

Great Spotted Kiwi/Roa

The "Mountaineers" of kiwi

Referred to as the "mountaineers" of kiwi, the great spotted kiwi or Roa are our close neighbours here in Arthur's Pass. Roa are also found in north Westland and north west Nelson. There is estimated to be around 10 000 great spotted kiwi living in the wild, but their population is declining at a rate of around 6% per year. Predators such as stoats, ferrets, dogs and cats were introduced to New Zealand last century and these animals kill many kiwi. Hopefully the great spotted kiwis choice of home, high in the mountains, will help to protect them a little from their enemies. Roa also fortunately have an impressive 30-40 year lifespan.

Protecting kiwi from predators in Arthur's Pass

Adult Roa are large and powerful birds, capable of fighting off most smaller predators such as stoats, ferrets, possums and cats. Sadly though kiwi eggs and chicks are easy meals for those smaller predators and dogs can easily kill the adult kiwi too. Predation by stoats, ferrets, possums, cats and dogs means that 95% of chicks die within 6 months of hatching!

There are many ways of helping to protect kiwi from their enemies. It is important that pet cats and dogs are carefully controlled in Arthur's Pass village as the kiwi live very close to the houses. Dogs are only allowed inside the National Park by special permission from the Department of Conservation. Pet cats should have a bell to stop them from sneaking up on Kiwi chicks.

The Department of Conservation in Arthur's Pass also undertakes trapping and poisoning of predators in some parts of Arthur's Pass National park. Some village locals help by trapping stoats and possums around the village. Trapping and poisoning has to be done very carefully as Cyanide poison and traps placed on the ground will kill kiwi too. So traps and poison need to be placed out of kiwis reach.

Kiwi listening

The kiwi's call can be heard over a kilometre away on a clear calm night. The long rising whistle is the male call. The harsher raspy call of the female is sometimes easy to mistake for a possum. To listen for kiwi find a quiet spot away from traffic noise. The first two hours of darkness during the dark phase of the moon is the time you are most likely to hear kiwi, but calls may be heard at anytime on any night near the village.

Great spotted kiwi facts

- **Where do they live?**
In damp mossy subalpine vegetation and forest.

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- **Do they have territories?**
Yes. Their territories can be large and they will defend them from other kiwi. They can have up to 50 burrows within their territory!
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- **Do they mate for life?**
Yes.
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- **What do they eat?**
All sorts of things! Mainly invertebrates such as beetle larvae, cicada nymphs, worms, beetles, crickets, fly larvae, weta, spiders, caterpillars, slaters, slugs and snails. Kiwi can also eat some seeds and berries. Kiwi push their long beak into the ground to capture tasty worms!
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- **How do they find food?**
Kiwi have a very developed sense of smell and also can feel for vibrations made by their prey moving in or on the ground. When kiwi are feeding they walk along sniffing (loudly!) and tapping their beak against the ground.
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- **When do they breed?**
June to March.
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- **How long do the eggs take to hatch?**
Up to 80 days!
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- **How big are their eggs?**
Huge! 15-20% of the female kiwis body weight.
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- **Do kiwi have hair or feathers?**
Kiwi do have feathers, but they are long and wispy, making the kiwi look hairy.