

EXTINCT BIRDS OF THE WORLD

#20 NORFOLK ISLAND KAKA



Illustration from:
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The Norfolk Island Kākā, *Nestor productus*, is an extinct species of large parrot, belonging to the parrot family Nestoridae. It was about 38cm in length, with mostly olive-brown upperparts, reddish-orange cheeks and throat, a straw-coloured breast, the thighs, rump and lower abdomen were dark orange and the beak prominent. It inhabited the rocks and treetops of Norfolk Island and adjacent Phillip Island. It was a



relative of the New Zealand Kākā, *Nestor meridionalis*.

Not much was recorded of the bird's biology. It was said to have frequented both the ground and tall trees, and to have fed on flowering shrubs and trees. John Gould, the eminent British ornithologist, described the call as a "hoarse, quacking, inharmonious noise, sometimes resembling the barking of a dog".



The species was first described by the naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster and his son Georg following the discovery of Norfolk Island by James Cook on 10 October 1774, but the description was only published in 1844. The bird was formally described by John Gould in 1836, from a specimen held by the Zoological Society of London. Initially, the Norfolk Island and Philip Island birds were considered two separate species, *Nestor norfolcensis* (described by

August von Pelzeln in 1860) and *Nestor productus*, respectively, but direct comparison of specimens from both island proved they were the same species.

With the arrival of the first settlers in 1788 they were hunted for food and caught as pets. Their population suffered heavily when penal colonies existed from 1788 to 1814, and again from 1825 to 1854. The species became extinct in the wild early in the nineteenth century. It was not recorded by Ensign Abel D. W. Best on either Norfolk or Phillip Island in his 1838/1839 diary entries. As Best hunted and collected specimens as a pastime, it is hard to accept that he would not have documented this attractive species, if the Kākā was still present.

The last bird in captivity died in London in 1851. At least seven specimens survive in musea in Melbourne, New York, Washington, Tring, Amsterdam and Leiden.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia