

North Island Weka



COMMON NAME: **NORTH ISLAND WEKA** – Sparrman, 1786

LATIN NAME: ***Gallirallus australis greyi***

LATIN MEANING: *Gallirallus* L. *gallus*, the farmyard cock; genus *Rallus*, rail; ref. brown speckled plumage and ground loving habits of the Weka *G. australis*. *Australis* L. *australis*, southern (*auster*, *austri*, the south). *Greyi* – after Sir George Grey (1812-1898); Governor of South Australia (1841-1845) and New Zealand (1845-1853 & 1861-1867).

CLASS: Aves

ORDER: Gruiformes

FAMILY: Rallidae

GENUS: *Gallirallus*

SPECIES/SUB SPECIES: *Australis* / *Greyi*

DESCRIPTION:

A large flightless rail with a strong mandible and feet and reduced wings. The plumage is mainly brown and black, but the tone of the brown and the amount of black vary with more grey on the breast. Legs are brown. Males are 1–1.2 kgs, females between 700–900 grams in weight.

HABITAT / DISTRIBUTION:

Various habitats on offshore islands, Bay of Islands and inland Bay of Plenty.

BREEDING:

Breeding can take place at any time of the year. A grass-lined nest is made beneath some over-hanging vegetation and 2–4 creamy white to pinkish eggs with brown and pale purplish blotches are laid. The incubation period is around 25–27 days. Active within hours of hatching, chicks are covered with black downy feathers.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:

Weka are a very inquisitive, yet highly territorial species. Aggression is not uncommon and mature females will kill immature males when thrust together. Males can become aggressive towards chicks. Weka have also been known to fight and kill intruding ferrets and rats.

DIET:

Weka are omnivorous, eating everything from the dupes and fruits of native plants to invertebrates, reptiles, snails, eggs and birds. Weka readily kill mice, rats and rabbits.

PRINCIPAL THREATS:

- Introduced predators such as ferrets, stoats, cats and dogs
- Introduced bird species such as blackbirds and thrushes competing for native dupes, fruits and invertebrates.
- Habitat loss, modification and degradation.
- Introduced avian diseases and parasites.
- Vehicles causing road kills.
- Poorly managed pest control operations, traps, rat baits and toxins such as cyanide, snail and slug baits.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

Threatened, more endangered than the North Island Kiwi.



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