

NEW ZEALAND BIRDS: THEIR STORIES AND THE ILLUSTRATIONS THEY HAVE INSPIRED

“Birdstories is about New Zealand’s extraordinary birds – their evolution, discovery and classification, and how they have, or have not, adapted over the past 700 years. When the first Europeans arrived in New Zealand, they immediately noticed the peculiarity of its birds, but still attempted to relate them to familiar northern hemisphere species. The result was robins, thrushes and wrens, wattled crows, the native woodhen and the bush canary. But with some birds, this approach just did not work. As early attempts to illustrate it show, the kiwi was unlike anything seen elsewhere. Just a few years after the kiwi revealed itself to European science, the discovery of moa bones established the existence of this giant and unique bird. Influenced by the newly expounded theory of evolution, scientists began looking more closely at the morphology and ecology of other more ‘familiar’ New Zealand birds, and soon found that most of them, too, were quite different from, and often quite unrelated to, the European birds for which they were named. Over the past 20 or so years the development and refinement in studies of the genetic material of both living and extinct birds have revolutionised the unravelling of New Zealand bird history. . . . This still very new science continues to confront, and confound, its practitioners with major surprises, but it has confirmed the unusual position occupied by New Zealand birds, and that many of their ancestors set off on their own quite distinctive evolutionary journeys very early in avian development. The result is – or, more accurately, was – a unique collection of birds whose isolation ended only a few hundred years ago. Since then they have been largely wiped out, with whole species, genera, families and orders disappearing, leaving a rapidly diminishing remnant population that reminds us of what we have lost.”

– Geoff Norman, *Birdstories*

A fascinating, comprehensive account of New Zealand’s birds, which spans their discovery, their place in both Pākehā and Māori worlds, their survival and conservation, and the illustrations and art they have inspired.

In 1872, the first instalments of Walter Buller’s *A History of the Birds of New Zealand* appeared. When completed, this became a landmark publishing event that described the place of New Zealand’s birds in the Māori world, the first encounters Europeans had with our birds, the arguments over their classification, and provided a snapshot of their status at the time. Through Buller’s books, the rest of the world got to know about New Zealand’s unusual and distinctive birds, and New Zealanders, too, began to appreciate them.

Geoff Norman’s *Birdstories* carries Buller’s publishing legacy through to the present day. He covers a range of our bird families and individual species, and provides an up-to-date picture of how these birds are regarded by both Māori and Pākehā, the backstory of their discovery, and their current conservation status. Extensively illustrated with historic illustrations and contemporary artwork, this is a beautiful, comprehensive publication that will help New Zealanders realise what a taonga we have in our birds.

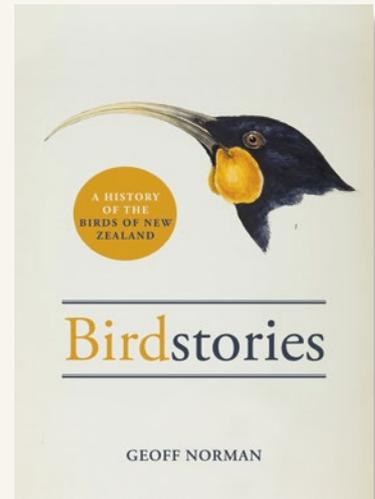
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GEOFF NORMAN was born in Wellington and has a background in science and environmental studies. He has been involved in publishing for over 30 years, designing, typesetting and producing books. His first book, *Buller’s Birds of New Zealand: the complete work of J. G. Keulemans*, was published by Te Papa Press in 2012. It was the New Zealand Herald’s Book of the Year in 2012 and a finalist in the 2013 NZ Post Book Awards, and has been reprinted three times. Geoff enjoys tramping, music, and Latin American and Spanish culture.

GEOFF NORMAN IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW / EXTRACTS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

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