

New Zealand's kiwi probably started out an Aussie, study finds

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In a finding likely to be a bitter blow for many New Zealanders, researchers have found the country's iconic kiwi bird probably descended from an ancestor that flew in from Australia.

Palaeontologist Trevor Worthy of Adelaide's Flinders University said fossilised remains suggested the flightless bird did not evolve from the extinct giant moa, as has long been assumed.

Instead, he said an ancestor of the [kiwi](#) dating back 20 million years discovered in the South Island was more closely related to another giant flightless bird, the emu, which is still common in Australia.

Worthy, himself an expatriate New Zealander, said it appeared the fossilised South Island bird and the emu evolved from a common [ancestor](#), which originated in Australia but also spread to New Zealand.

"If, as the DNA suggests, the kiwi is related to the emu, then both shared a [common ancestor](#) that could fly," he said.

"It means they were little and volant (able to fly) and that they flew to New Zealand."

Worthy said it was not uncommon for birds to "jump" from Australia to New Zealand, citing the Mallard duck, the little banded dotterel and the cattle egret as three species which regularly fly back and forth.

He said the research, published by the Society of Avian Paleontology and Evolution, was not conclusive.

"We need to find wing bones to put the theory beyond all doubt," he said.

New Zealanders have long complained about their trans-Tasman neighbours appropriating everything from champion race horse Phar Lap to actor Russell Crowe, and any Australian claim to the kiwi is likely to intensify the rivalry.

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