

Bold weka steal film-makers' hearts

By Lindy Laird

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Think of a hen-sized, flightless brown bird that is native to New Zealand and it's the kiwi that usually comes to mind.

But a colony of cheeky weka living at a Bay of Islands holiday park is parading before the cameras of the BBC's acclaimed Natural History unit.

Producer/director Nick Easton and camera operator Tom Walker are filming at the Orongo Bay Holiday Park near Russell where they've become captivated by the wacky weka but have less than a week to capture the magic. Altogether, for this stint offilming, they will spend five weeks in New Zealand but will return next year.



Camera operator Tom Walker and one of the quirky characters featuring in a BBC documentary about New Zealand's birds.

They are working on a three-part documentary to screen on BBC2 in 2016. The first show will be about the formation of the North Island, the second about the South Island and the third about how wildlife has adapted to the arrival of humans.

Mr Easton is responsible for sections featuring three bird species and their habitats.

"What we've most noticed about New Zealand is the diversity of geology and wildlife due to its isolation and longitude," he said.

"New Zealand had some of the most remarkable birds that ever existed."

After months of scouting, the BBC chose the weka living at the Orongo Bay campground where a re-vegetation and predator control programme has restored the habitat; the Chatham Islands' black robin which also showcases a unique landscape and successful repopulation project; and the flighty little fantails which were constant companions during the filming of geothermal Rotorua.

"The fantails were ridiculously fast and had no consistency to their flight," Mr Walker said.

"Weka are probably the boldest birds we've come across. They are curious and check out everything slightly edible."

The film-makers have been battling unreliable spring weather. They film mostly early or late in the day and rest in between when the light is harshest and the birds are also less active.

Weka were reintroduced to the Bay of Islands in the 1990s. The birds, of the rail family, are now thriving. When it comes to venturing into spaces shared by humans, weka are strongly motivated by greed, and are possibly far more popular with the BBC than with local gardeners.

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