

THE
New Zealand
BIRD BOOK



Sarita Betschart



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THE NEW ZEALAND BIRD BOOK

SARITA BETSCHART







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Pedication

To Holly, Arthur, and Maria



*Tiakina nga manu, ka ora ngahere.
Ka ora ngahere, ka ora nga manu.*

Look after the birds and the forest flourishes.
If the forest flourishes, the birds flourish.

-MĀORI PROVERB



Scan this code to listen to a playlist of all
the bird sounds mentioned in this book.



One

THE BIG WIDE WORLD

Rabbit | **Rāpeti** | *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Peacock | **Pikake** | *Pavo cristatus*

Turkey | **Korukoru** | *Meleagris gallopavo*

Pheasant | **Peihana** | *Phasianus colchicus*

ONCE upon a time there was a family of little rabbits. They lived with their mother in a tidy burrow underneath the roots of a tawa tree.

Early one morning Mrs Rāpeti told her young children it was time for them to go and make a life of their own. One of her sons, Peter Rāpeti, was eager to find adventure and gain knowledge of the great wide world around him.

The sun had just risen above the trees, when Peter set off to find a new place of his own. He went *lipperty-lipperty* through the dew drenched fields until he came to a fence. He squeezed under it and found himself in a beautiful hidden garden with archways, wrought-iron gates and tree-filled glades. He started to nibble on a patch of fresh grass, feeling very pleased with himself, when he noticed a movement out of the corner of his eye. Peter looked up to find he was surrounded by a group of large brown and white birds, with green throats and a spray of feathers on the tops of their heads. Some young chicks were also peeping at him from behind their mothers.



PEAHEN WITH CHICKS

“Help, hh-ee-ll-pp, I uh mean, H-hello?” Peter stuttered.

One of the chicks walked from the ring of circling birds and came right up to Peter, with a curious but friendly look in his little black eyes. But before he could speak, he was interrupted.

“Peawee, get back here,” his mother warned, and the young peafowl slouched back to his mother. “You have

no idea what kind of diseases he might carry, keep your distance,” she hissed at her son. He shrugged with embarrassment at the rabbit, who was now cowering into the grass, then was hustled behind his mother’s back by a strong wing.

There was sudden loud alarm call, “*Pe-girk, Kokok,*” com-

ing from right behind the group. They all jumped in fright, and Peter wished he was back in his safe warm burrow.



PEACOCK

“What have we here, make way, make way. I need to see.”

A larger and more colourful bird strode into the circle. He was a beautiful and stately peacock with shimmering green and blue feathers. He looked Peter up and down in silence, while Peter shrank deeper into the grass.

“*Pee-girk, pee-girk. Kokoko-ko*, what are you doing here, intruder?” The peacock asked him.

“I meant no harm; I am just looking for a place to make my home.”

“I am Píkake, Lord of the Manor. You are not welcome here, little rabbit, move on.”

Peter started to bound away, thankful that he had been let go so easily. Just before he pushed under the hedge at the edge of the garden, he turned around for one final look.

The peacock had spread his magnificent tail and was strutting over to a large window of the house. He admired his fabulous display of feathers in the reflection, while the peahens milled around him. The peacock then jumped up onto the roof of the house and started loudly proclaiming, “*Κερω, κερω.*”

“I don’t think this would be the right place for me anyway,” Peter murmured to himself as he squeezed under the bushes and away.

In the next paddock Peter saw a tall macrocarpa tree.



TURKEY

Perched on nearly every branch were large turkeys with black feathers and bald heads. Peter had never met turkeys before, so he hopped over to the base of the tree and looked

up at the crowd of funny looking birds. The largest gobbler jumped down from his perch and spread his brown and white fan-shaped tail. He glared at Peter with his small black eyes, surrounded by bright blue skin.

“Gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble.”

The red wattle under his chin and the snood that hung over his beak both swung back and forth in rage as he advanced on Peter. In horror, Peter turned tail and bounced across the paddock, as quickly as his little legs would carry him.

As he came up to a barberry hedge growing along the fence line, he was startled by a sudden *“squawk, squawk,”* and up flew a pheasant with beautiful striped tail feathers, and a bright red head.

Peter watched as the pheasant disappeared over the hedge and out of sight.

“Oh Mama, I

PHEASANT





do miss your safe warm burrow. What have I got myself into? I have met some beautiful looking birds today, but what a pity their actions have not been as lovely as the feathers they wear. Will I ever find a good place to make my home?"

With a sigh, Peter continued his search. Ahead he saw a garden that looked inviting. He made his way towards it, but as he neared the tall netting fence, he saw some movement. Racing up to the wires came a shaggy brown dog, and when he spotted Peter, he began to bark loudly and run up and down the fence line frantically. He seemed to be trying to find a spot to push through.

Peter did not wait to see if the large shaggy dog was successful in finding a hole in the fence. Instead, he raced off in a different direction.

When he finally stopped for a rest, Peter found himself near another farm house, with an abundant garden growing around it. His tummy started to rumble, so with some

trepidation, Peter went into the garden to find something to eat. He did not meet with any loud or rude occupants in this garden, so he began to relax and enjoy the food. His main course for lunch was a large clump of sweet kumara leaves.

Halfway through his meal he was startled by a sound coming from the back door of the farm house. The door opened and out walked three young children followed by their mother. They were the Cowan family, who lived on the farm, and owned the garden that Peter was thinking about making his home.

Peter sat very still, watching them carefully. They went towards the small shed in the flower garden, and he felt himself starting to relax again. Then out of the shed they came, this time with baskets and spades in hand, and started walking straight towards him. Peter froze, but as they came nearer, he decided to make a dash for it and raced towards the cow paddock.

“Mum, look, a bunny – *Oma Rāpeti, oma Rāpeti, oma, oma, oma,*” he heard one of the children sing out.





Two

PETER DISCOVERS TUI GLEN

Fantail | **Pīwakawaka** | *Rhipidura fuliginosa*
Tui, Parson bird | **Tūī** | *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*
Australian magpie | **Makipai** | *Gymnorhina tibicen*
Silvereye, Waxeye | **Tauhou** | *Zosterops lateralis*
Common myna, Mynah | **Maina** | *Acridotheres tristis*

ONCE Peter was safely in the paddock, he felt he could take a peek at what was happening behind him. He crouched behind a tall clump of grass and peered back into the veggie garden. He saw that the children had lost interest in him and were hard at work. It looked like they were digging up the rest of his lunch. What a pity. The eldest girl, with curls glinting golden in the autumn sunshine, was asking

her mother why they were digging up the kumara.

“Yes indeed,” grumbled Peter, “why?”

“The frosts are coming,” the mother explained to her children, “and kumara, like many other plants and animals, does not enjoy the icy frosts.”

Peter twitched his nose, testing the air. Yes, he could feel change in the breeze, autumn was coming to a close and the short dark days of winter would soon be here.

As Peter continued to watch Farmer Cowan’s family harvesting kumara, he noticed another observer. However, this fellow was much bolder than he would dare to be! He was a small brown and grey bird with a long white tail, striped with black. The tail was held together tightly and then opened out like a fan. Peter watched the small bird twisting and flitting around the branches of the peach tree, right within a few hops of the children.

“Well, I never,” exclaimed Peter, “My mother always told me I was a risk taker, but I never would dream of being as



FANTAIL

reckless as that! I wonder why he does it?”

Peter was interrupted by a bird in the cherry tree growing near the edge of



TUI

the paddock. “Hello little rabbit, I don’t think I have seen you in our garden before?”

Peter looked hesitantly at the bird above him, wondering if he would be chased away again. “Hello, my name is Peter Rāpeti, and I was thinking this would be a good place to make my new home, if I am allowed to stay?”

“Of course you may make your home here. My name is Tui, and that little bird you seem so interested in is a fantail called Pīwakawaka. There are many different birds that come to our garden.” Tui said.

“Well, I thank you for the welcome, and I look forward to learning more about birds. Do you know why Pīwakawaka is so bold with the humans?”

Tui glanced over at the fantail and then replied, “Here he comes now, why don’t you ask him? You will notice that Pīwakawaka never stays in one place any length of time.

The fantail flitted towards the walnut tree and Peter hopped closer.

“Good morning, Pīwakawaka,” he cried as he came up under the tree. “I am Peter Rāpeti, and I would love you to tell me how you dare to go so close to the humans?”

“*Cheet, cheet.* Hi there, Peter and Tui,” the fantail replied. “Those giants never bother me, and if I keep close, I can often find an easy meal. They disturb all sorts of tasty creatures as they work.”

“Ah food! Yes, that is a reason to which I can relate. A delicious morsel can be worth taking some risks for.”

“What are your plans for winter, Peter?”

“Well, I think it is time I built a burrow of my own. Once

the winter has passed, I will be wanting to settle down and start a family. What are your plans?”

“We will stay around here, the frosts are not too harsh, and the snow does not come to this area. We may have a visit from some family who live further south.”

“Yes, it does seem like a nice place to spend the winter. Plenty to eat, which is rather important. I may need to continue my lunch somewhere else though. Have a good day,” Peter called, as he headed towards the magnolia trees at the back of the garden.

After filling his stomach, Peter began his search for the perfect place to dig his new burrow. He came across a large blackberry bush growing beside a group of cabbage trees. He investigated, and decided that this would make the perfect spot for his front door. He set to work, and soon had a cosy space to call home.



“Quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle.” Peter opened his eyes and stretched, as he listened to the magpie calling outside his burrow. He had been



AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE

living in his new home for a few weeks now, and was very pleased with it. He had been seeing lots of different birds, and was enjoying getting to know more about them.

He peeped out his front door and watched as a group of magpies swooped down and started working their way across the paddock, towards the farm house. They grew bold, and worked right up onto the front lawn. The sliding door was pushed open and Farmer Cowan’s son stepped outside.

“Shoo, you pesky magpies!” The boy called. The large black and white birds flew up in a group and settled in the swamp cypress, the thin branches swaying and bending under their weight.

“Ardle wardle doodle”, they called down indignantly.

“Thank you for scaring away those horrid birds,” one of the sisters said, as she came through the door, followed by the third child. Together they walked over to a post that was dug into the lawn with a tray attached to the top. Peter watched curiously as they each put a white lump onto the tray, then turned and went back inside. Peter crept closer. He found a safe spot under a rose bush to observe. He didn’t have to wait long. Soon a small green and grey bird with dark eyes ringed with distinctive silvery-white circles had flown over

and perched on the tray and started to peck at the objects. It was Tauhou the Silvereye.

“Why hello there, little fella”, Peter called out. “What have you got there? Are you sure it is safe to eat?”

“*Creee, cli-cli, chirp.* Oh yes, it’s beef fat. The humans put it out over winter for us to enjoy. It’s a mighty fine feast, and it gets me through the dark cold days when food is scarce.”

“Ah, that does sound helpful. Do you stay here all winter, or will you fly north?”

“I plan to stay around for the winter. I have many relations coming for a visit soon. My great-grandpa will probably tell us his favourite story, the one about the great adventure silvereyes had when we first discovered these lands.”

“Why, I don’t know that story, have you not always lived around here?”

“Oh no, many years before my great-grandpa’s time, our ancestors were caught in a strong storm, which blew us across the ocean to this beautiful land. We decided to make our home here. Our name ‘tauhou’ means stranger, or new arrival. We are immigrants, just like those magpies, and like them, we have multiplied well! I meet friends and relations wherever I go.

SILVEREYE



We are most adaptable, and find this place very much to our liking.”

Tauhou took another large mouthful of fat,

then carefully wiped his beak on the tray before continuing the conversation.

“Pheasants, turkeys and peafowl are all introduced birds too, you know.”

“Ha, I have met all those birds before, and I guess that explains a few things – very poor manners every one of them!”

“There are also the blackbirds, song thrush, starlings, sparrows, and all finch species, swans, geese, chickens...”

“Quite a long list then! Well, I guess I enjoy having many of those birds around. But still, sometimes I wonder if it would have been better without them.”

The silvereye put his head to one side, observing Peter carefully. He wondered how to share the next tidbit of information he had. Finally, he took a deep breath.

“Peter, you do know that rabbits are also an introduced species, right?”

“What!! Hmm, well I guess it is kind of okay that travel and migration happen...”

“Not too fast, little rabbit,” interrupted Tui from a nearby tree, “I’ve been listening to some of your conversation, and take it from me, some of these birds can be real pests! When a great flock of sparrows or starlings numbering in their thousands turn up to roost in a new place it can cause major issues. The guano built up from such large numbers can cause harm to the other local birds, and the health of the

MYNAH





WAXEYE

nearby lakes and streams can go quickly downhill.

“*Chickork-chickork*,” suddenly came from the roof of the house.

They all looked towards the noise. “Why there is another immigrant to these lands, Peter.” Tauhou said. “The myna

has done very well here, but I find him a rough and unkind neighbour. I think I might be done for the day.”

They watched the silvereye fly off towards the shelter of the trees.

“I’m not surprised to see him hide at the sight of those mynas. During the nesting season they will destroy the eggs and nestlings of any other birds they find within their territory.”

“That’s cruel!” Peter indignantly replied.

“Magpies may also eat small birds and their eggs and chicks. It can have quite an affect when new birds move into the neighbourhood.”

MAGPIE





TUI



Three

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Tui, Parson bird | **Tūī** | *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*

THE next day, Peter was loping through the orchard, when two small birds flew over his head. He stopped to call a greeting, but already they were out of sight.

“Who was that?” Peter wondered. Then a flock of sparrows flew up out of a tree as he approached, they went over the house and away.

“Wait, I want to talk...” Peter called, but it was too late, they had already disappeared. A little later in the day, Peter had a similar thing happen.

“Birds are just so fast, it is hard to even catch a glimpse of them, before they are gone,” he exclaimed.



“Well friend,” Tui said from a kowhai branch nearby, “A lot about a bird is fast. Your running heart rate is probably half that of the average bird’s flying heart rate. The distances and speeds many birds can fly would far outstrip your fastest running speeds. Even when we stop to rest, we breathe faster than any other animal. We also have a higher internal temperature than any

other creature. With such strong hearts beating so quickly, such quick breathing, and such warm bodies, it’s no wonder you struggle to keep up with us.”

“That makes sense, I guess. So how do you stay so warm?”

“Well, all birds have feathers, which keep us from losing body heat. Our feathers are pretty wonderful! There are soft downy feathers that are our warm under-layer. Our babies grow their down feathers first, which make them look so cute and fluffy. Birds that live in the water are likely to have especially thick down feather layers.

“Then there are the contour feathers which are the main outer layer that you can see, and they are important for flying and for showing off. They come in a range of colours and patterns, shapes and sizes. Some bird’s feathers act as

camouflage, with patterns and colours similar to their surroundings. Females and young birds are the most likely to match their hiding places, as they need the most protection from predators.”

“Would that be like the peahens with their dull brown feathers, compared to the peacocks with their flamboyant blue and green?” Peter asked.

“Yes, that is one of the more obviously different bird pairs.”

Tui stretched out his feathers, fluffed them a little and then began to preen them. He collected preening oil from near the base of his tail with his bill and feet. He then stroked each feather from its base to its tip, getting each one aligned just right and spreading the preening oil to each feather.

Peter watched this careful care routine with interest. “What do you do that for, Tui?” he finally asked.

“Well, my mother taught me to preen my feathers a few times every day, so it is a habit I have had from when I was very young. I believe that the preen oil keeps my feathers flexible and strong. It keeps them waterproof and makes me healthier and looking good. When I have my feathers in the right position this also helps me use less energy when flying as they are a more efficient shape.”

“You seem to be growing a little larger Tui, how is that happening?”

“Sitting here I am starting to feel a little cold, but if I fluff out my feathers, the trapped air layers keep me warmer. If I am ever feeling hot, I can flatten my feathers to make them thinner.”

“Thank you for taking the time to share all this with me, Tui, it is most fascinating. I don’t want to keep you here get-