



Title: Owlsh

Short Description: A fledgling little owl, tumbled out of its perch or nest.

Photographer: Tim Heath

Where and when: Pūrākaunui, 31 December 2020

Sustainability: 2020 may have ended badly for this Little Owl which our dog Elsie found on the ground under one of our giant *Macrocarpa* trees at Pūrākaunui. We put it back in the tree to recuperate and maybe later to take it to the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital. Later it was gone, we hope back into a cavity in the old tree.

A total of 219 Little Owls (*Athene noctua*) were imported from Germany and released by the Otago Acclimatisation Society between 1906 and 1910. Additional birds were released in the Canterbury region around the same time. They spread rapidly, and are common throughout the eastern South Island. The introduction was against official advice but the farming lobby went ahead anyway with the intention that the owls would help control the numbers of small introduced birds, which were becoming a pest in grain and fruit crops. There is no evidence that they have been effective in this, but they are a major predator of the endangered Cromwell chafer beetle (*Prodontria lewisi*). Little owls are not considered a significant threat as a predator to any native bird species, but the largely non-overlapping distributions of little owl and native morepork are suggestive of “competitive exclusion” (where one species completely displaces the other). This may be driven more by habitat preferences than direct interactions, but this has not been studied. Locally, we also enjoy the native owl, Ruru (Morepork) and their call at night.

New Zealand's island ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to impacts from introduced species which sometimes become super-abundant here. In this instance there is no obvious evidence of widespread impacts of the new comer, so we have been lucky for a change. And stumbling on this beautiful little owl made our day.

Photographer's notes: iPhone 6+

Exposure: 1/800s, f/2.2, 4.15 mm, ISO 32

Digital specs: 2,448 x 2,448 (6MP)

Key words: Little Owls, introduced species, pests, competitive exclusion, chaffer beetles, wildlife hospital, Tim Heath, Aotearoa, New Zealand, Ecosystems Photography, Sustainability.

Price: \$100 donation. Visit www.ecosystemsphtography/sales for details & to order, or to get a quote if you want a high-quality print.

Donation: The price includes a \$100 donation to a sustainability organisation or project of your choice, or otherwise for the *Dunedin Wildlife Hospital* <https://www.wildlifehospitaldunedin.org.nz/>.

We recommend that the donation goes to The Wildlife Hospital, Dunedin because of the amazing work they do, treating a wide variety of native species, including parrots, penguins, reptiles, and sea lions. The hospital is important to the survival of so many of our beautiful creatures, including ones that have been hit by cars, flown into windows, blundered into powerlines or just fallen out of a nest like this little owl.

Image Ref: TH#017 (please use this reference in all orders and correspondence).

Tim Heath

9 December 2021