annually

The Eurasian Whimbrel is a regular visitor to New Zealand, in small numbers. This migratory shorebird has been spotted at The Landing in spring, on its annual journey from the Arctic, where it breeds. They are often seen alongside the common bar-tailed godwit, which annually migrates to and from New Zealand. Mottled brown in colour, with paler chests and bellies, they are larger than godwits, and recognisable by their long, downward-curved bill.



## Huahou

Red Knot

*Calidris canutus*

45,000 – 70,000, with  
4000 – 8000 over-wintering

Also known as the 'lesser knot', huahou are small, plain grey-and-white sandpipers that blossom into rusty red colouring during breeding season. They are often seen with godwits, which gain a similar red colouring during breeding season, although huahou are about half the size of godwits. They feed with a rapid bobbing action that has been likened to a sewing machine.



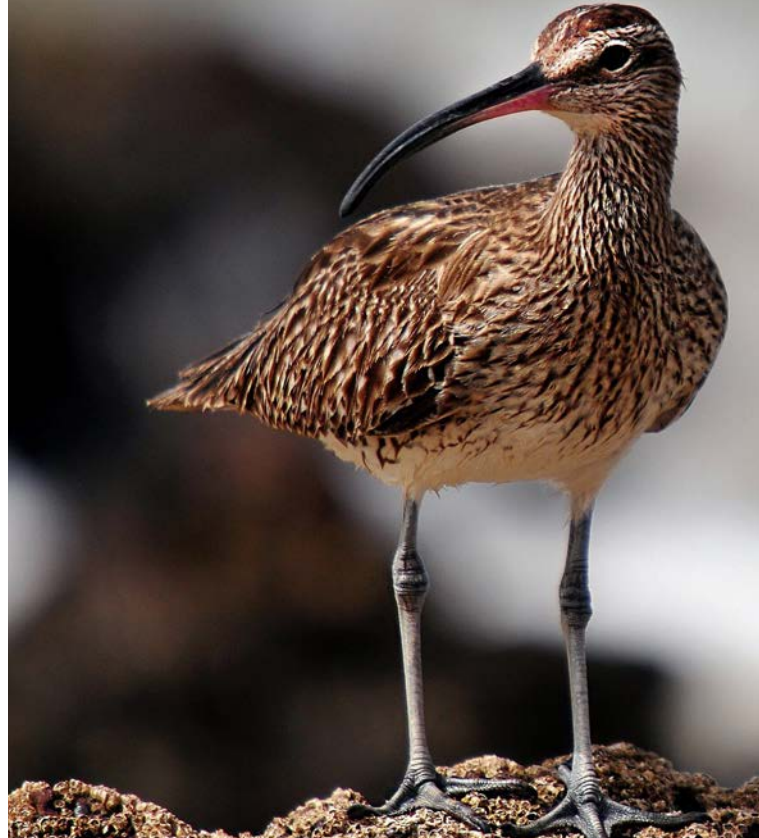
## Sulphur Crested Cockatoo

*Cacatua galerita*

Occasional visitors

Noisy and noticeable, this Australian invader is a large, white parrot with a black beak and bright yellow crest of feathers on the head. They are voracious seed and fruit eaters, and regarded as pests in Northland, where there is no established population.

Eurasian  
Whimbrel





# INTRODUCED



## Tiu

House Sparrow  
*Passer domesticus*

Found almost everywhere, house sparrows are one of New Zealand's most successfully introduced species. You'll often spot sparrows near human dwellings and throughout the country in cities and towns, although they tend to be less present in the bush and high mountains. These small songbirds are brown in colour, with males donning distinctive black "bibs". Sparrows vie with silvereyes in being the most abundant New Zealand bird, at least near human habitation.



## Dunnock

*Prunella modularis*

Similar to the house sparrow, dunnocks are small brown songbirds that were introduced to New Zealand from England. Although scarce in the north, dunnocks are a common bird in southern New Zealand. Their small insect diet was among the reasons for their introduction, with settlers using dunnocks for pest control in orchards. Adults form mainly polyandrous [female birds pair with two to three males] or monogamous breeding groups that occupy small territories.



## Pahirini

Chaffinch  
*Fringilla coelebs*

Chaffinches are the most widespread of New Zealand's introduced finches [small to medium sized birds with conical bills and colourful plumage, occupying a great range of habitats]. In spring-summer, males are brightly coloured, with a brick-red breast and a grey-blue crown. They often form flocks of varying size outside their own breeding system, and may even form mixed flocks with native species such as fantails and silvereyes.



## Maina

Mynah  
*Acridotheres tristis*

Native to India, Pakistan and Burma, mynahs were first introduced to New Zealand in the 1870s. Deep brown with a black head, white patches on their underwings and tail and distinctive yellow eye surrounds that match their beaks, they are clever, aggressive and omnivorous.



## Makipai

Magpie  
*Gymnorhina tibicen*

Magpies are cunning black-and-white birds with a lot of personality, about the same size as a crow. They are clever, with an eye for interesting objects, and if tamed, can be taught to talk well. Watch for them during nesting season (July to December), as they can territorially 'divebomb' passers-by. Their signature warbling cry is famously written as 'quardle-ardle-oodle-ardle-wardle-doodle' in the well-known New Zealand poem *The Magpies Said*, by Denis Glover.



## Kākā Uhi Whero

Eastern Rosella  
*Platycercus eximius*

A colourful species of parakeet native to Australia, Eastern rosellas were introduced to New Zealand in the early 1900s and became naturalised after escaped pets began breeding. They are abundant in the North Island, and are often seen in noisy, chattering groups of 6-20+ birds, usually made up of mating pairs.

Blackbird





## Tāringi

Starling

*Sturnus vulgaris linnaeus*

Compact, medium-sized songbirds with blackish-brown feathers dotted with iridescent spots, starlings can often be seen in large, wheeling flocks in the evening. They are omnivorous, and were originally (successfully) introduced to control caterpillar plagues.



## Warou

Welcome Swallow

*Hirundo neoxena*

Swooping low over fields and marshland, swallows can be entrancing to watch. They are small and dark blue-grey, with reddish heads, necks and chests. Their long, forked tail and pointed wings give them excellent manoeuvrability in the sky.



## Manu Pango

Blackbird

*Turdus merula*

Introduced by English settlers longing for the birds of home, the European blackbird is a common sight in New Zealand gardens, found everywhere in the country. Like the similar song thrush, blackbirds are sometimes regarded as pests for spreading the seeds of invasive introduced plants like blackberries.



## Manu-kai-hua-rakau

Song Thrush

*Turdus philomelos*

Brown and cream, with a light belly speckled with dark spots, the song thrush is a shy, solitary bird with a surprisingly vibrant song. From a high perch, they sing a wide-ranging volley of melodious notes, with sections repeated two or three times.



## Peihana

Pheasant  
*Phasianus colchicus*

New Zealand's common pheasant is a mix of subspecies of gamebirds that were introduced to the country by European colonists in the mid-1800s. They are not considered pests within New Zealand. Mostly solitary, they are most often seen when disturbed, erupting from their hiding place vertically and flying to safer cover.



## Kuera

Australian Brown Quail  
*Synoicus ypsilophorus*

With its intricate patterning and brown plumage, the small brown quail is an inconspicuous bird, but a common sight at The Landing along road edges. Although they were once widespread through the country, they are now found mainly in the warmer north.



## Tikaokao

Californian Quail  
*Callipepla californica*

A small, plump, sociable gamebird introduced to New Zealand after 1860. They are distinguishable from the brown quail by their prominent topknots, grey colouring with streaked wings and chest and distinctive 'Chi-ca-go' call (which also gives it its Māori name, Tikaokao).



**THE LANDING**