

Numerous mature Karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) trees, some of them very large, grow throughout Pukekura Park and Brooklands (“the Park”), and Karaka seedlings are abundant throughout its bushed areas. Karaka have varying-sized crops of elliptical-shaped fruits each year. Those fruits begin to ripen in the Park in mid-January, are at their peak throughout February, and nearly all have fallen by mid-March.

During the 2010 fruiting season, I measured 1280 ripe Karaka fruits of which at least 100 of typical size were collected from under each of 12 trees growing in the Park that I selected for the purpose. Included among them is the only tree I found in the Park that had noticeably smaller fruits. The average size of the 1280 fruits measured was 38.7mm long x 23.0mm wide, and their width ranged from 16.3mm to 31.3mm. The authors of a recently-published paper in the *New Zealand Journal of Ecology* 34(1)(2010): 66-85) consider that Tui (*Prosthemadera n. novaeseelandiae*), with an average gape size of 9.7mm, should be able to swallow Karaka fruits of up to about 15mm in width. Karaka fruits of that size are rare in the Park. I searched specifically for exceptionally small fruits under the 12 trees whose fruits I measured. Only 25 of the innumerable fruits examined were less than 16mm in width. Perhaps not surprisingly, a large proportion of them were under the Karaka with the smallest average-sized fruits. The seeds of very small Karaka fruits may not be viable.



Photo David Medway

I was fortunate to obtain the accompanying photograph of an immature Tui feeding at a Karaka fruit in the Park on 9 February 2004. It clearly shows the Tui pecking at its flesh.

Tui may theoretically be able to swallow small Karaka fruits, but that does not mean they do so in real life. There are no unequivocal records in the published literature of Tui swallowing Karaka fruits of any size anywhere in New Zealand. I spent a total of about 26 hours throughout the 2010 Karaka fruiting season specifically observing birds feeding at Karaka fruits in the Park. I saw only two Tui do so. Previously, I had seen only three Tui feeding at Karaka fruits in the Park. Undoubtedly Tui, which are present year-round in the Park, feed at Karaka fruits more often than I have noticed, but my few records of them doing so suggest that Karaka fruits are not a prime source of food for Tui there. All five Tui I have seen feeding at Karaka fruits in the Park, two adults and three immatures, pecked at and ate the flesh of ripe fruits which were far too large for them to swallow whole.