1. *Marie Ward says*

I grew up on a farm in the Upper Maruia valley, on the edge of the bush. I well remember seeing one of our cats (sorry) with a dead bird that had yellow wattles. when I was a young child. It was the first time I'd seen any bird with wattles, and on looking it up in my bird book I decided it was a Kokako. It was not until many years later that I realized the SI Kokako were supposedly extinct. The sighting would have been in the late 1950s or early 1960s, before significant numbers of possums were about in the valley. Unfortunately, the bush had been totally destroyed last time I visited the Maruia and what was "our farm". But perhaps some Kokako still exist in the wilderness areas bordering the valley?

Hi Peter,

I'll have a go at answering your questions, but I am afraid I have little more to add:

First question is did you keep the carcass, or any feathers we could have for DNA analysis ? Any photos, paintings of the bird ?

Sorry, no. The cat had the bird. I was about 11 or 12 at the time (or even younger) and although I knew that I had not seen any bird like it before, I did not realise it was of significance.

2) Do you have a grid reference for where the cat presented the bird to you, your house ?, if not could I send you a map for you to mark on it the position ?

The cat brought the dead bird back to our house. As mentioned before, our farm was in the Upper Maruia Valley, on West Bank rd, about 1 mile up river from Mair's Bridge. At that time there was a lot of bush nearby with abundant birdlife. This was before any major predators had invaded the valley.

3) What were the colour of the wattles ? As much detail description would be great.

They were yellowy/orange and very distinct. It was the wattles that I remember, as I had seen nothing like them before.

4) Were you absolutely certain it was a SI kokako ? Please describe the body features, shape and colours ?

I don't really remember any other features, apart from the yellow wattles. I think the bird was otherwise quite plain. At the time, I did not have access to much information. Our farm was quite isolated, we did not have electricity (or TV) and there were no libraries etc near by. It is likely that the only bird books I had seen had black & white photos. I remember being quite confident that it was a Kokako, and also remember feeling quite surprised to find out some years later that the N.I Kokako had blue wattles, & the SI one (with yellow wattles) was extinct. It was something that puzzled me for some years. I should explain that I was very interested in the birds on our farm. My cousin was married to a biologist (Dr Elliott Dawson, now retired, but still living in Days Bay, Wellington & (I think) a volunteer at Te Papa). At one stage they had encouraged me to make a list of all the birds that I had seen on the farm. My father also encouraged us to take note of the bird life in the bush, and it is likely that he helped me with the identification. (He is now

dead.) The sighting would have been sometime before 1963, and possibly as early as 1961. I remember winning a F & B competition in 1963 and buying M. F. Soper's "New Zealand Bird Portraits" with the prize money (but, of course, the Kokako is not in it).

5) What time of year did (as specific as possible) did you find the bird ?

Sorry, I do not recall.

6) Was the bird fresh or decayed when you discovered it ?

The cat had the bird, which was freshly dead. As is typical of many cats, he had brought it back to the house to show off.

7) A hard question. Can you remember anything about the phenology of the flowering and fruiting of the native trees in the area in the months prior to you finding the bird ?

Sorry, no.

8) Did the bird have any distinguisihing features ? Peculiar features?

Not that I recall.

9) How close was the nearest forest to where the bird was found ?

The bush was about 30 m from our house. Although there were some areas on the farm that had been clear felled, there were still patches of undisturbed bush left then. Behind our house was a large hill, the other side of which went down to the Woolley River valley. It was then pretty much dense bush, Victoria Forrest Park on my Google map.

10) What was the predominant forest type adjacent to where the bird was found ? eg. pure beech, beech/podocarp, hardwood forest.

Almost pure red, silver & brown beech.

11) Did anyone take a photo of the bird ??? If there is still a photo, it would probably be the only one of this species (almost alive) in existence !

No. I was 11 years old when I got my first camera, so maybe it was before then.

12) Did you hear of any body else in the area, or elsewhere, that reported either seeing or hearing SI kokako ?

No. I'll email my older brother to see if he can remember seeing anything similar. I think he was at boarding school when the cat brought the bird home, but during holidays etc we roamed about in the bush quite a lot.

Thats all I can think of for now. Thats really interesting about the Glenroy river area.

My phone number is 09 4457088. We have voicemail so you could leave a message. Otherwise, I am a Senior Lecturer in Physiology at the Faculty of Medical & Health Sciences, University of Auckland. Extension 84889. I have recently become very interested in NZ shorebirds, and am a Trustee for the Omaha Shorebird Protection Trust. Last week I photographed an NZ Fairy Tern at Omaha, supposedly NZ's rarest bird! I'd love to get back to the South Island some day and take an interest again in the birds of the bush.

Cheers,
Marie