



## Why Can't Kiwis Fly? And 181 Other Curious Questions About New Zealand's Natural History

Gerard Hutching

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**FOR A SMALL** country, New Zealand is an unlikely lesson in gigantism. The country has been home to an unusual number of the world's largest animal and plant species. Free from predators, animals tended to grow larger on the New Zealand archipelago, a phenomenon known as 'island gigantism'. We still boast the world's largest parrot, the kakapo, and the largest rail, the takahe, while the giant weta takes the title of the world's heaviest insect.

These factoids are just a handful of those explored in the new book *Why Can't Kiwis Fly?* Author Gerard Hutching answers 182 questions on weather, geology, animals, plants, conservation and people.

"The internet can be both a blessing and a curse," writes Hutching. "This book aims to provide a fun and illuminating way through the sometimes bewildering maze of information out there."

Though it doesn't include illustrations, the

book includes graphs, such as a comparison of weather temperatures over the summer months from 1981–2010 to illustrate the best time to take summer holidays to maximise good weather.

By the end of the book, readers will be able to confidently answer how far rats can swim, whether male kakapo get lonely, and why lobsters walk for more than 1000 kilometres around the New Zealand coast.

The book wraps up with a Mystery and Oddities chapter, detailing some of New Zealand's many urban legends and little-known facts. Hutching cites the 1970s fad of placing plastic bottles full of water on front lawns to discourage dogs. "Rationales were that dogs won't defecate anywhere there is fresh water, and that dogs are frightened off when they see their reflections in the water or the water glittering. Needless to say, dogs didn't get the message, and the idea died."

HAYLEY HANNAN

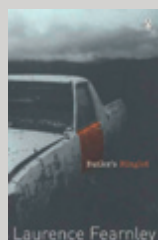


### New Zealand Birds Online

is a searchable encyclopaedia of New Zealand birds. You can find detailed information about all 457 species, including all living, extinct, fossil, vagrant and introduced bird species. The database is searchable by name, conservation status, and geographical distribution. Explore the site to read expert-written texts, listen to sound files of bird calls, and browse more than 6,500 photographs.

[nzbirdsonline.org.nz](http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz)

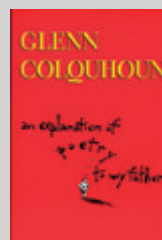
PHOTO: TONY WHITEHEAD



■ Laurence Fearnley's novel *Butler's Ringlet* is set in rural Southland. She sprightly and deftly creates a wonderful evocation of place and all-too-believable portraits of two lonely men searching for love, and moths. Often wry, and funny, too.



■ *Wildwood: A Journey Through Trees*, by Roger Deakin, is a global quest in search of trees, woods and woodlanders. In the fabulous *Waterlog*, he swam his way around Britain, an astute observer with a unique perspective on nature and human nature.



■ New Zealander Glenn Colquhoun's *An Explanation of Poetry to My Father* is the slimmest of volumes, without a letter or line drawing out of place. The poems are a playful and clever introduction to the power of words and story.