

Kaka and Camellia flowers

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The endangered North Island Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis septentrionalis*) is a rare visitor to New Plymouth. Nevertheless, up to three were present in Pukekura Park for varying periods between April and December in each year from 2002 to 2007. I do not have any reports of Kaka in the Park in 2008. One or more of those Kaka were seen feeding on invertebrates, the arils of green Kohekohe (*Dysoxylum spectabile*) fruits, seeds from the cones of Mediterranean Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), the fruits of Five-finger (*Pseudopanax arboreus*), Formosan Cherry (*Prunus campanulata*) and Guava (*Psidium cattleianum*), and nectar from the flowers of Puriri (*Vitex lucens*) and Kowhai (*Sophora microphylla*). Some examples of Kaka feeding on invertebrates in the Park are mentioned in the article “Feeding association of Tui with Kaka”, and a photograph of green Kohekohe fruits with the arils removed by a Kaka accompanies the article “Kohekohe - a spectacular New Zealand tree”, both of which can be seen on the Friends’ website at www.pukekura.org.nz.

On 30 July 2009, I saw a Kaka feeding quietly at the single, reddish flowers of the large, old *Camellia japonica* plant that is growing at the base of the Giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) tree adjacent to the Curator’s office at the bottom of Horton Walk. The Kaka was undoubtedly obtaining nectar from the flowers of this plant which are also favoured by Tui (*Prosthemadera n. novaeseelandiae*) for that purpose. Shortly after I first saw it, the Kaka was hassled by a Tui. It called loudly several times before being chased off by the Tui in the direction of Bellringer Pavilion. The following day the Kaka was in this Camellia again. Curator Chris Connolly and I watched it for 30 minutes as it fed more or less continuously at many flowers, calling only two or three times while doing so. I saw the Kaka feeding at these flowers again on 9 August 2009. It was not easy to photograph the bird as it fed among the foliage in the upper portion of the Camellia. However, I managed to obtain the accompanying photograph when the Kaka left the Camellia and perched briefly in the nearby Celery Pine (*Phyllocladus* sp.) where it called a few times before flying silently into the trees on the hillside behind the Curator’s office.

Chris Connolly and Park field staff saw the Kaka feeding at these Camellia flowers on at least four other occasions between 3 and 20 August 2009. The Kaka was not always to be found in the Camellia or its immediate vicinity. Presumably, it had other food sources in the Park between which it moved. It would not have been conspicuous as it did so because solitary Kaka are usually silent when moving about or feeding.

I know of only one other record of Kaka feeding on nectar from Camellia flowers in the Park. George Fuller, Curator of the Park from 1965-1990, reported in late August 1985 that three Kaka which were in the Park at that time were feeding on, among other things, nectar from flowers of the “single Camellia”. The single-flowered *Camellia japonica* in which the latest Kaka fed is almost certainly an unnamed seedling. Chris Connolly suggested, as we watched the Kaka feeding at the flowers of this plant on 31 July 2009, that an appropriate name for it would be *Camellia japonica* ‘Kaka’. Such naming of individual plants in the Park is not without precedent. For example, George Fuller when he was Curator applied the names ‘Tui’s Tucker’ and ‘Tui’s Mate’ to two large unnamed single-flowered *Camellia japonica* seedlings that are growing at the junction of Scanlan and Swan Walks near the Shortland Street entrance to the Park. Those plants are indeed favoured by Tui as a source of floral nectar (see my article “The importance of introduced plants as a winter source of nectar for Tui in Pukekura Park and Brooklands” in *Magazine of the Friends of Pukekura Park* 3(2) (June 2008): 3-6). The *Camellia japonica* plant in which the Kaka fed recently is not only significant in its own right and as a favoured source of floral nectar for Tui. It now has added significance as a named plant which is also a favoured source of floral nectar for Kaka visiting the Park.

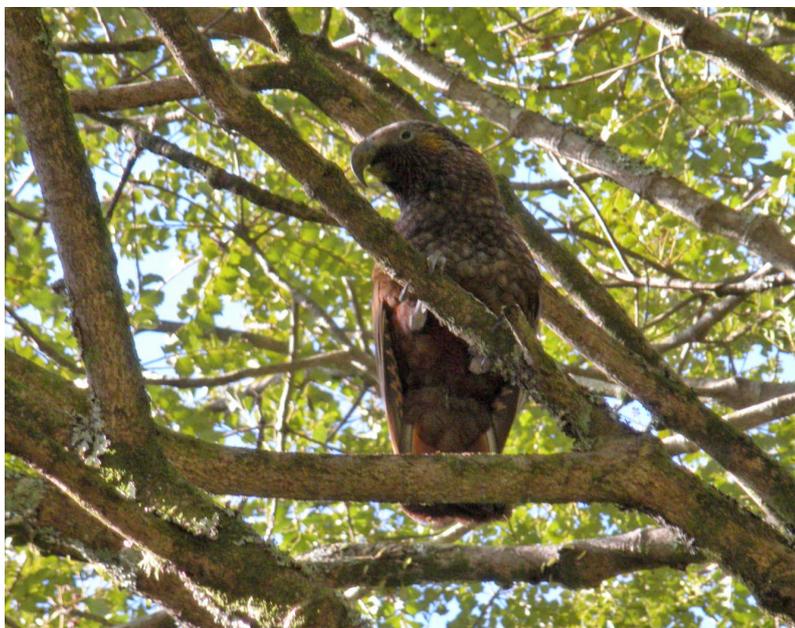


Photo David Medway