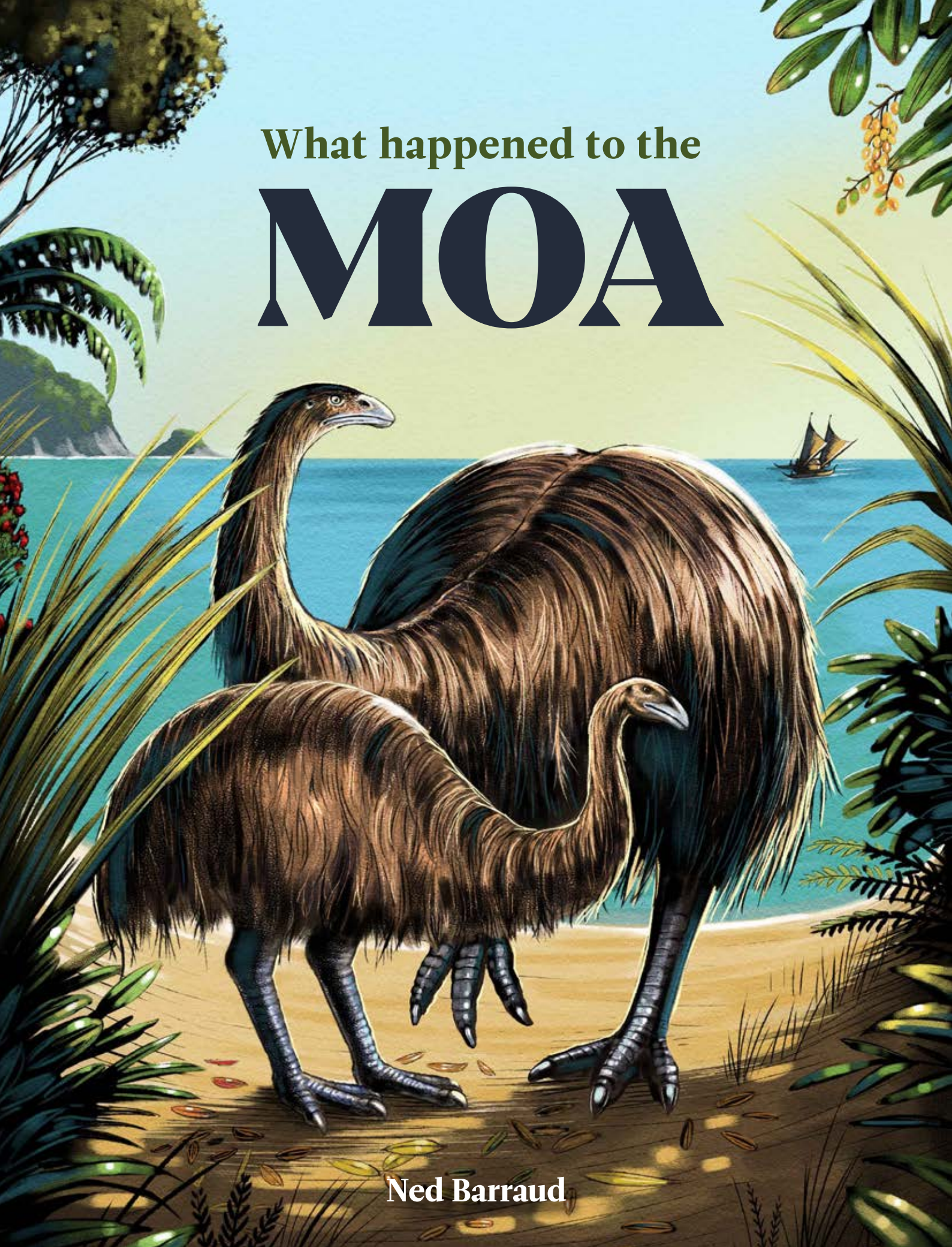


# What happened to the **MOA**



Ned Barraud



For millions of years, moa roamed Aotearoa. From coastal dunes to alpine meadows, swampy flax wetlands to dense forests, moa inhabited many parts of the country.

When Polynesians first arrived by waka in the 1300s, they would have been astonished by the sight of giant flightless birds roaming about, some twice the height of humans.



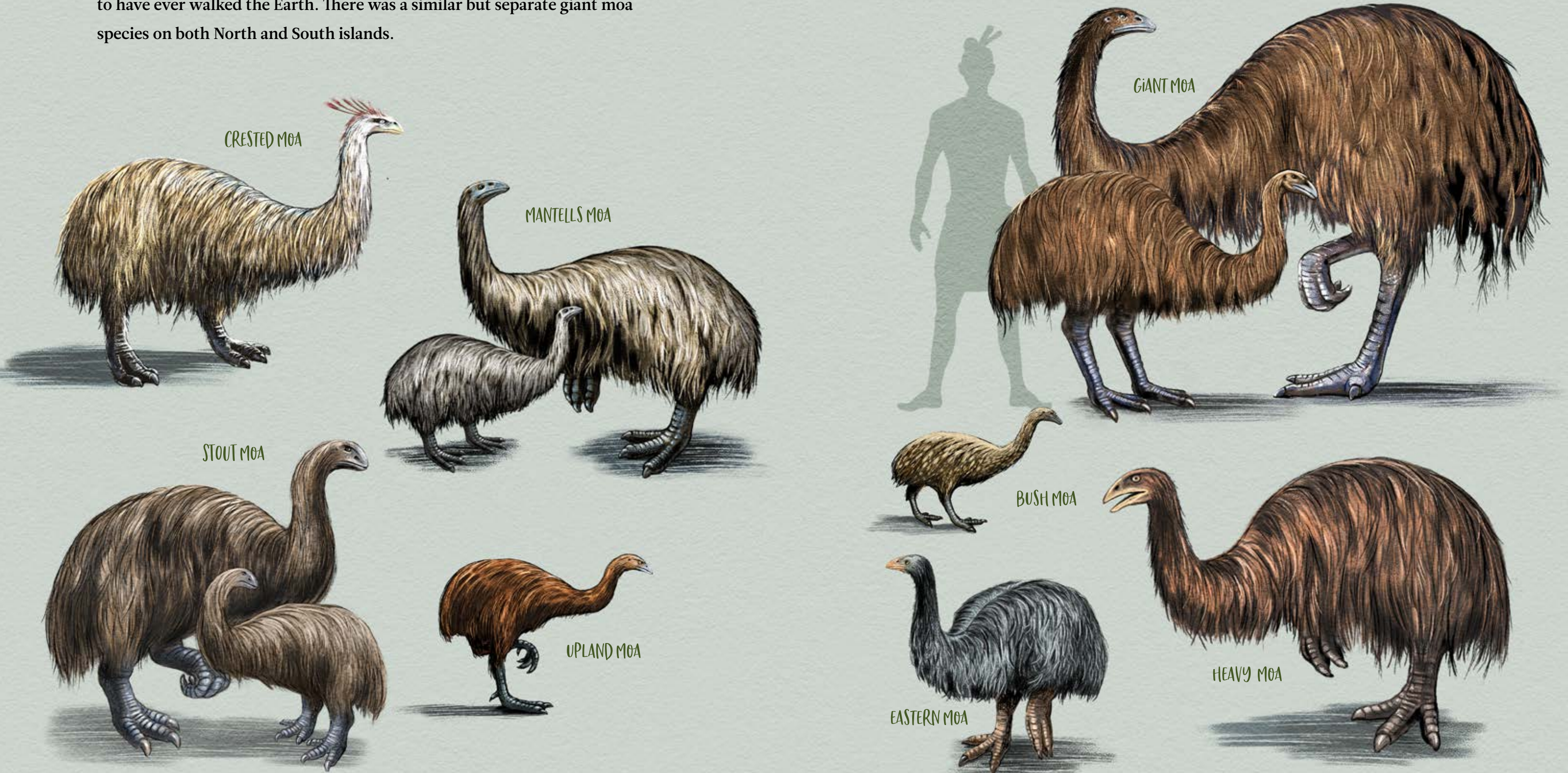


There were nine species of moa when people arrived in Aotearoa.

The giant moa male has been estimated to weigh 85 kilograms, while the female would have weighed in at a whopping 250 kilograms! That's three times the weight of the male. The female could stretch to a height of 3.6 metres to nibble at hard-to-reach leaves. It was one of the largest birds to have ever walked the Earth. There was a similar but separate giant moa species on both North and South islands.

The little bush moa was only 1.3 metres tall and more common.

The heavy-footed moa would have looked a strange sight as it waddled along on its massive, stumpy legs, with its fat body and a tiny head at the end of a long, trunk-like neck.





Moa were covered in shaggy, furry feathers. From the few feathers that have been found they were probably shades of red and brown, like a weka or kiwi. Some feathers had white tips that would have given a speckled or striped appearance, possibly for camouflage.

Who knows what magnificent plumage the crested moa had?

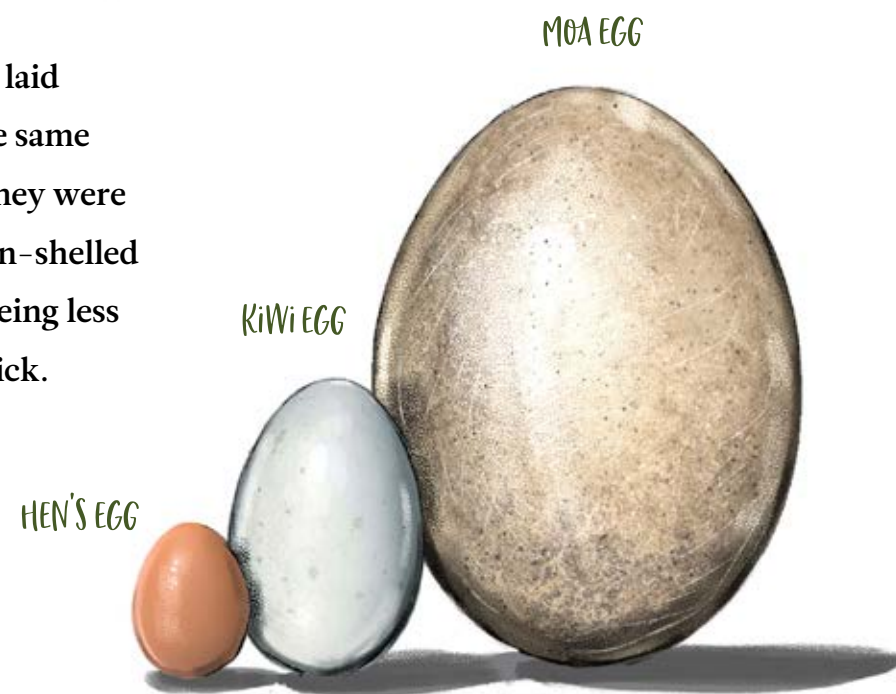




With the vast size difference between males and females, in some moa species, it is thought that males would have been chased away from the best feeding territory, and only allowed there when it was time to mate.



The giant female moa laid giant eggs – about the same size as a rugby ball. They were incredibly fragile, thin-shelled eggs, with the shell being less than 2 millimetres thick.



Because of this, the smaller, lighter males may have incubated the eggs by wrapping their bodies protectively around them to keep the eggs warm, rather than sitting directly on top of them. Even still, a broken egg would have been common. From egg-shell and moa bone remains, scientists can also tell that giant moa nested in rock shelters, building their nests in late spring and early summer.

