



Scientists Use Drones to Track Kākāpō Birds

Why are some birds flightless?

- One theory suggests that some birds didn't evolve to fly because they had no natural predators. Therefore, they had no need to fly away.
- Other flightless birds include, penguins, kiwis and emus.

Scientists have been struggling to track the rare kākāpō. Luckily, they have come up with a clever technological solution to the problem.

New Zealand scientists have been tracking the elusive kākāpō bird. It is, however, hard to reach on foot. Now, by using drones, they have been able to track the bird with much more success.

The kākāpō, also known as the owl parrot, is a fascinating creature. It is the only flightless nocturnal bird in the world.

They were once high numbers in New Zealand because they had no predators. However, explorers and settlers brought animals with them, such as rats and cats, which hunted the animals. They have also suffered from habitat loss.

There are there only 211 kākāpōs left in the wild. There are so few that each one of them has been named, such as Suzanne and Zephyr.

Because there are so few birds, it is important to track them carefully. The scientists have been tracking them by attaching electronic tags on the birds. They then use equipment to track them, find them and check they are OK.

Although this has allowed the team to track the birds, it is expensive and takes a long time.

The team has now been trialling using drones to track the birds instead. The drones are able to fly over land which is otherwise hard to get to by foot. This has allowed the scientists to find



Illustration: A kākāpō.

the birds in record time. In just one flight the drone has been able to find up to 40 birds. It is also cheaper than the other equipment used for tagging and tracking the kākāpōs.

Dr Digby, who is in charge of the revival programme said, "Having people walking around the Island causes a lot of disturbance for the animals, but a drone 100m up in the air is hardly noticeable."

By allowing scientists to keep a careful eye on these endangered birds, it should be easier to track and protect them in the wild.

Glossary

elusive	Difficult to find.
nocturnal	Animals that are awake during the night.
predators	Animals that hunt other animals.
drones	a remote control aircraft.

Questions

1. What is the kākāpō also known as?

2. The phrase 'keep a careful eye on' suggests...

- To watch with interest.
- To ignore.
- To watch now and then.
- To carefully listen.

3. Tick each statement to show whether it is a fact or opinion.

	Fact	Opinion
Kākāpōs are fascinating.		
There are only 211 kākāpōs left in the world.		
The kākāpō is cute.		
The kākāpō is a flightless bird.		

4. What is one advantage of using a drone to track the birds?

5. Why are there so few kākāpōs now? Give one reason.

6. Summarise the key information in this story in 15 words or fewer.

Answers

1. What is the kākāpō also known as?

The owl parrot.

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	Fact	Opinion
Kākāpōs are fascinating.		✓
There are only 211 kākāpōs left in the world.	✓	
The kākāpō is cute.		✓
The kākāpō is a flightless bird.	✓	

4. What is one advantage of using a drone to track the birds?

Accept any of the following: the drone can find birds quicker; the drone is cheaper than other technology; the drone doesn't disturb the birds.

5. Why are there so few kakapos now? Give one reason.

Accept any reasonable answer which refers to new predators or habitat loss, e.g. The kākāpōs have so few numbers because they are hunted by cats and rats as well as having lost parts of their habitat.

6. Summarise the key information in this story in 15 words or fewer.

Accept any reasonable answer which is 15 words or fewer, e.g. Kākāpōs are being monitored by drones which can track the birds quicker and cheaper.