

Extinct birds on the ballot for New Zealand's avian beauty contest

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The kakapo, a chubby parrot resembling a green-feathered bowling ball has twice won the competition.

Five extinct species have been included on the ballot to find New Zealand's most popular feathered friend as competition organizers hope to draw attention to endangered birds.

New Zealand's annual avian beauty contest has proven highly contentious over the years.

The kakapo, a chubby parrot resembling a green-feathered bowling ball which can't fly, couldn't run in last year's Bird of the Year competition.

The twice former winner was dropped from the 2022 [vote](#) by organizers to help less popular species have a shot at the title.

Feathers were also ruffled when a native bat was allowed to enter, then flew off with the 2021 title.

This year, competition organizers Forest & Bird will celebrate their centenary by crowning New Zealand's most popular feathered friend in the last 100 years—even if the potential winner no longer exists.

"We're searching for the bird that has captured New Zealanders' hearts over the last century," said Forest & Bird chief executive Nicola Toki at Saturday's launch.

The [environmental group](#) has put 75 species on the ticket for this year's Bird of the Century contest, of which a quintet are thought to be extinct in New Zealand.

They include the huia -- a songster, whose last confirmed sighting was in 1907.

Voters can also plump for the laughing owl—also known as the 'whekau'—whose shrieks were last officially heard in 1914.

Toki says she hopes adding [extinct species](#) will trigger conversations about [endangered birds](#).

"New Zealand's extinction record is devastating," said Toki.

She said the now-absent species are "a heartbreaking reminder of the incredible biodiversity we've lost".

"Eighty-two percent of our living native bird [species](#) are threatened or at risk of extinction," Toki added.

"We cannot let any more end up with the tragic fate of the laughing owl or the huia."

Voting opens at the end of October, closing on November 12 with the winner announced the next day.

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