

# Bird of the Year

**Bird of the Year** (Māori: *Te Manu Rongonui o te Tau*) is an annual election-based competition run by the New Zealand conservation organisation Forest & Bird to elect a New Zealand native "Bird of the Year". The competition is intended to raise awareness of the conservation threats to many endangered native birds.

It draws support from celebrities including politicians, artists, actors, and television personalities.<sup>[1]</sup> The election is a significant social media and public event in New Zealand; there are regular attempts at voter fraud, some winners (such as the short-tailed bat) have been controversial. In 2023, a TV campaign by British-American comedian John Oliver for the pūteketeke drew international attention to the contest, leading it to win with more than 290,000 votes.<sup>[2]</sup>

## History

Bird of the Year (BOTY) was first launched in October 2005 by Michael Szabo, editor of *Forest & Bird* at the time, initially as an online poll featured in Forest & Bird's first email newsletter; votes were collected by email and through the post.<sup>[3]</sup> Szabo noticed the public outcry when RNZ considered dropping bird calls from its daily Morning Report, and decided to tap into this public interest with an annual poll.<sup>[4]</sup> The first BOTY contest included 76 native bird species and received a total of 900 votes; the tūī was the winner.<sup>[5]</sup> BOTY was later championed by Forest & Bird's communications manager Helen Bain, who saw it as a "light-hearted...way of raising the profile of native birds and the threats to them".<sup>[6]</sup>

In 2014, the competition was temporarily retitled to **Seabird of the Year** and only seabirds were eligible.<sup>[7]</sup> In 2023 the competition was dubbed **Bird of the Century** (*Te Manu Rongonui o te Rautau*) to coincide with Forest & Bird's centennial celebrations, and for the first time included extinct birds: laughing owl, South Island snipe, huia, South Island kōkako, and bush wren.<sup>[8]</sup>

Between 2022 and 2024, voters used the Forest & Bird website to rank their top-five choices for Bird of the Year. The winner was determined using the instant-runoff voting method.

### Bird of the Year

*Te Manu Rongonui o Te Tau*



**Incumbent**

**Kārearea**

since 29 September 2025

|                         |                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Term length</b>      | 1 year                                                                                                    |
| <b>Inaugural holder</b> | <span>Tūī</span>                                                                                          |
| <b>Formation</b>        | October 2005                                                                                              |
| <b>Website</b>          | <span><span>birdoftheyear.org.nz</span></span> ( <span><span>https://birdoftheyear.org.nz</span></span> ) |

Because of the transferable voting system, the Bird of the Year was not necessarily the species receiving the most number-one votes in those years. For example in BOTY 2022 (starting 17 October), seventy-one species were shortlisted as candidates, and the rock wren was the winner, because it received the most and highest vote rankings, despite getting fewer #1 votes than the second-place winner, the little penguin.<sup>[9]</sup>

Bird of the Year 2022 top 10

| Bird                                                  | Number of #1 votes | Position |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| <u>Pīwauwau / rock wren</u>                           | 2,894              | 1st      |
| <u>Kororā / little penguin</u>                        | 3,351              | 2nd      |
| <u>Kea</u>                                            | 1,852              | 3rd      |
| <u>Karure / kakaruia / Chatham Island black robin</u> | 1,594              | 4th      |
| <u>Tawaki piki toka / rockhopper penguin</u>          | 1,468              | 5th      |
| <u>Pīwakawaka / fantail</u>                           | 1,228              | 6th      |
| <u>Hihi / stitchbird</u>                              | 1,302              | 7th      |
| <u>Kārearea / New Zealand falcon</u>                  | 1,260              | 8th      |
| <u>Pūteketeki / Australasian crested grebe</u>        | 1,184              | 9th      |
| <u>Titipounamu / rifleman</u>                         | 1,477              | 10th     |

Bird of the Century 2023 top 10<sup>[10]</sup>

| Bird                                                  | Number of #1 votes | Position |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| <u>Pūteketeki / Australasian crested grebe</u>        | 290,374            | 1st      |
| <u>North Island Brown Kiwi</u>                        | 12,904             | 2nd      |
| <u>Kea</u>                                            | 12,060             | 3rd      |
| <u>Kākāpō</u>                                         | 10,889             | 4th      |
| <u>Pīwakawaka / Fantail</u>                           | 7,857              | 5th      |
| <u>Tawaki piki toka / Rockhopper penguin</u>          | 6,763              | 6th      |
| <u>Karure / kakaruia / Chatham Island black robin</u> | 6,753              | 7th      |
| <u>Huia</u>                                           | 6,467              | 8th      |
| <u>Tūī</u>                                            | 6,457              | 9th      |
| <u>Takahē</u>                                         | 6,292              | 10th     |

Bird of the Year 2024 top 10<sup>[11]</sup>

| Bird                                                  | Number of #1 votes | Position |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| <u>Hoiho / yellow-eyed penguin</u>                    | 6,328              | 1st      |
| <u>Karure / kakaruia / Chatham Island black robin</u> | 5,442              | 2nd      |
| <u>Kākāpō</u>                                         | 4,548              | 3rd      |
| <u>Ruru / Morepork</u>                                | 4,467              | 4th      |
| <u>Kea</u>                                            | 4,206              | 5th      |
| <u>Pīwakawaka / Fantail</u>                           | 4,205              | 6th      |
| <u>Takahē</u>                                         | 3,892              | 7th      |
| <u>Tawaki piki toka / Rockhopper penguin</u>          | 3,834              | 8th      |
| <u>Kōkako</u>                                         | 3,445              | 9th      |
| <u>Toroa / Antipodean albatross</u>                   | 3,415              | 10th     |

The 2025 competition returned to a "First-Past-the-Post" FPTP system, but still with the option for voters to pick up to five birds. Each choice made is worth 1 point toward that bird's overall total.

Bird of the Year 2025 top 10<sup>[12]</sup>

| Bird                                                  | Number of #1 votes | Position |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| <u>Kārearea / New Zealand falcon</u>                  | 14,317             | 1st      |
| <u>Kea</u>                                            | 12,506             | 2nd      |
| <u>Karure / kakaruia / Chatham Island black robin</u> | 11,726             | 3rd      |
| <u>Kākāpō</u>                                         | 10,792             | 4th      |
| <u>Ruru / Morepork</u>                                | 10,174             | 5th      |
| <u>Tawaki piki toka / Rockhopper penguin</u>          | 10,030             | 6th      |
| <u>Pīwakawaka / Fantail</u>                           | 9,915              | 7th      |
| <u>Takahē</u>                                         | 9,828              | 8th      |
| <u>Hihi / stitchbird</u>                              | 8,885              | 9th      |
| <u>Hoiho / yellow-eyed penguin</u>                    | 8,665              | 10th     |

Bird of the Year runs for two weeks in September to November each year, and around 70 species usually compete. Anyone can nominate themselves as a "campaign manager" for a bird, and organise social media publicity campaign. The competition is not restricted to New Zealand: anyone with a valid email address is able to cast a vote, which became critical to the 2023 landslide victory of the Pūteketeke.<sup>[2]</sup>

# List of winners

Bird of the year

| No. | Portrait                                                                            | Name              | Year | Votes              | % of vote |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1   |    | <u>Tūī</u>        | 2005 | 865 <sup>[2]</sup> | 20        |
| 2   |    | <u>Pīwakawaka</u> | 2006 | 458                |           |
| 3   |    | <u>Riroriro</u>   | 2007 |                    |           |
| 4   |   | <u>Kākāpō</u>     | 2008 | 578                |           |
| 5   |  | <u>Kiwi</u>       | 2009 | 1,586              |           |
| 6   |  | <u>Kākāriki</u>   | 2010 | 6,921              | 33        |
| 7   |  | <u>Pūkeko</u>     | 2011 | 1,480              |           |
| 8   |  | <u>Kārearea</u>   | 2012 | 1,261              |           |
| 9   |  | <u>Mohua</u>      | 2013 | 2,473              | 19        |

| No.  | Portrait                                                                            | Name              | Year | Votes                 | % of vote |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------|-----------------------|-----------|
| 10   |    | <u>Tara-iti</u>   | 2014 |                       |           |
| 11   |    | <u>Kūaka</u>      | 2015 | 1,957 <sup>[13]</sup> | 15        |
| 12   |    | <u>Kōkako</u>     | 2016 | 3,614                 | 18        |
| 13   |    | <u>Kea</u>        | 2017 | 7,311                 | 18        |
| 14   |    | <u>Kererū</u>     | 2018 | 5,833                 | 12        |
| 15   |   | <u>Hoiho</u>      | 2019 | 12,022                | 28        |
| (4)  |  | <u>Kākāpō</u>     | 2020 | 10,773                | 20        |
| 16   |  | <u>Pekapeka</u>   | 2021 | 7,031                 | 12        |
| 17   |  | <u>Pīwauwau</u>   | 2022 | 2,894                 | 5.6       |
| 18   |  | <u>Pūteketeke</u> | 2023 | 290,374               | 83        |
| (15) |  | <u>Hoiho</u>      | 2024 | 6,328                 |           |

| No. | Portrait                                                                          | Name            | Year | Votes  | % of vote |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------|--------|-----------|
| (8) |  | <u>Kārearea</u> | 2025 | 14,317 |           |

## Controversies

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- 2008: The successful campaign to elect kākāpō was accused by the takahē of accepting undeclared donations "from wealthy migratory birds living in Monaco." It was cleared by the fictional Serious Feathered Fraud Office.<sup>[14]</sup>
- 2010: The kākāriki was accused of rigging the vote. Forest & Bird confirmed these concerns in 2011, committing to improving vote security.<sup>[15]</sup>
- 2011: The emperor penguin was added to the competition for one year, when a juvenile bird, dubbed Happy Feet, was found on the Kāpiti Coast. It had made national and international headlines after being rescued.<sup>[16][17][18]</sup>
- 2015: Two teenagers from Auckland made over 200 fraudulent votes for the kōkako.<sup>[19]</sup> They used their father's business account to make fake email addresses.<sup>[20]</sup>
- 2017: The competition suffered a further voting scandal when 112 fraudulent votes were made for the white-faced heron using internet bots from an IP address in Christchurch.<sup>[21]</sup>
- 2018: An independent scrutineer from Dragonfly Data Science was brought in to prevent further voting scandals.<sup>[22]</sup> Despite this, a third voting scandal surfaced when 310 fraudulent votes were placed for the black shag. These were traced to Australia.<sup>[23][24][25]</sup>
- 2020: 1500 votes were placed for the little spotted kiwi using fake email addresses from the same IP address, briefly pushing it to the top of the leaderboard before the fraudulent votes were discovered.<sup>[26]</sup>
- 2021: The long-tailed bat was added to the competition with mixed responses from candidates and voters, who criticised the fact that it was not in fact a bird.<sup>[27]</sup> This controversial entry ended up winning 2021 Bird of the Year.<sup>[28]</sup>
- 2022: The kākāpō, a previous two-time winner of BOTY, was barred from competing again.<sup>[29]</sup>
- 2023: Television comedian John Oliver announced on his HBO show Last Week Tonight that he was the campaign manager for the Southern crested grebe or pūteketeke. Oliver erected billboards in Wellington, Paris, Tokyo, London, Mumbai, and Manitowoc, and arranged for an aeroplane with a pūteketeke banner to fly over Ipanema Beach in Brazil. He also appeared on Jimmy Fallon's The Tonight Show in a pūteketeke costume. So many votes were received—over 350,000, from 195 countries—that Forest & Bird's website crashed and the results of the competition had to be delayed by two days while verification was carried out.<sup>[2][30]</sup> The previous record for verified votes was 56,733 in 2021.<sup>[31]</sup> The pūteketeke won by a landslide, receiving 290,374 votes, over 100 times those of the previous year's winner, and far more than the second-placing North Island brown kiwi with 12,904.<sup>[31]</sup> The contest was also marred by fraud, with 40,000 votes cast by one person for the eastern rockhopper penguin. A Pennsylvania voter cast 3,403 fraudulent votes, with one arriving every three seconds.<sup>[31]</sup> Forty-five of the verified votes were cast under the name "John Oliver", one of them for the fairy tern, and the rest for the pūteketeke.<sup>[30]</sup> Forest & Bird claimed to be pleased by Oliver's campaign, as it furthered the contest's basic environmental awareness purpose by encouraging international attention.<sup>[32]</sup> The

organisation received over \$600,000 in donations, six times the previous record, as a result of the campaign.<sup>[33]</sup>

# Celebrity endorsements

| Year | Birds endorsed                            | Celebrity/organisation                                                                                                |
|------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2024 | <u>Hoiho</u>                              | <u>Helen Clark</u> , <u>Chris Hipkins</u> , <u>Jane Goodall</u> , <sup>[34]</sup> <u>Phil Keoghan</u> <sup>[35]</sup> |
| 2023 | <u>Pūteketeke</u>                         | <u>John Oliver</u> <sup>[36]</sup>                                                                                    |
| 2022 | <u>Wrybill</u>                            | <u>Christopher Luxon</u> <sup>[37]</sup>                                                                              |
| 2021 | <u>Kea</u>                                | <u>Jenny-May Clarkson</u> , <sup>[38]</sup> <u>Kiri Allan</u> <sup>[39]</sup>                                         |
|      | <u>Royal Spoonbill</u>                    | <u>David Seymour</u> , <u>Melissa Stokes</u> <sup>[40]</sup>                                                          |
|      | <u>New Zealand dotterel</u>               | <u>Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand</u> <sup>[41]</sup>                                                            |
|      | <u>Long-tailed Bat</u>                    | <u>Radio One 91FM</u> <sup>[42]</sup>                                                                                 |
| 2020 | <u>South Island Kokako</u>                | <u>Ruud Kleinpaste</u> <sup>[43]</sup>                                                                                |
| 2018 | <u>Tāiko/Black Petrel</u>                 | <u>Jacinda Ardern</u> <sup>[44]</sup>                                                                                 |
| 2014 | <u>Australasian gannet</u>                | <u>Matt Watson</u> <sup>[7]</sup>                                                                                     |
|      | <u>Brown skua</u>                         | <u>Metiria Turei</u> <sup>[7]</sup>                                                                                   |
|      | <u>Northern royal albatross</u>           | <u>Peter Dunne</u> <sup>[7]</sup>                                                                                     |
|      | <u>Buller's shearwater</u> <sup>[7]</sup> | <u>Winston Peters</u>                                                                                                 |
| 2013 | <u>Mōhua</u>                              | <u>Metiria Turei</u> <sup>[45]</sup>                                                                                  |
|      | <u>New Zealand fairy tern</u>             | <u>Hayley Holt</u> <sup>[45]</sup>                                                                                    |
| 2011 | <u>Ruru/Morepork</u>                      | <u>Phil Goff</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                      |
|      | <u>Yellow-eyed penguin</u>                | <u>Anton Oliver</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                   |
|      | <u>Kererū</u>                             | <u>Hinewehi Mohi</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                  |
|      | <u>Kōkako</u>                             | <u>Hollie Smith</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                   |
|      | <u>New Zealand robin</u>                  | <u>Lisa Chapell</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                   |
|      | <u>New Zealand fantail</u>                | <u>Kate Wilkinson</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                 |
|      | <u>Ruru/Morepork</u>                      | <u>Maisey Rika</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                    |
|      | <u>New Zealand falcon</u>                 | <u>Pita Sharples</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                  |
|      | <u>Kea</u>                                | <u>Rachel Smalley</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                 |
|      | <u>Takahē</u>                             | <u>Riki Gooch</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                     |
|      | <u>Tūī</u>                                | <u>Russel Norman</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                  |
|      | <u>Kākāriki</u>                           | <u>Seth Haapu</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                     |
|      | <u>Wandering albatross</u>                | <u>Steve Abel</u> <sup>[15]</sup>                                                                                     |
| 2010 | <u>Weka</u>                               | <u>Don McGlashan</u> <sup>[46]</sup>                                                                                  |
|      | <u>Black stilt</u>                        | <u>Grahame Sydney</u> <sup>[46]</sup>                                                                                 |

|             |                                          |                                            |
|-------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|             | <u>Ruru/Morepork</u>                     | <u>Jerome Chandrahasen</u> <sup>[47]</sup> |
|             | <u>New Zealand fantail</u>               | <u>Taika Waititi</u> <sup>[48]</sup>       |
|             | <u>Kererū</u>                            | <u>Kiri Te Kanawa</u> <sup>[49]</sup>      |
| <b>2009</b> | <u>Pūkeko</u>                            | <u>Damian Christie</u> <sup>[49]</sup>     |
|             | <u>Kākā</u>                              | <u>David Farrar</u> <sup>[49]</sup>        |
|             | <u>Royal spoonbill</u>                   | <u>Jeremy Wells</u> <sup>[49]</sup>        |
|             | <u>Pied stilt</u>                        | <u>Sam Hunt</u> <sup>[49]</sup>            |
|             | <u>New Zealand fantail</u>               | <u>Kim Hill</u> <sup>[49]</sup>            |
|             | <u>Kererū</u>                            | <u>Kiri Te Kanawa</u> <sup>[49]</sup>      |
| <b>2008</b> | <u>Pied stilt</u>                        | <u>Sam Hunt</u> <sup>[50]</sup>            |
|             | <u>Tūi</u>                               | <u>Sam Morgan</u> <sup>[50]</sup>          |
|             | <u>Yellow-eyed penguin</u>               | <u>Anton Oliver</u> <sup>[50]</sup>        |
|             | <u>Kererū</u>                            | <u>Barnaby Weir</u> <sup>[50]</sup>        |
|             | <u>Tūi</u>                               | <u>Irene van Dyk</u> <sup>[50]</sup>       |
|             | <u>Kea</u>                               | <u>Jason Gunn</u> <sup>[50]</sup>          |
|             | <u>Grey warbler</u>                      | <u>Graeme Hill</u> <sup>[50]</sup>         |
|             | <u>Kiwi</u>                              | <u>John Key</u> <sup>[50]</sup>            |
|             | <u>Weka</u>                              | <u>Anand Satyanand</u> <sup>[50]</sup>     |
|             | <u>White-faced heron</u> <sup>[50]</sup> | <u>Steve Braunias</u>                      |
|             | <u>Southern royal albatross</u>          | <u>Tui De Roy</u> <sup>[50]</sup>          |
|             | <u>Weka</u>                              | <u>Anand Satyanand</u> <sup>[50]</sup>     |
|             | <u>Albatross</u> <sup>[50]</sup>         | <u>Susan Satyanand</u>                     |
|             | <u>Tūi</u>                               | <u>Petra Bagust</u> <sup>[50]</sup>        |
|             | <u>Kea</u>                               | <u>Peter Hillary</u> <sup>[50]</sup>       |
| <b>2006</b> | <u>Kōtare/Sacred kingfisher</u>          | <u>Annabel Langbein</u> <sup>[1]</sup>     |
|             | <u>Ruru/Morepork</u>                     | <u>Caroline Church</u> <sup>[1]</sup>      |
|             | <u>Kākāpō</u>                            | <u>Chris Carter</u> <sup>[1]</sup>         |
|             | <u>Kōtuku</u>                            | <u>Don Brash</u> <sup>[1]</sup>            |
|             | <u>Kākāpō</u>                            | <u>Helen Clark</u> <sup>[1]</sup>          |
|             | <u>Kererū</u>                            | <u>Jeanette Fitzsimmons</u> <sup>[1]</sup> |
|             | <u>Kokako</u>                            | <u>Susan Satyanand</u> <sup>[1]</sup>      |
|             | <u>New Zealand fantail</u>               | <u>Lois Daish</u> <sup>[1]</sup>           |
|             | <u>Tūi</u>                               | <u>Mark Sainsbury</u> <sup>[1]</sup>       |

|             |                                      |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| <u>Kāhu</u> | <u>Pita Sharples<sup>[1]</sup></u>   |
| <u>Tūī</u>  | <u>Rodney Hide<sup>[1]</sup></u>     |
| <u>Kiwi</u> | <u>Ruud Kleinpaste<sup>[1]</sup></u> |
| <u>Weka</u> | <u>Anand Satyanand<sup>[1]</sup></u> |

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